

the spotlight

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River Clay Fine Arts Festival Marks Its 11th Year With a Sculpture That Stays, Art You Can Wear, and Students Working in Plastic

Sponsored Content By: Megan Nivens-Tannett, River Clay Fine Arts Festival

Every October, downtown Decatur turns into a gallery. This year, River Clay Fine Arts Festival is giving the community more reasons than ever to show up. The 11th annual festival returns to Decatur City Hall on Saturday and Sunday, October 24 and 25, with more than 70 juried artists from across the country, live music, and food.

The celebration started early. On September 24, River Clay unveiled its first permanent public art gift to the city at Walden Oaks Park. The sculpture features three sandhill cranes and ten steel cattails, one for each of the festival's first ten years, and volunteer blacksmiths from Athens Forge hand-forged it. The group demonstrated at last year's festival and voted unanimously to take on the project.

"River Clay is one weekend a year. The tents come down, and everybody goes home, but this will remain," said Holly Whitt, board president of the River Clay Fine Arts Festival.

New this year is The Art of Recycling, a student art competition presented by Plastic Recyclers Southeast, Inc. (PRSEI). High school art students across North Alabama are creating large-scale works from recycled plastic, a medium most young artists are unfamiliar with. The finished pieces will be displayed and judged during festival weekend.

For the first time, an artist has shaped the official festival T-shirt. The 2026 design draws on Confluence, a large-scale work by Alabama artist Jamey Grimes, who builds room-filling installations from melted plastic. Grimes joins this year's lineup of artists, with work installed outdoors near City Hall. The shirts are a limited run.

The weekend opens Friday, October 23, with the Rendezvous preview party, which gives guests first access to the artists and their work before the crowds arrive. Rendezvous tickets are \$60 and include a weekend pass. General admission is \$5 and covers both days. Veterans and their families get in free, courtesy of PRSEI.

Every ticket and purchase supports something bigger than one weekend. Since it began, River Clay has invested more than \$65,000 in arts education across North Alabama. That includes classroom grants awarded this August to teachers in Decatur City Schools, Morgan County Schools, Hartselle City Schools, and Decatur Heritage Christian Academy.

This is what Decatur does in October; don't be the one who missed it! Tickets and details are available at riverclay.org.

IF IT'S
OCTOBER,
IT'S
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