

FAIR-LY IMPORTANT

Movers and Shakers in the Country Fair Family

By Vanessa Salvia

You've seen them in the grocery store, the bank and at restaurants. They go about their lives doing seemingly normal things, just like you do, but you know there's something a little different about them. Those bright tie-dyed shirts with the peach logo give them away every time: they're Oregon Country Fair staff and volunteers. But who are these people when they're not organizing the VegManEC crew or spraying dust on the trails, skin glittering with pixie dust, fairy wings flapping? *Eugene Weekly* talked to a few long-time fair folk; these are people who have been with the fair from the beginning or nearly so, keeping things running smoothly so you can have a magical weekend.



TODD COOPER

SUZI PROZANSKI

Suzi Prozanski and her husband, Democratic State Senator Floyd Prozanski, moved here from Texas in 1984. "At first people told us we should go check out the Albany Timber Fest, so we did that for the July 4th weekend, our first July 4th here in Oregon," Prozanski says. "It was pretty interesting. It was sort of like a rodeo for loggers from our point of view, but it was too much like what we saw in Texas. Then someone said, 'Oh, you should go to Renaissance Fair' [as OCF was known then]." The couple had been to Renaissance fairs in Texas and thought they knew what to expect.

"We got on the bus with everyone else and rode out there and went, 'Oh

my gosh! This is wonderful! This is different!'" she remembers. "I fell in love with the new vaudeville shows in particular and the crafts and the magic of the whole event, and we went back the next two days." In 1989 Suzi began working at Gil Harrison's pottery booth [see Gil's profile below] and was able to "sleep over." She joined the Information Crew in '93, and for the past three years has been editing and writing for the fair's newsletter, *Fair Family News*.

Now, Prozanski is the fair's "accidental archivist," as she continues working on an oral history of the fair. Since 2000 she has conducted more than 200 interviews, collected all but two issues of *Fair Family News* and spent countless hours doing newspaper research. Though it may take a few more years, Prozanski plans to compile the research into a book. "It's a little overwhelming, and at the same time it's delightful and fun and interesting," she says. "Going that far back in peoples' memories, 40 years ago, and trying to tie dates and times and pieces of facts together with what people remember is a challenge. But it's just been a delight to meet all the interesting people that I've been able to meet through the interviews. I fall in love with every one of them. A lot of love goes into this event!"

GIL HARRISON

Ever thought about who to thank for the fact that there are plenty of rolls of toilet paper in the fair port-a-potties? Gil Harrison had something to do with that.

Harrison attended the very first fair and then set up his booth selling pottery the second year. "Somewhere in the middle of the '70s," Harrison began staffing an information booth, which was across the path from his pottery booth. "[Fair] wasn't near as big as it is now," he says, "and I was able to go back and forth to the information booth if someone stopped with a question. It got more complicated, so I gave up my pottery booth for a while."

Harrison worked his way up to Information Coordinator and then Admissions Coordinator back when the fair still took money at the gate. Harrison noticed that there was a lack of attention to some basic needs, like toilet paper. "No one was paying attention to how much we had and where it was," says Harrison. "Or matching the number of batteries with the number of flashlights, things like that. Back then, the person who complains or gripes or whatever the loudest became in charge, so I became the first Quartermaster, to keep track of what the fair needed and what the fair had and find them."

After doing that for several years, "and versus getting burnout," he says, he resumed his pottery booth, which he has kept ever since. In the early '80s Harrison founded one of the first marimba bands in town, called Shumba. Soon Shumba began performing at the fair. "There were a few times that I was up there on Main Stage playing music, and doing my booth, and running around to the different stages doing music," he says. "I didn't sleep much during those fairs. It sure was fun though!"



Gil and Kassey Dagget (a former Slug Queen) at the 2006 Fair.