

# Renaissance Faire touches the human spirit

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Editor

Across the rolling hills of Mount Hope, Pa., is an enchanted land, where a beautiful queen rules brave knights, comic jesters and a magical faerie garden. It is a place where childhood and adult dreams are made and fulfilled. The Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire.

On a weekend morning, visitors arrive at the Mount Hope Estate and Winery in droves, just as they would a shopping mall or movie theater.

A pebble-stone path guides small clusters of four and five through the formal gardens and by the mansion's copper fountain. The sounds of Celtic music, a hammered dulcimer, mandolin and guitar, waft invitingly over the high fence, which blocks off the Faire grounds from the rest of the winery's property.

The entrance to the Tudor village is framed by a 12-foot stone wall. On the very top is a handful of smiling peasants, dressed in flowing skirts and Robin Hood hats, waving and calling greetings to the new faces below dressed in their modern 21st century attire.

The redwood gates serve as a time portal as visitors step through them. Left behind are cars, paved roads and steel structures, for all one can see is a shire of tents and wooden structures with roofs of thatched hay. Fragrant incense intertwining with the fresh autumn air and the aromas of cooking turkey legs and peasant bread welcome noses. The ears are astonished to hear Olde English chatter. Visitors find that, in one step, they

have been transported back in time to the year 1596, when Queen Elizabeth Regina Glorianna ruled England.

The enchanted feeling created by this shire is not solely the effect of the authentic structures and stages which serve as a backdrop for the 18 professional and more than 40 volunteer actors. Nor is it only the effect of the more than 400 hours of training those actors received to acquire their 16th-century mannerisms and dialects. No, the magical spell woven here not only affects the senses, but the human heart and spirit as well.

The Faire's style of interactive theater erases the barriers between stage and audience. Patrons and the cast walk side by side through the village. Despite the numerous staged and impromptu performances that take place on the grounds throughout the day, the actors still find time to introduce themselves, (as their fictional characters of course), to fairegoers with a "How farest thou?"

The Renaissance Faire's unique style of performance tends to bring out what is best in the human spirit, and the inhabitants of the Tudor shire seem to possess the magic to heal what the modern day has broken of that spirit. Eye contact is made between strangers. Hands are shaken and the new "gentles" even find themselves hugged by the cast. The entertainment from the staged events pull the audience deeper into the Faire's spell through the power of laughter. The Commedia dell' Arte troupe offer their unique

adaptations to Shakespeare's works turning the bard's tragic plays, such as "King Lear," into comedy. The troupe encourages audience participation and even seeks out unsuspecting fairegoers to take starring roles in the performance.

Humor surrounds even the dangerous stunts, such as those performed by swordswallower, Lord Xavier. Xavier boasts that he is only one of four individuals in the country who swallow a variety of steel weapons without the aid of illusion.

After Xavier pushes an ice pick up his nose and swallows a 16-inch sword, he informs his audience that he will next swallow a sword 26 inches long. The stunt man explains how it took three-and-a-half years of training for him to do the trick.

"It's extremely dangerous and I could die now!" he exclaims.

The spectators chuckle, but as Xavier does in fact begin to swallow the sword, they shrink back and hide their eyes while the stunt man's tear up from the difficulty of the performance.

To everyone's relief, he finally pulls the sword back out through his mouth. Saliva drips off the tip of the steel blade as Xavier says, "Look at that! I'm a quart low!" The audience explodes into laughter and applause.

He continues the show, patiently explaining each stunt and even inviting the fairegoers to come right up to the stage to take pictures.

That patience does not only exist in the explanation of the perfor-

mances, but can also be found on Guildsman's Way, a working street of artisans. Visitors to the Tudor shire can purchase the wares of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and potters.

Alan and Anni Brodrick are the Faire's glass artisans. Their open-air shop is designed so that their art as well as their work can be displayed. People gather in awe around the warm furnace as the Brodrick's command the delicate, heated glass to conform to their wishes.

When the royal herald sounds his trumpet at 4 p.m., announcing the queen's procession to the human chess match, visitors have already spent a day filled with laughter, patience and acceptance, and feel as though they have become members of the community of this enchanted land.

Crowds faithfully follow the queen and gather around the 1,000 square feet of red-and-yellow chess board where living royalty and commoners take their positions as pawns. Fairegoers find themselves taking sides on the "friendly" game between Queen Elizabeth and King Phillip of Spain. The wager placed on the outcome of the match is the queen's hand in marriage to King Phillip.

The match ends with a skirmish between the two countries, and the queen announces that the matter will be settled by a joust on Bosworth field.

The crowning point of the day's events is when Sir James the White champions the cause of



Queen Elizabeth waves to visitors at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire.

photo by Jody L. Jacobs

Elizabeth against King Phillip's knight on the jousting field. As the chivalrous traditions of testing the field and suiting up in armor are witnessed by the viewers, the traditions are explained to them as well.

James raises his lance to the spectators and exclaims, "I fight for you!"

The crowd screams its support as the knight's lance strikes the enemy's shield and continues until blood spills and James claims his ultimate victory over the Spaniard.

And the crowd, that earlier in the day was timid in its participation, jumps to its feet and roar "Huzzah!"

Almost on cue, the sun begins to fall behind the hills, casting human shadows on the field as the joust ends. A cool breeze stirs the air and the queen invites the "commoners" to gather together for the Faire's finale, a celebration in song dedicated to the defeat of Phillip and Elizabeth's continued marriage to

England.

Just as the visitors are greeted at the gates when they arrived in the morning, they are affectionately escorted back to that portal in time and bade a fond farewell.

The villagers of the shire sing their good-bye, "Good night and joy be with you," as fairegoers exit the gates smiling at others who earlier that day they regarded as strangers, but now leave the Mount Hope Estate feeling as though they are parting from friends.

The Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire runs for 11 weekends from August to October, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Other events that the Mount Hope Winery hosts include: "Edgar Allan Poe Evermore," "A Charles Dickens Christmas Past," and "The Roaring 20s." For more information regarding the Faire, phone (717) 665-7021.

## Capital Region Internship/Co-op Fair

Wednesday, October 16, 1996  
1:00 - 4:00 PM

Capital Union Building  
Penn State Harrisburg  
Middletown, PA

*Open to all students from Pennsylvania colleges and universities.*

### Program Schedule

12:30 - 4:00 PM	Registration
1:00 - 4:00 PM	Internship/Co-op Fair
1:15 - 3:15 PM	Concurrent Informational Workshops:
1:15 - 1:45 PM	Session I: State & Government Internships
2:00 - 2:30 PM	Session II: Behavioral Interviewing
2:45 - 3:15 PM	Session III: International Internships
4:00 PM	Internship/Co-op Fair Closes

**Free Admission**

**Free Resume Critique - Available from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.**

For more information and to register:

Contact your college's Internship/Co-op Office, Career Center  
or call

Nancy Karlik, Director  
Penn State Downtown Center at (717) 783-0433

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