

BMD from A1

the 1959 celebration which put the festival on the map with its faux western storefronts, parades and high turnout. It was also the inception year of the Prospectors and Gold Diggers Club, the production engine behind the festival.

Bohemia Days began as a summer celebration to pay homage to the history of mining on the near-by Bohemia Mountain, as well as the rich heritage of the area.

“There was a lot of colorful and really unique history about Cottage Grove from its agricultural, Oregon Trail pioneer settling in this area, from the discovery of gold in the mining district in the 1850s,” Weeldreyer said.

It wasn’t until sometime in the mid-1960s that “Bohemia Mining Days” was permanently adopted as the festival’s name.

In 1970, the festival and Cottage Grove made national news when Jerry Lewis accepted an invitation to participate in the small town’s festival.

A local seven-year-old boy, Scotty Swift, had been selected that year as the national poster child of the Muscular Dystrophy Association and was flown to New York for a taping and photo shoot which included Lewis. As that year’s Bohemia Mining Days Parade Grand Marshal, Swift (with some prior coaching from the Cottage Grove Mayor Bill Whiteman) invited Lewis to sit beside him in the parade.

News of Lewis’ attendance soon spread and Cottage Grove found itself packed to the brim with adoring fans.

“It was probably the highlight of our 60 years, was having such a famous person come to town and for such a sweet reason,” said Weeldreyer.

Over the years, a number of attractions have come and gone. One performance troupe in particular, though, achieved legendary status. The Lemati Gang, a fictional group of outlaws who would enact shootouts and train robberies, was a festival staple for decades.

Led by Whiteman, the troupe was so successful that it became its own separate nonprofit and took their performances on tour around Oregon. However, rising insurance fees and maintenance costs caused the gang to finally hang up its hats and gun holsters in 2002.

This year, the infamous gang has been resurrected by Mayor Jeff Gowing, a previous performer himself, who will play sheriff to the gang in their scheming shenanigans opposite the Bohemia City Marshal played by City Councilor Bob Ehler. Though there are no plans to bring back past eccentric performances, the gang will march in Saturday’s grand parade and entertain the crowd.

“I think it’s going to be a lot of fun to get back in and do it,” said Gowing.

Other returning attractions will include a historical treasure hunt, a gold panning booth, the Bloomers Parade, an antique engine display and an ugly dog contest.



COURTESY PHOTO

The “Time-Traveling Train” is just one of the many attractions during this year’s 60th anniversary BMD Festival that is both fun and educational, highlighting the Cottage Grove area’s historic past.

The Prospectors and Gold Diggers Club will also be celebrating its 55th “Breakfast on Bohemia Mountain” at 6 a.m. on July 21 in the Bohemia Mining District, in which the club simulates and serves a “high country” breakfast from the early mining days.

New attractions will include covered bridge tours, a Civil War encampment, a living history village kid zone, a “Bohemia Mines” documentary and an Opal Whiteley play performed by the Bohe-

mia City Players. At the day, Kalapuya Tribe El-Heritage Stage on Saturday, Esther Stutzman will

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