

Bohemian Rhapsody

A celebration of beer, brat's, clogs and polka ... and beer.

Autumn has always been my favorite time of year. The brilliant colors, the crisp, clear air, the accordion music and short leather pants. That's right, it's Oktoberfest time again, that magnificent bastion of brew signaling the start of Fall. But it hasn't always just been about getting drunk and watching people clog dance in silly costumes. OK, yes it has.

Picture Munich, Oct. 12, 1810. A crowd of about 40,000 Bavarian citizens, probably all sporting lederhosen and milking-girl skirts, has gathered in a large field outside the city gates to celebrate the wedding of Prince Ludwig (later King Ludwig I) and Princess Theresia. This marks an unprecedented mingling of peasants and royalty that surely encourages some spontaneous clog dancing from both sides.

In addition to copious amounts of beer (or bier, if you like), the highlight of the day's festivities is, naturally, a horserace. The next year it's a horserace and an agricultural show. Then no more horserace. Then, well, it just becomes an excuse to get trashed in public. And that's where America gets on board.

LaCrosse Wisc., holds the first "Oktoberfest" on U.S. soil in 1961. Pretty soon, falling leaves start turning everyone German, at least for a couple of weeks. Here we are almost 200 years from the beginning, and nearly every city in America now hosts its own version of this boisterous

celebration of life ... and beer.

The St. Mark Catholic Church in Eugene has offered a family-friendly Oktoberfest for more than 20 years, but this is the first time the festival will be produced by an outside company.

Big Green Productions, the capable handlers of such beloved events as Art and the Vineyard and the Eugene Celebration, will take the reins on Sept. 9, for what is sure to be a typically quirky foray into the finer points of Bavarian culture.

Brendan Relaford of Big Green is quick to clarify the company's commitment to tradition. "There will be a few changes, but very minor ones," he said. "The church has always used the event as a fund-raiser, and they will have some booths set up for that. But there will still be the clog dancers and the beer tents."

The St. Mark Oktoberfest will last three days, short of the traditional two-week Munich marathon, but just inside the alcohol-poisoning tolerance of an American college town.

Expect performances from

Minnesingers such as The Little Bohemian Band, The Misty Valley Cloggers, The Valley Boys, The Hillbilly Band and many more. Prost! **EW**

Oktoberfest will be held on Sept. 9, 10 and 11 at St. Mark Church, 1760 Echo Hollow Rd., Eugene. Friday and Saturday, 11 am-11 pm, Sunday 11 am-6 pm. Admission is \$5 after 4 pm on Friday and Saturday. Sunday is free all day. No charge for kids 12 and under. For more information check out www.eugeneoktoberfest.com

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