As the cherry blossom trees were just starting to bud in early March 2020, the finishing touches were being finalized for the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival, scheduled March 20 to April 12.

Over three weeks and four anchoring weekends of fun cultural events, music, art, and engaging experiences were in store as DC was poised to embrace the coming season and welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city for one of the world’s greatest celebrations of spring.

Local businesses and restaurants brought the spirit of the Tidal Basin into neighborhoods through the collaborative City in Bloom campaign and Cherry Picks restaurant program. World-class Japanese performers were set to arrive for the Opening Ceremony co-presented with The Japan Foundation. Numerous entertainers and 14 of the nation’s best marching bands were slated to parade down Constitution Avenue in the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® presented by Events DC. Award-winning professional kite flyers prepared to “wow” thousands at the Blossom Kite Festival presented by Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc., and hundreds of community members were on deck to support the Festival through thousands of volunteer hours. An exhilarating closing weekend at Petalpalooza® presented by Chase, at the Capitol Riverfront, with 16 performances, more than 30 art and activity stations, and an epic fireworks display would close the Festival with a bang. The much-anticipated Pink Tie Party presented by ANA, was only 10 days away. Like the budding blossoms, the growing anticipation was reaching its peak.

Overlooking stunning views of the Tidal Basin, the dates for peak bloom were excitedly announced at a March 4 press conference where Mayor Muriel Bowser, the National Park Service, key media, and Festival stakeholders and sponsors gathered.

Then, less than 10 days before the Opening Ceremony, the National Cherry Blossom Festival began canceling its in-person events due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

For the 2020 Festival, the hope that the blossoms represented was a unifying force, demonstrating resilience and adaptability to take the events beyond the blossoms.
The Festival team sprang into action and worked with supporters, stakeholders, and media partners to quickly pivot—essentially planning a second 2020 Festival. With support from locally based VIVA Creative, the team brought its program into the homes of participants around the region, country, and world on a new digital platform.

Each year, approximately 40 organizations present multiple events and activations, celebrating the spirit of the Festival across the region. While live events were canceled, many partners rose to the challenge and produced video content that was shared as part of the virtual Festival.

The first virtual National Cherry Blossom Festival engaged an audience of hundreds of thousands of participants from around the world.

#ShareYourBloom

Festival fans celebrated spring by sharing pictures of blooming flowers in their community for a chance to win a Festival-themed Petal the Garden Gnome.

Festival’s own Petal the Garden Gnome

With stay-at-home orders still in place, the Festival turned house-bound blues to bliss with the reintroduction of the “Blossom Kids” web page, supplying an array of online games, crafts, and video tutorials.

THE PLATFORM SHARED

28 CAPTIVATING VIDEOS

Festival Event Manager, Ashley Depew shared an easy way to make a kite from found objects around the house.

Blossom art and craft

Festival fans took a stroll down memory lane, sharing their favorite past Festival moments on social media.

#MyCherryBlossomFestival

#ShareYourBloom

“Brighter Days are Coming” #ShareYourBloom

“No one told the cherry blossoms the festival was canceled” #ShareYourBloom

Amid an environment of uncertainty, the Festival’s dedication to its mission of embracing spring by enriching and unifying communities and cultures was paramount.
The New York Times dubbed the Festival’s Tidal Basin tour a “must-see” for those who wanted to tour the blossoms without leaving their couches.

The Festival promoted the National Park Service and the Trust for the National Mall’s joint installation of a BloomCam high above the Tidal Basin to offer fans a way of enjoying the blossoms from anywhere in the world.

#BloomCam was viewed over 750K times by over 315K users from 164 countries.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade®, presented by Events DC, is one of the area’s largest spectator events. This year, producers assembled a compilation of highlights featuring favorite performances from past years.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® program was broadcast nationwide and aired locally on ABC7 and WJLA24/7.

305 airings of the Parade Program were originally scheduled, but final airings far surpassed that number as fans across the country tuned in!

The Festival’s virtual Parade provided a way of enjoying the blossoms from anywhere in the world.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® program was broadcast in 92.6% of U.S. markets.

1,400 airings
3M viewers

Local and international media coverage and publicity

Growth continued to be seen across the Festival’s platforms

More than 3.5B impressions

Worth $46M in earned media

28K Facebook followers
17K Twitter followers
15K Instagram followers
22K email subscribers

The parade program was broadcast nationally and aired locally on ABC7 and WJLA24/7.

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The show must go on!
The brand prominence and appeal of the Festival is witnessed on the local and national level; present in creative visual campaigns and collaborative product partnerships.

Despite retail closures, the Retail Window Competition flourished. Online voting celebrated the artistry of local businesses and allowed consumers to vote for their favorite blossom-infused window treatments.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival’s cooperative partnerships further boosted the Festival’s presence and visibility on both the national and local market levels.

Festival fans can take artwork with them when they’re on the go. Metro printed 100K SmarTrip® cards featuring the 2020 Official Festival artwork.

GT’s Living Foods’ limited-edition springtime kombucha, “Bloom,” made a splash as custom cherry blossom coolers popped up in over 120 grocery stores across the region.

Kendra Scott reintroduced its Cherry Blossom Tree Charm nationwide, contributing 20% of all online charm sales to support the Festival’s mission.

Despite retail closures, the Retail Window Competition flourished. Online voting celebrated the artistry of local businesses and allowed consumers to vote for their favorite blossom-infused window treatments.

Share your blossom love when you swipe.

Kendra Scott’s Cherry Blossom Tree Charm nationwide, contributing 20% of all online charm sales to support the Festival’s mission.
Community synergies were key to reimagining the 2020 Festival. Despite the outpouring of disappointment expressed over the cancellation of in-person events, devoted Festival fans showed immense support and appreciation for the opportunities to celebrate spring online.

SPRINGTIME RENEWAL THROUGH Artistic Connection

Matt Long, a local Frederick Md. artist was chosen to create the Official 2020 Festival Artwork. His vibrant and whimsical design was unveiled at the Launch Event alongside Festival President, Diana Mayhew.

"With blooming regards, we are sending you, our artwork from Germany. I would love to create with you ‘cherryblossomcommunity’ around the world” – Hilja

Performances by the 6821 Quintet provided with the support of the Ryuji Ueno Foundation.

A coloring page inspired by the 2020 Festival artwork was featured online and in the Festival’s Official Guide, published in the Washington Post. The interactive element extended the artwork, born in our backyard, across the digital divide, creating a sense of community among festival fans, both near and far. (Below)

The Student Art Contest, presented with the DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative was brought to an online platform this year. (Below)

Winning performers Aurora Martin and the GW Troubadours at the Arena Stage.

Sing Into Spring – January 27, 2020

"Best Friends Blossom," by Ty’yonna B. of J.O. Wilson Elementary School, was voted the "People’s Choice" award winner through online voting by the community.

A Performance from The 6821 Quintet.
When spring sprung, the blossoming trees inspired hope and connected teachers and students at home as they shared photos on social media.

To celebrate the tenacity of local students, the Festival supported the 2020 Digital Japan Bowl, a Japanese language and culture competition presented by the Japan-America Society of Washington DC (JASWDC), by providing merchandise for giveaways and livestreaming the event on the Festival’s social media platforms. The Festival’s live stream of the event reached over 4,000 YouTube viewers.

With the generous support of ANA, the Festival collaborated with schools around the DC region to plant more than 30 cherry trees this past fall, following the Festival’s historic appeal to save nature and promote sustainability.

The Festival proudly works with the Trust for the National Mall to raise funds that preserve and protect the iconic cherry trees by encouraging individuals and corporations to endow one of the 3,800 cherry trees on the National Mall.

Despite not being able to travel to DC for the Opening Ceremony, the incredible presentations by the Japanese performers Naotaro Moriyama, Anna Sato x Toshiyuki Sasaki, and WHITE OUT TOKYO were one of the highlights of the digital Festival. They provided heartfelt messages from Japan to introduce their musical performances through performance, historical videos, online kids’ crafts, and other activities.

The 2020 Festival remained true to its legacy of cultural celebration, fostering international collaboration, and honoring the gift of trees and the lasting friendship between Japan and the United States.
National Cherry Blossom Festival Staff

Consultants
Alissa Mora
Andreas Sengbaecher
Carol Henegy
DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative
Diverse Markets Management, LLC
Fathom Creative
Happi Enterprises, LLC
JIM Best Entertainment, Inc.
Karyn LeBlanc
LaBea Steiger
Linder Global Events
Matt Fox
Meraki Communications Group
Planet Cotton
Three Thieves, LLC
Under the Sun Productions
Whit Creative
The Webber Group
Photo Credits
Jay Snap
Mark Tegeltroff

Opening Remarks – March 4, 2020
Grand-opening Remarks Best left to right: Mayor Muriel Bowser; First Lady Yumi Bowser; Secretary of the District of Columbia, Honorable Kim Bassett; Diana Mayhew, President and CEO, Blossom Festival Staff.

Search Event – November 20, 2019 National Cherry Blossom Festival Staff

Copyright Office, 2017
Festival Awards (in recognition of the 2019 festival) Sponsored by the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® presented by Events DC.

Bronze:
Grand Pinnacle
Gold:
Best Full Length TV Program
Cherry Blossom Festival Parade®
presented by Events DC

Best Media Relations

Festival and Events Association
Bestowed by the International Festival Awards

Best Volunteer Program
for an Individual Sponsor
for the Paws

Best Sponsorship Program
for MGM National Harbor

Best Organizational Website

Best Media Relations

Best Overall Merchandising

Best Commemorative Poster:

Best Pin, for the 2019

GOLD: presented by Events DC

Best Overall Merchandising

Best Pin, for the 2019

GOLD: created by Simon Bull

Best Commemorative Poster,

Campaign

Best Media Relations

Best Organizational Website

Best Volunteer Program
A MESSAGE FROM FESTIVAL PRESIDENT & CEO DIANA MAYHEW

For many, spring and the National Cherry Blossom Festival bring a sense of vitality, hope, and renewal. While everything was changing around us, we remained rooted and unwavering in our dedication to our mission, values, and priorities and continued the tradition of embracing spring by enriching, unifying, and supporting our community.

This year, we continued to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the Festival’s offerings and showcased groundbreaking programming beyond the blossoms. With a fresh approach to this unprecedented turn of events, we bloomed where we were planted. Despite incredible barriers and unforeseen limitations, the Festival drew new audiences and extended its global reach by increasing accessibility to Festival fans with virtual offerings and deepening local and global partnerships.

Looking forward to spring of 2021, the National Cherry Blossom Festival will:

• Foster public trust as the health and safety of our staff, attendees, sponsors and other Festival stakeholders is our first priority.
• Present a series of innovative, entertaining and engaging hybrid events and community outreach programs designed to incorporate both virtual and personal experiences while adhering to city and CDC guidelines.
• Emphasize inclusivity as a top priority, with most programming remaining free and open to the public.
• Leverage the Festival’s brand and tradition by engaging with its extensive audience to support DC’s economic recovery through the creation and promotion of revenue opportunities for local businesses.

We are profoundly honored by and greatly appreciative of the commitment of our staff and the loyalty of our stakeholders and partners. We joyfully and optimistically look forward to next year and the inspiring possibilities that the 2021 Festival holds.

Diana Mayhew
President and CEO