**NEWS RELEASE**

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**The Power of the Story: Donald Davis Brings Storytelling Magic to the Center for Pioneer Life**

Back in the 1910s and 1920s, two cousins named Jim Young grew up within a stone’s throw of each other along Shoal Creek in Yancey County. James Ray Young, known as “Black Jim,” was raised on the land which is today home to the Center for Pioneer Life. James Leland Young, known as “Red Jim,” grew up in a house just up the road. In a mountain valley chock full of Youngs, their nicknames are how cousins and neighbors came to distinguish the pair.

The nicknames had nothing at all to do with their ethnicities. James Ray had black hair; James Leland had red hair. Of course, hair fades over time, but nicknames often don’t. In fact, Black Jim was silvery-gray by the time he was 40. But he remained known throughout the community as Black Jim for the rest of his 95 years.

**Master storyteller Donald Davis**, a western North Carolina native who brings his tales to Burnsville in November, shares a similar story from his upbringing. Growing up in Waynesville, Davis’s father was one of three men named Joe Davis. Each became known by community nicknames: Joe the Photographer, Joe Silas, and Donald’s father, Banker Joe. Mr. Davis goes on to share a gripping story of how his father was first known as Cripple Joe and how his infirmity led him to a successful career and a new nickname of Banker Joe.

Decades later, Mr. Davis continues to share personal, captivating stories of life on the farm and in the small towns of southern Appalachia.

“Stories are our biggest bridge builders,” said Mr. Davis. “Often, one story begins to follow another to follow another to follow another, and people are grasping hands with one another and saying ‘I think I know you.’”

The art of storytelling has evolved since the invention of language. Before radio, television, or the internet, storytelling is how families across Appalachia (and around the world) shared their rich heritage with children, grandchildren, and future generations. As an internationally acclaimed storyteller—and son of the mountains—Donald Davis is one of the most enthusiastic teachers of the craft of telling a compelling story.

“If you come to see me at a festival, you’ll meet me as a performer,” said Mr. Davis. “But the most important work I do is help people find the stories from their lives that are most important to them.”

**Beginning November 18,** Donald Davis will serve a four-day residency at the Center for Pioneer Life on Shoal Creek Road. His residency will include a day-long workshop where participants learn to coax family and friends into sharing their memories and turn them into memorable stories. Mr. Davis will also share his homespun stories in a public performance on the evening of November 20 at Burnsville Town Center.

In addition to his workshop and performance, Mr. Davis will spend two days with local students and teachers on how to use storytelling in their writing. In a partnership between the Center for Pioneer Life and Yancey County Schools, Mr. Davis will conduct workshops for students from across the county, followed by visits to the Center on Shoal Creek Road. Support from the Yancey Fund through the Community Foundation of WNC helps make this partnership possible.

Donald Davis was born in a mountain world rich in stories, surrounded by family who shared fairy tales, scary tales, silly Jack tales, Welsh and Scottish folktales, and the true stories of his own neighbors and kin. During a 25-year career as a United Methodist minister, Mr. Davis began retelling these stories and adding his own until he was repeatedly asked to “tell it again, on purpose.” Before long, he was performing at festivals and other venues until retired from the church to tell stories full time.

Mr. Davis says people connect with one another through their stories, whether over the dinner table or back fence. He believes stories are about identity and who we are. While technology makes it easier to share information, it’s in our stories that wisdom is passed down. And a well-told story will help a listener actually see it as it unfolds.

“A story moves us from that logical left side of the brain on which we go to sleep in church, to that visual right side of the brain where we not only love to watch, but we still remember it when we get home,” said Mr. Davis.

Mr. Davis has become one of a handful of storytellers to achieve permanent Featured Teller status at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. He has served as a featured teller at the Smithsonian Institution and the World’s Fair. Mr. Davis is recipient of the ORACLE Circle of Excellence and the Lifetime Achievement Awards from the National Storytelling Network and has guest-hosted NPR’s Good Evening. He’s also a prolific writer, authoring eighteen books and more than 40 original recordings.

“The story doesn’t change what happened,” said Mr. Davis. “But the story has the remarkable power to completely change our whole relationship to what happened.”

The mission of the Center for Pioneer Life is to preserve the legacy of the pioneers who settled this region and experience how they live. **For more information or reserve tickets go to** **PioneerLife.org** or call the Center at 828.536.0337.

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