

Local marshals to get award

By **Keith Purtell**

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— A Muskogee group that has been jailing people since the 1970s will be presented an award Tuesday in Tulsa. Long known for their blazing guns and period clothing depicting Oklahoma's pre-statehood days, Muskogee's Indian Territory Marshals will be receiving an Indian Territory Award for Preservation of State and Local History from the Oklahoma Heritage Association.

"For the past 31 years now we've been going from town to town, dragging our jail and dressing up and re-enacting the Old West," said Malcom Moore, secretary of the marshals.

The association's annual awards recognize the educators, individuals and organizations that are committed to preserving state and local history and sharing that heritage with others. Seven individuals and organizations will be recognized at the their annual membership meeting and awards luncheon Tuesday at the Renaissance Tulsa Hotel and Convention Center. With frequent appearances around this region, the marshals describe themselves a non-profit group that promotes Oklahoma history, law enforcement and gun safety.

But it's done with a lot of flair, including quick-draw exhibitions, street shoot-outs and jailing "lawbreakers" in a traveling jail house. All proceeds go to charity.

Moore said the group's origins go back to 1970s.

"We're sponsored by the Muskogee County Sheriff's Department," he said. "We began as bunch of guys who wanted keep the Old West alive in Muskogee and the surrounding area."

Moore said the group has 17 active members who regularly don costumes including boots, guns, holsters, Old West hats, spurs or even a sombrero.

"We're always looking for more members," he said. "We like to perform a number of skits like jail breaks, and we put on gun safety demonstrations. Occasionally we go out in the crowd and get a participant. We set our jail up in the middle of town. Anybody can arrest anybody, and it's a dollar to put them in jail. Normally, it's a dollar to get them back out. The money goes to children's charities. Through our costumes and manners, we try to re-create the 1800s."

People in Muskogee help custom-make the costumes, Moore said.

"We have some who portray themselves as mountain men, some who are gentlemen, card players, an undertaker, and (Don) 'Chico' Jones, who is our chief marshal, often wears a big sombrero," he said. "The next time, he'll put on a different hat and become the sheriff."

Moore said the marshals try to get out at least once a month.

"We've gone to towns like Porum, Checotah, and Warner," he said. "We also help in Muskogee with the Azalea parade and the Veterans parade."

It has been a big morale-booster to be picked for the Indian Territory Award for Preservation of State and Local History, Moore said.

"We're very excited to receive it, because of the recognition for what we've been doing," he said. "A lot of these guys have been in the marshals over 25 years."

Erin E. Page, director of Communications and Marketing with the Oklahoma Heritage Association, said the marshals were a good choice.

"All the things that the Indian Territory Marshals have done really work to advance Muskogee and state history," she said.

"We really look for organizations and individuals that engage their community, especially young people, to learn about all

the great things that Oklahoma history has to offer. They teach young people all over about Oklahoma history, and that makes an impact.”

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