

ROANOKE HAS A FESTIVAL SATURDAY

Olde tymes, goode tymes



Medieval fair celebrates olde tymes, goode tymes

Glenn King (center) throws a 56-pound weight over an 11-foot-high bar Saturday at a re-creation of the Highland Games at a Medieval fair in Roanoke County. The festival featured activities such as coursing, hammer tossing and human chess matches.

Photo by Kyle Green | The Roanoke Times

Age-old practices came back to life at the Green Hill Medieval Faire.

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The small brown hare skimmed across the grassy field, followed a fraction of a second later by the two greyhounds. Both dogs ran as fast as their long and slender legs would carry them, but only one was quick enough to snatch up their target.

It's called coursing, a competition first organized in England during the reign of Elizabeth I.

But this chase happened Saturday in Green Hill Park, and the dogs' quarry was, in actuality, a squeaky toy wrapped in fur and pulled quickly on a rope.

That was just one of the anachronisms on display at this weekend's Green Hill Medieval Faire 2007, an event that includes, among other spectacles, hammer tossing, human chess matches, dancing and enough chain mail and corsets to form a modern Camelot.

The annual event used to be called the Virginia Renaissance Faire, but organizer Wendi Schultz said, "we changed it to broaden the scope.

"The Medieval period was longer than the Renaissance."

As the hounds -- Candy and Izzy, and their sibling Killian -- relaxed later on cushions under the shade of a canopy, their owner, Scott McDonald of Woodbridge, explained how the display of the old custom connects with today.

"A lot of people don't realize what loving, wonderful companions they [greyhounds] are," said McDonald, who wore the purple-and-gray garb of royalty. His wife, Jenifer, operates Her Majesty's Hounds, a nonprofit greyhound adoption and education group. They travel to fairs to spread information about racing greyhounds that have been turned out after their prime. This is the McDonalds' sixth year at the fair.

"They turn them [greyhounds] over so fast, but they live 12 to 14 years," McDonald said. "What a waste it is to destroy such a fine animal."



FAIR: Old clothing features many modern conveniences

Rob Davis of Baltimore is a volunteer who took part in the coursing display and spent most of Saturday dressed in armor he estimates weighs about 100 pounds.

"I enjoy it immensely. It's an excuse to get dressed up," said Davis, whose neck movements were severely restricted by a protective collar called a gorget.

He was new to the armor, but as he sipped a can of Pepsi under the bright sun, he said it was cool enough.

At most festivals, he explained, he's "in black leather, head-to-toe, and a full cape. So this isn't really that hot. It's really more about the weight. That's the joke: The kids all think I'm a tough-looking barbarian, but if they pushed me, I'd fall down."

Georgette Yakman of Blacksburg sported a dress she purchased at the fair made entirely of chain mail, but she had a secret advantage.

"This is aluminum, so it doesn't get hot," Yakman said. "This is about 15 pounds."

Other vendors offered cotton tunics, surcoats, carved wands and henna tattoos. Another advertised a combination deal: a tarot reading and a foot massage.

Rodney Hallam, operating a booth that sells exotic weapons for the Waynesboro company Steel Dragons, said that although pirate swords are always a popular item, most buyers this weekend were going for something with a little more heft to it.

"Axes and maces, we're almost sold out of," he said, presenting a spiked club that was selling well. "People have really gone for them for some reason."

At a nearby archery tournament, a contestant's arrow missed a target and hit a protective facade painted to look like a castle.



Kyle Green | The Roanoke Times

Chris Horning (left), Melinda Griffith (center) and Pat Hulon entertain the crowd Saturday at the fair. They are members of the music and comedy group Hither, Dither and Yon.

Green Hill Medieval Faire

When: Today

Time: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Where: Green Hill Park, Roanoke County

www.medievalfantasiesco.com
www.hmhounds.org

"That guy in the window is not really shooting back at you," joked George Gunner of Baltimore, one of the senior members of the Duchy of Cashel, a medieval re-creation group in charge of the match.

In his puffy purple shirt, black tights, black velvet hat, boots, beard and ponytail, Gunner had the period look down cold, except for his modern eyeglasses.

He said that his group frequently educates young people about the period from 1066 to 1603 -- or, more specifically, from the Battle of Hastings to the death of Elizabeth I.

"We focus a lot on the children," he explained. "Old fogeys like me, we need someone to continue this."

Robyn Barcomb of Roanoke, a saleswoman at Hydraulic and Pneumatic Systems, was there with her daughter, Taylor, 12.

"We spent a week sewing our outfits," Barcomb said, explaining that most volunteers make their own clothes. They're volunteers who appear in costume and interact with the other guests, and she said they have a lot of fun.

"It's really very family-oriented," she said. "More than it seems."