Special Thanks

First United Methodist Church

The City of Rocky Mount

The NC Department of Cultural Resources
Highway Historical Marker Advisory Committee
NC Department of Transportation

The folks on the Rocky Mount Way Back When *Facebook page who inspired Clifton Barnes to apply for the marker.*

Excerpt from the Kay Kyser marker nomination:

At one point in the 1940s, Kay Kyser was at least as popular as Bob Hope and big band leader Glenn Miller. Yet, today, many people, including those here in North Carolina don't know who Kay Kyser was. It's ironic because Kyser, very proud of his roots, always touted his home state and his hometown. Kyser, known for his humor and for leading a big band, starred in seven feature films, mostly as himself. He was able to work "Rocky Mount, North Carolina!" into his movies. Radio was his biggest vehicle for success as he hosted his own program called, "Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge" which started in the mid-1930s in Chicago and then moved to New York where it was a hit for NBC for more than a decade. Dressed as an old-timey professor and known as "The Ol' Perfessor," Kyser greeted listeners with his trademark words "Evenin', folks. How y'all?" and "C'mon, chillun! Le's dance!" Kyser's band had 74 top 20 hits, including 11 No. 1 songs.

Kay Kyser Marker Dedication



Oct. 5, 2018

Evenin' folks, how y'all?

Who had a weekly radio show with an audience bigger than the Super Bowl?

Who has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame?

Who holds the record for the most songs on the Hit Parade at the same time?

Who started the first major organized cheer block at UNC-Chapel Hill and wrote the Tar Heel fight song?

Whose band was the most popular – and biggest selling of the 1940s – breaking attendance records wherever it performed?

Who performed more shows for the troops during World War II than Bob Hope?

Who disappeared from public view at the peak of his career to serve family, church and charity?

That's Right, You're Wrong!

It's Rocky Mount's own Kay Kyser!

Today's Event Program

Welcome & MC for the event

Kenneth Heath: pastor, disc jockey and Kay Kyser fan extraordinaire

Speakers

Dr. Kevin Cherry: deputy secretary of the NC Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources

David Combs: mayor for the City of Rocky Mount

Dr. Roger Thorpe Gregory: the son of Kay Kyser's best childhood friend

Kimberly Kyser: daughter of Kay & Georgia Carroll Kyser

Unveiling

After closing comments by Kenneth Heath, gather around the marker out front for the official unveiling of the permanent marker for our own Kay Kyser.

Evening

Join us for a Fish Fry here at the church from 5-6 p.m. Then head over to the Imperial Centre at 270 Gay St. for an evening of swing/big band music by the Tar River Orchestra and exhibits featuring Kay Kyser photos, videos and memorabilia.

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