

Caledonian Games bring spirit of Scotland to Oregon

By Jennifer Colton

Go! Magazine

ATHENA — The spirit of the Highlands of Scotland is alive in Athena, and the annual Caledonian Games will bring that to life Saturday, July 9.

Caledonian Games President Sue Friese said the games in Athena date back to 1899, then the Umatilla County Caledonian Society Picnic and Games, and they are still going.

"I am carrying on a tradition in Athena that has roots that far back," she said. "We're a little bit smaller (than before the pandemic), but we're keeping the tradition going."

Although the event includes a full day of activities, it takes its name from its Scottish Games, a series of athletic competitions of strength and skill. The games range from a stone throw to the caber toss where participants throw a 16-foot-long log end-over-end and try

to get the highest score from the judges.

The games take place at the high school athletic field, and Friese said these events are a highlight.

"It's amazing because they have people who are professionals competing right next to people who have never thrown before, and they have a great time together. It's a wonderful atmosphere," she said.

The registration fee to participate in the athletic games is \$35; watching the event is free.

For those who feel more ready for competitions that do not involve heavy lifting, the Caledonian Games will also include time for family games such as an egg relay, a watermelon eating contest and a "Honey, I Fixed It" relay. The challenges wrap up with the "Bonniest Knees Contest" at 2:45 p.m.

"Some of the games require practice and skill. Others do not," Friese said



Janet Nayor plays the Celtic harp during the 2019 Athena Caledonian Games at Athena City Park. This year's Scottish celebration is Saturday, July 9. Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

with a laugh.

In addition to the competition, the Caledonian Games will have different activities and entertainment from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Caledonian Games begin at 9 a.m. with the Main Street Parade, followed by the Piper's Welcome at 10:25 a.m. at Hesketh Rose Garden and the first performance by Celtic band Endalos at 10:30.

Based on the Oregon coast, Endalos is a folk band whose music is drawn from traditional Scottish and Irish folk music and sea shanties. Endalos will take the stage a second time at 12:30 p.m.

In other main stage entertainment, a Highland Dance Demonstration is scheduled for 1:45 p.m., and there is a "Pipin' & Tellin'" session at 3 p.m. The car show winners will be announced at 3:30 p.m., also on the main stage.

Food and other vendors will be set up in Athena City Park throughout the event, and Saturday draws to a close with the Candle Lighting Ceremony and Piper's Farewell at 4 p.m.

The final event is the "Kirkin' of the Tartans," a church service in the city park at 10 a.m. Sunday.

Find more information and register at www.athena-caledonian.org.

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