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## **Oklahoma Center for the Book Cancels Two Big Literary Events for 2021**

**The Oklahoma Center for the Book in the Oklahoma Department of Libraries is canceling the 2021 Oklahoma Book Award Dinner and Oklahoma Book Festival**

The Annual Oklahoma Book Award competition continues in 2021 for the 32nd year, but award recipients won't be picking up their medals at an in-person ceremony this spring. For the second year in a row, the Oklahoma Center for the Book in the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL) is canceling the awards dinner. Winners will be announced and recognized online. The Center is also canceling the Oklahoma Book Festival, which was planned for the fall.

Connie Armstrong, Executive Director of the Center, said there are too many uncertainties surrounding the Pandemic to move forward with these events.

"We know we won't be where we need to be in April, when we were planning to host the Book Awards dinner," Armstrong said. "And it takes months to plan the Oklahoma Book Festival. With so many unknowns, it would be difficult to get commitments from authors to travel in for the festival."

Armstrong said the Center considered a virtual festival, but the experiences of other virtual book festivals have not been encouraging.

"The 2020 National Book Festival was online, and it attracted less than 10% of their normal attendance," Armstrong said. "We have to be better stewards of our tax dollars as well as the monetary support offered by our festival partners, including the Friends of the Oklahoma Center for the Book."

ODL's Board voted to reallocate federal library dollars from the festival to other library projects at their February meeting.

Armstrong said 115 entries were received for the 2021 Oklahoma Book Awards. Works by Oklahoma authors or with Oklahoma themes are eligible to enter. Finalists will be announced in March in the five categories: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, children/young adult, and design/illustration/photography.

“We’ll announce the winners in April and we’re working on plans to honor these medalists online,” Armstrong said.

The Center will also honor author, attorney, educator, and consultant Hannibal B. Johnson with the Arrell Gibson Award for Lifetime Achievement, which honors a body of work by an Oklahoma writer.

Johnson has written extensively about Tulsa’s Greenwood District—known as America’s Black Wall Street in the early 20th Century—its virtual destruction in the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, and its resilience and renaissance in subsequent years. His current work, *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples with its Historical Racial Trauma*, is a window into the Tulsa that was and the Tulsa that is now, providing updates since the 1998 publication of his *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa’s Historic Greenwood District*.

Other books by Johnson include *The Sawners of Chandler: A Pioneering Power Couple in Pre-Civil Rights Oklahoma*, *Apartheid in Indian Country? Seeing Red Over Black Disenfranchisement*, *Acres of Asperation: The All-Black Towns of Oklahoma*, *Mama Used to Say: Wit and Wisdom from the Heart and Soul*, *IncogNegro: Poetic Reflections on Race and Diversity in America*, and *Up from the Ashes*, which tells the story of Greenwood from a child’s perspective.

Johnson serves on the federal 400 Years of African-American History Commission, a body charged with planning, developing, and implementing activities appropriate to the 400th anniversary of the arrival, in 1619, of Africans in the English colonies at Point Comfort, Virginia. He chairs the Education Committee for the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission.

For more information about the Book Awards and the Oklahoma Center for the Book, visit [libraries.ok.gov/ocb](http://libraries.ok.gov/ocb).

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The Oklahoma Center for the Book is organized to focus attention on the vital role of books and reading in our lives. The Center promotes the past, current, and future works of Oklahoma authors; promotes the literary heritage of the state; and encourages reading for pleasure by Oklahomans of all ages.

Oklahoma Department of Libraries is the official state library of Oklahoma. It serves the information and records management needs of state government, assists with public library development, coordinates library and information technology projects for the state, and serves the general public through its specialized collections.