

BANNER ELK, N.C. — Entering its fifth decade as one of the Southeast’s quirkiest gatherings, Banner Elk’s Woolly Worm Festival has added a new distinction: Official State Woolly Worm Festival of North Carolina.

The festival garnered that honor when NC House Bill 425 was signed into law on June 25 after unanimous passage in the NC House and Senate.

The full text from the general statutes reads: “The Woolly Worm Festival, held the third weekend of October of every year in the Town of Banner Elk in Avery County, is adopted as the official Woolly Worm Festival of the State of North Carolina.”

Banner Elk Town Manager Rick Owen came up with the idea to pursue the designation last year after a brainstorming session with town officials. Owen mentioned it to NC Senator Deanna Ballard at last year’s Woolly Worm Festival, and Ballard got behind the idea with the help of local NC Representative Josh Dobson.

“I’ve been lucky to attend and participate in this festival for many years — as a kid and in recent years in my service as a State Senator,” Ballard said. “I’m excited to see Banner Elk will be home to NC’s only official Woolly Worm Festival and trust this investment and local support will continue for many years to come.”

That sentiment was echoed by Dobson, who said: “the Woolly Worm Festival is a special part of not only Banner Elk but all of Avery County.”

The festival was created by Jim Morton in 1978 as a way to decide which woolly bear caterpillar predicts the winter weather in the NC High Country. Folklore says the 13 bands of fur on the caterpillar correspond to winter’s 13 weeks. Brown bands mean a mild week and black bands mean a cold, snowy week. Unfortunately, colors differ from worm to worm, so the festival determines the prognosticator by holding several woolly worm races on the main stage. Winners come together for a final heat, with the champion receiving the forecasting honor, plus \$1,000.

The festival is run by the Banner Elk Kiwanis Club and draws an average of 20,000 people to Banner Elk during a prime weekend for fall foliage. In 40 years, it has raised more than \$1.4 million to better the lives of children in Avery County.

“Getting this designation really shows Banner Elk’s commitment to the Woolly Worm Festival,” Owen said. “We recognize its importance and impact on our community.”

This year’s festival is Oct. 20-21. More info is available at www.woollyworm.com.

###

CONTACT:

Craig Distl
704.466.3744
CraigD411@gmail.com

