

MOUNT AIRY, N.C. — Eleven actors who appeared on “The Andy Griffith Show,” including the kid who famously wrote his way into Mayberry, are set to headline the 30th annual Mayberry Days festival in Mount Airy.

The festival takes place Sept. 23-29 and celebrates all things Mayberry in the hometown of Andy Griffith.

This year’s list of actors includes Calvin Peeler, who at age 13 in 1968 landed the role of Martin during the first season of “Mayberry R.F.D.” The Tennessee youth read an article about Andy Griffith and decided to write a letter to executive producer Richard O. Linke suggesting that Mayberry needed an African-American kid in the new series and offering to play the part.

Linke agreed and flew Peeler and his mom to Los Angeles, where the adolescent signed a contract to appear in one episode. Peeler will give a presentation about his groundbreaking experience and be available for autographs along with other cast members.

Betty Lynn, the actress who played Barney Fife’s sweetie Thelma Lou and moved to Mount Airy in 2007, will make appearances, as will Rodney Dillard (one of the Darling boys), Maggie Peterson Mancuso (Charlene Darling), Keith Thibodeaux (Johnny Paul Jason), Dennis Rush (Howie Pruitt), LeRoy Mack (one of the Country Boys) and Ron Howard’s younger brother, Clint, who played the silent, sandwich-toting kid, Leon.

Three actors who had roles as different characters on more than one episode will attend: Margaret Kerry, Ronnie Schell and Joy Ellison. Joining in the festivities will be: Bruce Bilson, assistant director of “The Andy Griffith Show”; Karen Knotts, daughter of Don Knotts; and Gary Nelson, who directed the memorable “Malcolm at the Crossroads” episode.

The week-long festivities include contests, games, concerts, Aunt Bee’s Bake Sale and visits to the Andy Griffith Museum. The most popular event is Saturday morning’s Mayberry Days parade featuring the visiting actors, along with dozens of Mayberry-themed entries.

“So many people, young and old, travel here from across the country to be a part of Mayberry Days,” says organizer Tanya Jones of the Surry Arts Council. “They play checkers, eat pork chop sandwiches, meet the stars, drink a bottle of pop and celebrate a simpler way of life.”

Mayberry Days consists of free events and ticketed events. For more information or to purchase tickets, call 336-786-7998 or visit www.mayberrydays.org.

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