

NC Black Bear Festival Director: Tom Harrison

Tom Harrison is a long-time resident of Plymouth, a local entrepreneur and the part-time Director of the Washington County Travel & Tourism Authority. As an avid outdoorsman with a passion for photographing bears, Tom created the NC Black Bear Festival in 2015. After having the idea, three days later he called a group together to plan the first Bear Festival. With only three month's planning Plymouth had the first Black Bear Festival and subsequently won the "Rising Star Award" for the best festival in NC less than 5 years old from the NC Assoc. of Festivals & Events.

Harrison said, "When we decided to create the Bear Festival, we didn't wade in and test the waters with a small event. We threw everything we had into the first Black Bear Festival with over 30 activities. We wanted to plant our flag in the ground and claim Plymouth as home to the NC Black Bear Festival."

With the immediate popularity of the newly minted NC Black Bear Festival, Harrison next created the Bear-Ology Black Bear Museum to have a year-round facility to promote Northeastern NC having the world's largest black bears and (according to the NC Black Bear & Furbearer Biologist, Colleen Olfenbuttel) the highest black bear densities on the planet.

In 2017 Harrison applied to the National Day Calendar to create the first National Black Bear Day. Harrison said, "I noticed upon investigation that there was a National Polar Bear Day, but no National Black Bear Day - even though black bears are found in 40 of our 50 States." His application was accepted out of 18,000 other requests and in June, 2018 the first National Black Bear Day was celebrated at Bear Fest.

Harrison continues to serve as Director of the NC Black Bear Festival and uses it as a creative outlet as he infuses the festival with a plethora of news ideas each year. He also continues to photograph and video black bears all year. He conducts private bear tours by appointment. The tours are free for the Press. Harrison has had thousands of encounters with black bear and is considered a regional expert on bears.