

Renaissance Festival revives enchantment

By Fiona Soltes
Staff Writer

Come, Milord and Milady! The King doth bid your presence at the 14th annual Texas Renaissance Festival.

His Majesty King Henry VIII began welcoming visitors to Sherwood Forest last weekend. He was joined by his royal court as well as jugglers, magicians, belly dancers, mud wrestlers, tightrope walkers and many other servants, all wishing to share new delights with visitors.

This year, the festival has several new exhibits, including Noble House, a Greco-Roman structure displaying the treasures Marco Polo brought back from the Orient, as well as a post office and a bank where visitors can exchange checks or credit cards for pound notes to be used at the festival. Also new are six new food buildings and two new stages for entertainment.

Many more street characters are new to the festival this year, too. The people who play these parts are as diverse as the characters themselves. Some of the workers, like Paige Hunt, are locals who enjoy working at the festival just for fun. Hunt, who is from Conroe, works for

Chrysler Credit Corp. during the week and sells flowered hair wreaths at the festival on weekends.

"This is my third year at the festival," Hunt said. "I do it basically because it's extra fun for several weekends during the year. I'm definitely planning on doing it again next year." Hunt said she is paid a base rate, near minimum wage, plus a commission for each wreath. The wreaths, made by an outside company and shipped in for the festival, are available to visitors for \$8 to \$20 each.

Visitors can have their faces painted by "Lady" Susan Griffin, who participates in the festival as an extension of her real-life career. Griffin works for a performing arts costume company in Houston during the week, making costumes and doing make-up for actors in feature films. Griffin said she is willing to paint any design.

"The most common designs are unicorns, dragons and free-form," Griffin said. "But the customer is king; I'll do whatever he likes." She said she will paint bodies as well as faces. The artwork ranges from \$5 to \$8.

Elaborate costumes abound at the festival. Eulice Vial, who portrays Lady Anne, Duchess of Somerset, makes

many of the costumes visitors wear during the festival.

"I am a specialist in the Elizabethan time period," Vial said. "I make costumes out of my home, one at a time. I have made about 80 of the costumes for this year's festival." Vial said that the performers own only one costume since prices usually start at \$1,500.

The characters are responsible for supplying their own costumes. Some of the lesser characters, those who are not members of the court, buy theirs at the Renaissance clothing shops at the festival.

Many shops are on the festival grounds. They sell just about everything including clothes, armor, furniture, woodwork, paintings, mirrors and statues of wizards.

David Dawson, apprentice to the derhill of Underhill Pavilions, B&B and Tents, said he takes enough business for Renaissance tents and banners at the festival to keep him in business all year long.

"We really enjoy making them."

See Renaissance Festival, page 7



Photo by Jay Janner

Lady Susan Griffin holds the mirror for Jonathan Salas, 4, so he can see the balloons she painted on his cheek.



Photo by Jay Janner



Photo by Jay Janner

(Top Right) The Queen and King Henry VIII sing "Morning Dew" with the royal court.
(Bottom Right) Magical Mystical Michael explains the mystery of the red box during his magic show. His 40 minute show is largely improvisational.
(Bottom Left) Miniature clay wizards on display at the festival. They cost around \$20 each. These are just some of the hand-crafted items available to visitors.
(Middle Left) A fool yells "Make Thy Day!" as he prepares to be hit by tomatoes by visitors. He was the target in the game Vegetable Vengeance.



Photo by Jay Janner



Photo by Jay Janner