

Step into another time at the Oregon Country Fair

by Deborah McGee

"A lot less dust, and lots more fun" promises Douglas Parker, president of the 16th Oregon Country Fair. The incomparable celebration, calling itself an "annual refuge from today's asphalt and electric life," begins a week from Friday.

Parker, a hearty, curly-headed, merry-eyed man offered me a cool drink, looped his hands through the straps of his shirtless bib overalls and gave a tour of the fair site last week. We walked through quiet grounds, which soon will be overflowing with life.

Fair coordinators have expended a thousand dollars to reduce dustiness, a perennial problem because the fairgrounds is underwater during winter months. "I canoed through here last winter," Parker said, and pointed to an orange survey ribbon marking the former water line—five feet up a tree. Tons of sand and gravel have been laid in low places along the fair's double-loop configura-

cial as a stress-reduction class.

But back to the Karamazovs, who've recently tasted stardust, appearing in last month's *Rolling Stone* magazine, and performing on Broadway and in the movie *The Jewel of the Nile*. Fair veteran Parker recalled seeing them for the first time: "There were just two of them then," he said. "They started here, you know. They did a juggling bit along the paths and passed the hat afterwards."

From all reports, the Oregon Country Fair has played matchmaker to Uncle Sam's second-time-around with Lady Vaudeville. When asked to define vaudeville, Mel Urban, OCF publicity coordinator, said he liked the definition on sword-swallower Moz Wright's t-shirt: ancient arts brought to life.

Jugglers, storytellers, clowns, puppets ad astra will appear on many of the fair's eight stages. Daredevil Meadow, which is another grassy corner, and the



The Mud Bay Jugglers will be on hand at the Oregon Country Fair to entertain you.

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tion of paths, a perfect surface for bare feet or tennies. Workers have planted daisies and were in the midst of a vigorous watering and hay-mowing campaign. Parker also promised a grassy main meadow, the fair's major hub.

Besides being less dusty, another change this year is greater emphasis on a cultural and artistic trend which has begun to be termed The New Vaudeville.

Yes, the Flying Karamazov Brothers are expected. They headline the list of performers titled The Circus, a group which will give two shows and two parades per day, at noon and 3 pm, or so. . . .

That "or so" is important. Fair atmosphere celebrates the joy of a more leisurely life. Things happen at people time, not according to Greenwich, and a good dose of the Country Fair may be as benefi-

W.C. Fields Stage list some 90 acts between them. Spontaneous bursts of performance are likely to occur just about anywhere at the fair, so be alert for sudden knots of people, especially little people, eyes agape at some wondrous sleight-of-hand or phantasmagoric feat.

Music fills the air at OCF, but it is real, live, music; only Main Stage has major sound equipment. This stage fronts on an enormous meadow which, when first seen during the fair, makes you think you've stumbled upon some strange tribe performing wild and pagan rituals—until you realize the tribe is our own! Friday will see Nine Days Wonder, Dakotah and the ever-popular Shumba, among others. Citizens Band, featuring "anarcoustic" music, Loose Wimmie and Baby Gramps are just a few of those to appear Saturday.

If these names aren't enough to tempt you, try Sunday's picks, among them: Subconscious Population with original Reggae, Sandunga, and a most intriguing entry: Ken Kesey and the Thunder Machine. The latter's announcement seems to have sparked conflicting rumors about whether or not the Grateful Dead will be there. The Dead, by the way, gave an early benefit for the fair, which provided the downpayment for the land when the non-profit organization purchased it in 1982.

A gentler atmosphere pervades Shady Grove, a nice place to mellow out when you've reached the maximum of stimulation. Locals Emmy Fox, Peter Thomas, and Sweet Grass, as well as Judy Toy and Jim Scott of the Paul Winter Consort from farther climes, are among the 27 acts to be staged there. Milton Briggs, grand champion of the world's whistlers, and many similar acts will spice the Shady Grove offerings.

Entertainment is but one of the many aspects of the fair. Three-hundred crafts and food booths mushroom along the sides of the fair's paths. Booth construction, which prefers fabric and unpainted wood, is forever imaginative, and crafts offered are like a Saturday Market gone wild and multiplying by the milliseconds. You'll see some of the same people from our weekly celebration, and marvel at the wares of many a backroads ar-

tisan. Booths are set up to explore the healing and psychic arts as well, so come to have your palm read or your back rubbed, too. A sauna as mind-boggling as the Roman baths also awaits the weary visitor.

The most difficult thing about the food booths is picking what you want. Among the notes of constantly merry-making music waft the aromas of cuisines from the world over. Sample widely. A great place to pig out. Real healthful stuff will be at hand, too, and I can remember one year being refreshed with wheat grass juice. Last year's culinary delight was a chocolate-covered strawberry, free, handed to me by a stranger at a booth selling Mexican food.

Once again, local activists and future-thinkers have pooled their largely volunteer efforts to carry on the traditions of the 10th Community Village and the Energy Park. Stepping into one of them always is an adventure, an expansion of awareness at humankind's possible future along a softer path. "One seed planted for a common future" is their statement of purpose. Six-hundred individuals, 90 organizations take part.

The Village also has a stage

with scheduled performances and such ongoing events as New Games, which stress cooperative, rather than competitive, principles.

The fair itself is like a small town. Water is available free at all times and people gather 'round the water barrels much as they once did the village well. Recycling is evident, with separate barrels for glass, paper, etc. There are no cars in the fair, and parking is handled by a hardy bunch in nearby fields. Better yet, take the Lane Transit Bus. For only a quarter each way, the bus drops you right at the entrance gate, and leaves downtown every 1/2 hour from 10 am.

The 1986 Oregon Country Fair opens its gates to the masses from 11 to 7, July 11, 12 and 13. Admission is \$5 Friday, \$6 Saturday and Sunday. All entertainment is free with admission, which also includes *The Peach Pit*, a newspaper listing the entire fair schedule. Children under 12 get in free; seniors have \$1 discount. Dogs get in no way, no how.

It's time to dust off your pan pipes, shake out the gypsy gear and have some midsummer day dreams sure to ripen into evening thoughts by winter's fire.

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