

Tommy Johnson fest brings old-school performers to Terry

On Saturday the fourth annual Tommy Johnson Celebration will once again take place on the grounds of the Cooper's Down race track in Terry. Music starts at 11 a.m. with gospel groups, and the blues portion of the show begins at 11 a.m. with an acoustic performance by Ben Payton.

Headlining this year's show are two soul-blues veterans who haven't performed in the Jackson area in many years.

Texas' Blues Boy Willie has scored hits including the comical *Be-Who*, and Frank-o Johnson formerly recorded for Jackson's Ace label and wrote hits for artists including Willie Clayton and Johnnie Taylor.

Other artists performing at the event are Greenville pianist/vocalist Eden Brent and Jackson area artists J.T.



Scott Barretta

Watkins and Grady Champion.

The event pays tribute to blues pioneer Tommy Johnson (1896-1956), who was the most

influential blues artist in the Jackson region in the 1920s and 1930s. His most noted songs include *Big Road Blues*, *Maggie Campbell Blues* and *Canned Heat Blues*.

Johnson's niece Vera Johnson Collins, who runs the non-profit Tommy Johnson Foundation, organizes the event.

For more than a decade, Collins has worked determinedly to publicize the legacy of her uncle.

"Things are beginning to take hold and people are

becoming more familiar with Tommy Johnson," says Collins. "We're also working with graduate students from the University of Memphis and Mississippi College who are uncovering and exchanging information about him."

One of the goals of the

foundation is to place a tombstone for Johnson that was paid for by Bonnie Raitt and dedicated in 2001.

Over the years the road leading to the graveyard where he was buried became grown over and it is now located on private property.

Despite the efforts of various state government agencies, Copiah County has yet to build an access road to the graveyard.

For more information, visit www.tommyjohnson-blues.com.

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