

AggieLife

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THE BATTALION

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A whole new world

Texas Renaissance Festival commences Saturday as a Magical Realm

By JENNIFER CROSS
THE BATTALION

The aisles are empty of the thousands of people who visit each year. The grass has grown over the paths, some booths gleam with fresh coats of paint, the trees rustle over head, and somewhere in the distance a bagpiper is practicing for the opening day.

The Texas Renaissance Festival will explode into vibrant life Saturday, and it will be as colorful and noisy as ever. This year's theme, "The Magic Realm," will transport visitors to another world.

A glorious garden has been built by an unwary mortal, but the garden is part of a deadly prophecy that may be the end of the fairies, if not destroyed by the end of the day. The Goblin King has pledged to

destroy the garden for the fairies, but only if his son is wed to the beautiful fairy princess. While plots for the festival seem to repeat, this year's plot promises to be interesting and original.

Rehearsals for the festival began in June, and the 155 members of the performance company have worked every weekend since then to make this year's more magical than the last. More than 500 people comprise the core cast of the festival. The air is teeming with excitement as brightly-colored, fairies and green-faced goblins come down the

festival.

"We have a new magic garden this year [with] six different sanctuaries," said Orvis Melvin, director of marketing for the festival.

Where once stood a tangled forest beside the entrance to Sherwood Forest and the rest of the grounds, a set of tall white columns have been erected, leading to an enchanting garden. The garden itself was designed by owner George Coulam and cost more than \$300,000. Construction began in May 2000 and continued during last year's festival. Spanning 280,000 square feet, the garden winds past a stream whose sides are paved with stones of earthy beige and soft grays.

"I see a very Spanish-Mexican flavor in there," said Erin Gele, a worker at the magic cauldron booth and a senior international studies major.

The path urges casual strollers through the garden and into the six different sanctuaries along the path. Mosaic benches and vibrant plant life invite long rests in the wild garden.

"I think [the garden] will add to the overall enjoyment of the fair," said Kerri Jo Reed, a senior management major. "The only reason I would ever go is because of the atmosphere of the place."

The path and the sanctuaries are populated with unique sculptures, and each sanctuary has a different theme.

"Some [of the sculptures] were made in our shop," Melvin said. "Mr. [George] Coulam designed them and they were made by our artisans here at the festival."

While the new garden may draw some, the more than 300 shops and 204 live shows on 21 stages will draw most of the projected 25,000 daily visitors. Popular shows such as "The Dead Bob Show" on the Globe stage and "The Sturdy Beggars Mud Show" at the Mud Pitt will be returning this year, along with some new faces.

"We have new vendors and new acts,"

Melvin said.

Other acts include "Throw Up" at the Globe stage, "Washing Well Wenches" at the Mud Pitt, "To the Hilt" and "Cliff Hanger" at the Castle Stage and "Arsene Dupin" and "Sound & Fury" at the Odeon stage.

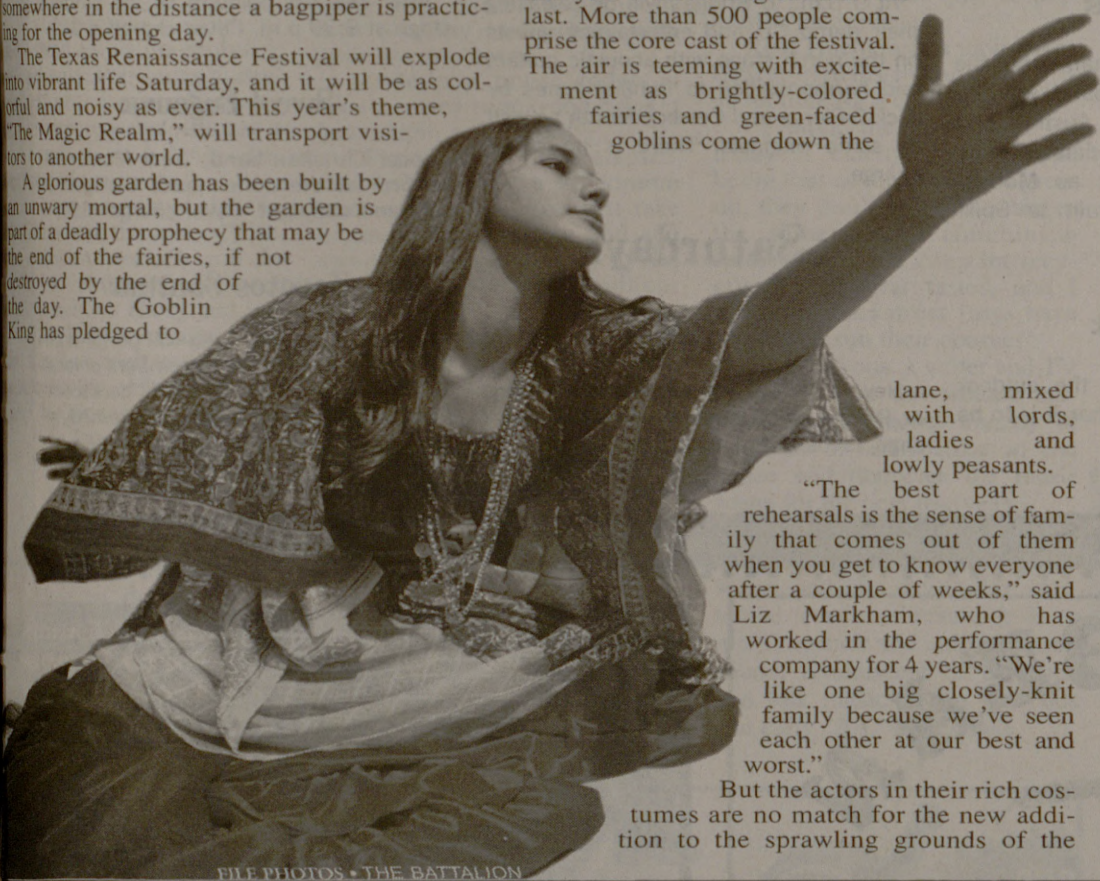
The Texas Renaissance Festival will host more than three weddings a day this year, for a total of 46 in the popular open-air chapel.

"Weddings are scheduled to be held [in the Magic Garden] in the future as well, and it will be a really popular place to have them," Markham said.

A lot of hard work each year goes into making the festival a magical place for visitors.

"It's a lot of hard work," Markham said. "But it's worth it and if I had to do it over again, I wouldn't change a thing."

Tickets are \$20 at the gate for adults and \$9 for children. Advance tickets for the first weekend may be ordered online before 2 p.m. Friday at \$12 for adults and \$6 for children. Tickets ordered online for any other weekend have a \$3 discount. The festival opens at 9 a.m. and runs until dusk Saturdays and Sundays until Nov. 18. Visit www.texrenfest.com for directions, camping information and ticket sales, or call 1-800-458-3435.



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