

Experience Chicago's First Outdoor African American Literary Festival

In June 2015, author and founder of Soulful Chicago Book Fair (SCBF) Asadah Kirkland attended Printer's Row Lit Fest, the largest literary festival in the Midwest, and noted that less than 20 of the 100-plus authors in attendance were black. She also felt that the focus was more on selling old and used books rather than on the authors themselves.

She approached every black person she saw and told them she was having a Soulful Book Fair in 2016, and asked if they were interested in participating. She went home with contact information of several authors and potential festival visitors.

Prior to Printer's Row, Kirkland conceived the idea of SCBF while conversing with friends at Greenline Coffee on 61st and Eberhart. "I just saw opportunity with all that space...I decided to create a venue that would make black authors feel confident enough to take part in something and have a stage," says Kirkland.

Kirkland's dream will come to fruition on Saturday, July 16th. This outdoor festival, celebrating literacy and literary arts found throughout the African Diaspora, is the first of its kind in Chicago, and possibly the nation. Attendees will experience a day filled with stories told through books, spoken word, storytelling, songwriting, playwriting and art! SCBF will be held from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Following are several things that are uniquely Soulful:

- On 61st Street between King Drive and Cottage Grove featuring over 100 black authors from Chicago, New York, Texas, DC and Florida; each block will feature a different genre
- A children's block full of children's authors, family fun shows and activities
- Music & performance from Kuumba Lynx, J, Daphaney, DJ Duane Powell, Maggie Brown, David Boykin, Blah Blah Blah, and special headline, Grammy-nominated, neo-soul artist Eric Roberson
- The "Taste of Soul" block will provide a variety of food vendors for all appetites
- Workshops on book publishing, song writing, playwriting and more
- A tribute ceremony for new authors that have published books between June 2015 and July 2016
- Literary events leading up to the book fair, including Reading the Black Library at Theaster Gates' Stony Island Arts Bank

Two historically significant events that can only be experienced at SCBF are: a Centennial Migration processional at 10:00 a.m., in celebration of the Northern Migration to Chicago, and the Timuel D. Black Chicago History Essay contest.

Authors wanting to participate in this historical event can make a \$275 investment for a booth and commercial, which will be posted on SCBF's YouTube channel. "It's all about promoting authors, and people knowing them before they get to the book fair." All books are reviewed prior to approval to ensure they are family-friendly.

“I’m happy it [SCBF] has evolved and is inspiring so many authors to take part. Black authors are emerging in the city and we’re not going to wait for anyone to validate us. We’re not going to wait five years to become well known. We’re going to make it happen now.”

To purchase a booth or for detailed information on the activities at the Soulful Chicago Book Fair, visit www.soulfulchicagobookfair.com. Visit their YouTube channel to watch the authors’ commercials; and get updates on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.