

Heritage awards marshal up gunslingers

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Most people coming to a fancy luncheon to be presented with an award for all the good deeds they've done don't show up packing heat.

But the men involved with the Indian Territory Marshals aren't "most people."

When a half dozen or so of the group moseyed up from around Muskogee way to attend the Oklahoma Heritage Association Awards Luncheon on Tuesday at the Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center, each man was decked out in hat, vest, boots and holster belt stuffed with shootin' irons.

"I'm trying to think," said Don "Chico" Jones, who's been a member of the marshals for most of the organization's 36 years. "No, I really don't think there's anything we do that doesn't involve firearms in some way."

But then, teaching gun safety is one of the principal missions of the Indian Territory Marshals. The group also works to preserve a bit of Oklahoma's Wild West heritage with staged gunfights at festivals and outdoor events.

The marshals also raise money for charities that help children by putting people into the marshals' portable pokey — to get out of jail, the prisoner has to get friends to pony up the bail.

For their efforts, the Indian Territory Marshals were presented with the Indian Territory Award for Preservation of State and Local History from the Oklahoma Heritage Association.

This is the 37th year the awards have been presented, honoring individuals, teachers, organizations and publications for their work in preserving state and local history.

One of this year's award winners, Thrissa A. Johnson, a humanities teacher at Fort Gibson High School, summed up the importance of preserving and teaching history when she said, during a video presentation preceding her award, "When I think of Oklahoma history, I think of the Greek mythology character of Antaeus, who, as long as he was in touch with the land, was empowered. I want young people to be empowered by their heritage."


Other recipients were: Charlotte Smith, history teacher at Classen School of Advanced Studies in Oklahoma City; Bill Bryans, director of the Applied History program at Oklahoma State University; T.L. Walker, executive director of the Standing Bear Native American Foundation in Ponca City; the Marland Estate Foundation, Ponca City; and "The Chronicles of Oklahoma," published by the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The luncheon also included a changing of the guard as Oklahoma City University President Tom Daniels took over as chairman of the Heritage Association from former state Rep. Glenn Johnson. A keynote address was given by Gilcrease Museum Director Duane King on the life and work of Oklahoma artist Willard Stone.

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