

INSIDER NORTHERN MICHIGAN
FIFE LAKE

Hoisting Heritage

Annual festival honors Celtic traditions

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Contributing Writer

An early morning thunderstorm didn't stop participants or visitors from attending the 5th Annual Springfield Celtic Festival last weekend. Featuring authentic music, food, and athletics, the event featured a full day of entertainment and fun. Held at the Springfield Township Recreation Area near Fife Lake, the Celtic Festival is just one of the free functions offered throughout the summer.

"Everything is completely free," said Laura White, co-founder of the festival. "Some food is for sale, but we always have something for free. For some families, their only cost is the gas to get here."

White started the festival five years ago to honor her Irish and Scottish heritage. Having traveled to Alma and Detroit for larger festivals, she decided to create one closer to home.

"People seem to enjoy everything about it," she said. "It's unique to the area."

In 2006, the festival had only one vendor. This year they had

six, including assorted foods, art exhibits and medieval reenactments.

Allan Ackroyd, owner of Ackroyd's Scotch Bakery in Redford, Michigan, sold authentic shortbread, sausage rolls, and meat pies. It was his third appearance in Springfield.

"I vacation in the area, so this lets me combine work and play," he said.

Also returning was the Society for Creative Anachronism. Dressed in period costumes, the members demonstrated hand-to-hand combat, blacksmithing, and other skills

developed over 1,000 years of Celtic history. Members Godeleve and Debalyn even cooked a feast in a cauldron.

A cornerstone group at the festival, the Grand Traverse Pipes and Drums returned for the fifth time.

"It was a beautiful day," said band manager Jack Fellows. "(White does) a great job at organizing the festival. She has a good core of volunteers and sponsors. We had a great time."

The pipes and drums performed twice and provided music for some of the Scottish dancers.

For guests who preferred more modern Celtic tunes, the festival included groups like Scattered Mud and Morgan Stew. The bands played throughout the afternoon in the park's pavilion.



Photo by Katherine Stiney

Vintage challenge

A main feature at each year's festival is the Scottish Heavy Athletic Games. Originally developed as a way for the Scots to train for war, serious enthusiasts continue to compete in the strength events for the challenge.

The competition includes tossing hammers, weights, and the caber. All participants must compete in kilts.

Former athlete Mike "Moose" Brown judged this year's contest. A paramedic from Saginaw, Brown stopped competing after a serious injury but stays involved as a judge. Having been to larger contests in Las Vegas and Scotland, he still enjoys the trip to northern Michigan.

"Here we all want to do our best, but we work together to help others do their best too," he explained. "It really is a brotherhood. We're serious, but

Jeremy Bliven, a plumber from Shepherd, Michigan, gets set to toss the Caber as part of competition during last Saturday's Springfield Celtic Festival.

not too serious."

Jason Cherry, a registered nurse from Gaylord, agreed.

"The other festivals are so big," Cherry said. "This group is top notch. The crowd is nice, sort of intimate. We really get to talk with them."

Jeff White, Laura's brother and co-founder of the event, said he was pleased with the turnout.

"We were down in our

counts, but the festival flowed nicely," he said. "The participants were happy and the spectators really liked it. We're growing into a real nice event."

For more information about the Springfield Celtic Festival and next year's activities, call 231-879-3887.

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