

A Celtic awakening



Photo By Judy James

An estimated crowd of over 800 gathered at Springfield Park on Saturday to enjoy some history, Celtic music, and highland games at the 4th Annual Celtic Festival. See more photos on 9A

Springfield Recreation Area hosts themed festival for fourth year

By JUDY JAMES
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

FIFE LAKE - Stopping by the Springfield Recreation Area on Saturday was like stopping the clock and stepping back into time. Knights in armor, peasants in drab and kilt-wearing highlanders greeted visitors to the park as Celtic melodies blended with the lilt of bag pipes at the Fourth Annual Springfield Celtic Festival.

The event drew an estimated crowd of nearly 1000 who came from all over Michigan to spend the warm, sunny day enjoying music, food, historical reenactments and Highland games - all free of charge.

Groups such as Malarkey, Tanglemere, Mulligan Stew, Freshwater and Scatter the Mud provided the audience with toe-tapping Celtic tunes throughout the day. Many of the band members traveled from

around the state to participate in the weekend's gathering.

"A lot of them are people we've met through travels with our bluegrass band," said event organizer and Springfield Parks and Recreation chairman Jeff White. "We've got some great talent here for such a little spot in the woods."

The talent of the Grand Traverse Pipes and Drum added to the atmosphere of a time long past. The haunting sound of the Great Highland Bagpipes, the crisp thunder of the Scottish snare drums, and the flash of kilts was a delight to the eyes, as well as the ears.

The critically-acclaimed group was founded in 1974 to preserve and promote Scottish Gaelic arts and traditions, and performs in hundreds of parades, concerts, civic and pri

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vate events each year.

Celebrating their Scottish and Irish heritage, over 17 kilt-clad men - representing clans from as far away as Detroit - gathered to compete in the Scottish Heavy Athletics.

The seven traditional games of strength, such as tossing the stone, throwing the hammer, and flipping the caber, were not for the faint of heart or weak of limb.

The strongman competition saw participants flinging 28, 42, and 56-pound weights for height and distance. For the caber toss, contestants had to pick up and throw a 20-foot long, 120-pound pole - causing it to flip end over end.

Many of the games date back to the early 1300s. Scottish kings and clan chiefs would hold contests to determine who their strongest men were.

According to event judge Mike Brown, of Saginaw, some of the games had more humble beginnings.

"The 28-pound weight for distance games started with men who worked in the mills using the mill weights. We get some pretty impressive throws with the 28-pounders," Brown said. The Scotts and Irish

were not the only Gaelic representatives at the festival. Members of the Society for Creative Anachronism offered visitors the chance to experience some of the arts, skills and ordinary life of medieval times.

The SCA is an international organization dedicated to researching and re-creating the arts and skills of pre-17th-century Europe. Members of the SCA study and take part in a variety of activities, including combat, archery, equestrian activities, costuming, cooking, metalwork, woodworking, music, dance, calligraphy, fiber arts and much more.

"Like the Civil War re-enactors, we try to get as close as we can to how it was really done," said Jeff Walter, of Traverse City, who has been a member of the SCA for 15 years. "But we don't do it for money. We do it for the education and because we're passionate about it."

Visitors to the festival could stroll among men, women and children - some dressed as peasants and some as royalty - and learn about life in the middle ages. Woodcarving, spinning, felting, blacksmithing and cauldron cooking were some of skills on display.

Lisa Phillips, a pharmacist from Marne,

Mich, demonstrated spinning sheep's wool and camel hair into yarn.

"The spinning wheel dates to around the 1800s in Italy," said Phillips. "I like to do mostly fiber arts and costuming. I've even traveled to Europe to do research on medieval dress. I work at my real job to support my passion for history."

Deb Sieting, of South Boardman, and Annette Yasin, of Gaylord, spent the already-warm day getting warmer. The women worked around a boiling cauldron, preparing a meal for the group.

"We have a beef roast wrapped in pastry and greased muslin at the bottom of the pot. It will turn out kind of like a dumpling with the moist pastry on the outside," said Yasin. "Other items, such as the cherry bread pudding, are put into crock pots and then set in the boiling water. The meal cooks over a hardwood charcoal fire, which is exactly what they would have used in the middle ages."

Some of the main attractions, for kids and adults alike, were the fencing and heavy weapons fighting provided by the SCA. Galantly-dressed fencers fought each other with blunt tipped foils, while armor-clad warriors

demonstrated heavy weapons fighting using swords made from rattan and wooden shields.

"We use weapons made from rattan, rather than other woods, because if rattan breaks it will not splinter - it just shreds," said Walters. "The injury rate is about the same as high school basketball. I've had a few injuries - because it is full-contact - but that is half the fun."

White was pleased with the success of Saturday's event.

"We've had a good turnout and a great day. There are so few places you can go and take your family for arts and culture at no cost. All of our events are free, but if you want to donate money, that's fine too."

Other events on the calendar this summer for the Springfield Recreation Area include a weekly Farmer's Market, held each Thursday afternoon through Oct. 8, a horse pull with live music and a pie auction on July 5, the eighth annual Bluegrass Festival on July 25, the four annual antique tractor meet on Aug. 22 and a Pig Roast on Sept. 12.

For more information on these events or to become a park volunteer, contact Jeff White at 231-369-2685.

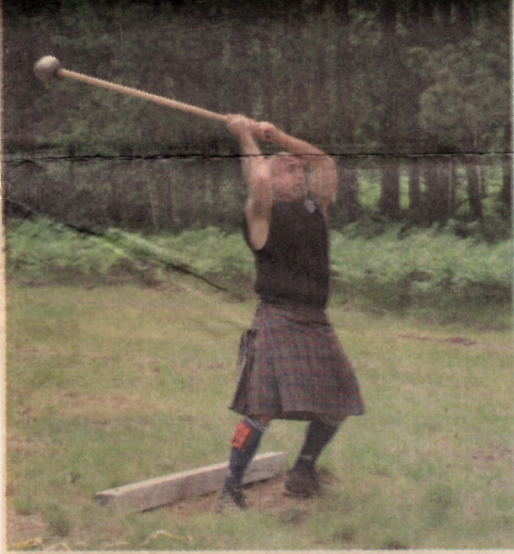


Photo By Judy James

John Tracy of Wayne, Mich. came to participate in the Highland Games.



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Fencing was one of the historical reenactments performed by a group called the SCA - Society for Creative Anachronism.



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Mac McLaughlin of Bendon, Mich. and Chuck Sieting of South Boardman demonstrate heavy weapons fighting.

A Verdancy of Spirit

Springfield Recreation Area hosts fourth annual Celtic Festival



Chuck Sieting of South Boardman displays some of his metalsmithing handiwork at Saturday's event.

Photo By Judy James



Blacksmith Richard Thibeau exhibits his skill in shaping iron during Saturday's festival.

Photo By Judy James



'Scatter the Mud' was one of seven groups on hand to entertain the audience with Celtic melodies.

Photo By Judy James



Ivor Alcorn, an Iraq War veteran from Freeland, Mich., represents his clan during the Highland Games.

Photo By Judy James



Charlene and Ron May of Lake Leelanau enjoy sharing their historical hobbies with others. Charlene knits and then felts hats while her husband Ron is accomplished in the art of Bas Relief Wood Carving.

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