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Harrisonburg, Virginia

TODAY
Rain likely
80

TONIGHT
Partly cloudy
58

Found His True Love — Recreating Medieval Times

Story by Jessica Clarke ■ Photos by Michael A. Tripp

As a lieutenant with the Staunton Fire Department, Chris Pugh slays plenty of fire-breathing dragons.

He has turned his reality into fantasy.

As Sir Blackwolf, manager of Medieval Fantasies Co., based at his home, Pugh is up to his armored helmet in the era of dragons.

With a band of about 100 merry volunteers, Pugh creates fairs, weddings and other events with a Renaissance theme.

Unicorns and dragons. Wooing contests. Bridegrooms with rapiers, tights and blouselike shirts. Costume balls. Swords and shields, archery.

"If you can dream it up, we can do it," he says.

Pugh dreamed up his company, which will produce the Stone Tower Glenn Renaissance Faire at Natural Chimneys Regional Park in Mount Solon today and Sunday.

This is the third year he has produced the fair to coincide with the annual jousting tournament sponsored by the Natural Chimneys jousting club.

The fair, set in the 15th century, will include magicians, weapons demonstrations, dance lessons, a masquerade ball and archery contest.

Volunteers from Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina will play roles of fairies, knights, musicians and others.

"The chance to do a Renaissance fair is a dream for a lot of us," says Pugh, 43.

A dream that brings no monetary compensation. He uses money made to build the business and hopes to pay helpers eventually.

Medieval Fantasies produced The Fairies of the Gem this summer, a fair that marked the opening of a park in Shenandoah.



Queen Beth Mathis, left, and King Dave Mathis sit under the royal canopy at the Renaissance Faire at Natural Chimneys in June 2003.

The company also created a Celtic wedding in Harrisonburg with the couple in period dress.

Wedding themes include Scottish, gypsy, fairy and Camelot with music, singing and feasts.

Transportation can include horse-drawn carriage, horseback or ship.

Prices vary, but a Celtic wedding with bride and groom on horses, music and food would cost about \$1,000, Pugh says.

In addition to creating weddings and fairs, Pugh teaches long-bow archery and sword fighting.

As Sir Blackwolf, a knight for hire, he has appeared at a Renaissance fair and graduation at schools and in business promotions.

"A guy running around in armor, clanking, that usually grabs people's attention," Pugh says.

He clanks around in about 80 pounds of armor.

A wall in Pugh's home is covered with the black garb of his passion: leather-lined helmet; breastplate; gauntlets; bracers; a coif, made of heavy chain mail, which covers the head and neck.

Pugh will wear the armor at the fair at Natural Chimneys.

Renaissance fairs are held in Fredericksburg and Newport News, also.

About 6,000 such festivals are organized in the United States each year, says Dusty Webb, director of Ye Olde World Living History Foundation in Cody, Wyo.

"People like role-playing. People can step out of their jobs and step into the role of a character, a knight in shining armor, a wench serving beer in the king's court," Webb says.

Although many people use Renaissance role-playing to leave stress behind, the medieval period had its stress.

See **MEDIEVAL**, Page S6

Love Of Medieval Times Develops Into A Blossoming Business With Fairs, Weddings

Medieval

FROM PAGE S1

The era "has been severely romanticized. It was a brutal, horrible time in human history" with nasty diseases, a low standard of living and knights who were thugs, Pugh says.

"The whole idea of Camelot and Robin Hood, that's what it should have been instead of what it was," he says. "We're recreating the ideal, not the reality."

The ideal for Pugh is honor, justice, loyalty. He dons those with his armor.

"I want people to come to what we're putting on and have their dreams come true," Pugh says.

His have.

Medieval symbols adorn his living room: statues of armored knights on horseback; a dragon figurine; the Welsh flag — green and white with a red dragon.

"It's more than a hobby. It's a way of life," he says.

As Sir Blackwolf, Pugh uses a shield he made of plywood, painted black and red with the phrase "My honor is my life."

At the bottom of the shield, a dragon stands.

Pugh still has plenty of those to slay.



Left: Chris Pugh, also known as Sir Blackwolf, stands with one of his medieval props behind his West Augusta home. Pugh has turned his love of all things medieval into a business providing costumed actors, props and other accessories for fairs, weddings and commercial events. Top: Queen Beth Mathis, left, and King Dave Mathis, right, preside over the events at the Renaissance Faire at Natural Chimneys in Mount Solon with Chris James standing guard over them in June 2003.