

A. E. BACKUS MUSEUM & GALLERY
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

International Instagram Phenomenon and Local Firefighter Rusty Wiles Shows Contemporary Photography at the Backus Museum

Fort Pierce, Florida, August 27, 2018 –

The A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery is presenting a special pre-season, limited exhibition in September, prior to the official opening of the 58th Season. “First Response: Photographs by Rusty Wiles” will be on view September 14-30, 2018 during special weekend hours, with the opening coinciding with the Firefighter Combat Challenge national competition hosted by St. Lucie County in Fort Pierce. For more information, please visit www.BackusMuseum.com.

Rusty Wiles is a St. Lucie County native with a creative secret identity. He is a local firefighter and paramedic, one-time bail bondsman, day worker at Adams Ranch, former grove caretaker at Egan Groves, married and a father of three – and an international Instagram phenomenon with more than 49,000 followers. When he is not on shift with the St. Lucie County Fire District, he is a social media superstar, a self-trained photographer with an intuitive, disciplined eye for the principles of design and the magic of composing the perfect shot at the perfect moment. And he is a down-to-earth, up-and-coming contemporary artist beginning to be noticed in real life.

“Rusty’s photography has been described as ‘saturated minimalism,’ to express the effect of the bright Florida light soaking into the clean geometry and vivid colors of the urban landscapes he actively seeks as subjects,” says Marshall Adams, museum director. “After working 24-hour shifts and heading home in the sunny mornings along the Atlantic Coast, that distinctive quality of light and atmosphere fuel his artistic compositions. These images, of the rich visual patterning seen in daily life, exhibit a refined sense of balance, space, form, and rhythm. He was recognized by Instagram as a recommended artist in 2014, and his distinctive work has been featured in Wired Magazine, Feature Shoot, and other publications around the world. When it was time for his first art exhibition ‘in real life,’ it had to be here in his hometown art museum.”

“I got my start with my cell phone,” says Wiles. “I used to work with a guy from New Jersey who would take pictures from the (fire) engine, and he introduced me to the photo hashtag #ShootFromTheFireTruck. That kind of introduced me to the idea that I could do this.”

“When you have a camera in your pocket, you can catch things really conveniently,” Wiles continues. “With filters and editing right there, you can share with the world in the moment.” But he realized later, while that convenience opened the door to the interests of a wide audience, taking those social media images and producing them in real life as printed photographs required a more thoughtful approach – and more professional equipment. While he still uses his phone and posts for his tens of thousands of followers, today his Canon Rebel T3i digital SLR camera is transitioning to become his primary tool.

But that doesn't stop him from being aware of the beauty all around him. Wiles says that 98% of his work is still shot from the driver's seat of his own truck. "Not while driving of course, I'm constantly seeing something cool and turning around to park – my family's used to it by now."

"First Response: Photographs by Rusty Wiles" will include fifty images from Wiles's earliest Instagram fame to his most recent work in large scale. Wiles is planning to donate a portion of his sales proceeds to benefit the Boys and Girls Club of St. Lucie County.

The special pre-season display of "First Response" is presented in conjunction with St. Lucie County's hosting of the national Firefighter Combat Challenge, September 14 and 15, 2018, transforming the parking lot between the Backus Museum and the Manatee Observation & Education Center into the competition course.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit www.BackusMuseum.com. To see more of Wiles's body of work on social media, find him on Instagram @rustyFD912. For more information on St. Lucie County's hosting of the Firefighter Combat Challenge, please visit <https://visitslucie.com/2018fcc/> or www.firefighterchallenge.com.

Beginning September 14, Special Pre-Season Hours for "First Response: Photographs by Rusty Wiles" are: Friday – Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM; Sunday, 12 Noon to 4 PM. Admission is \$5 per person; AARP, AAA, and Veterans with appropriate ID receive a \$2 discount. Students with school ID, children under 18 and active duty military are always free.

About the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery

Overlooking the Indian River in beautiful and Historic Downtown Fort Pierce, the A.E. Backus Museum & Gallery houses the nation's largest public presentation of artwork by Florida's preeminent painter, A.E. "Bean" Backus (1906-1990), and is home to the state's only permanent multimedia exhibition on the Florida Highwaymen.

With a career spanning more than 70 years, Backus was the first Florida-born artist to build his professional renown by painting the landscape and scenes from daily life of his native state. He was fortunate to have known great success during his lifetime, with paintings hanging in the businesses and the private collections of many of Florida's most prominent citizens. A renowned humanitarian who abhorred the racist attitudes and segregation that engulfed the region, Backus taught and mentored the group of entrepreneurial African American artists who became known as the Florida Highwaymen. Their inspiring story is part of the A.E. Backus legacy.

In addition to preserving and perpetuating the artistic and humanitarian legacy of Backus, the Museum organizes and hosts changing exhibitions from artists of national and international acclaim. It was voted "Best Museum 2018" in Indian River Magazine's annual "Best of the Treasure Coast," where it was described as "a fabulous place to visit."

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Images:

Rusty Wiles – Island Dream, 2013
Rusty Wiles – Primary Wave, 2015

Rusty Wiles – Ron John, 2016
Rusty Wiles – Okeechobee Sunrise, 2018