

Arts festival shifts focus toward heritage this year
Thursday, June 30, 2011
By Mary Thomas, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



The Heritage Trail of the Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival will be expanded this year with more artist demonstrations, historical society and author booths, and the appearance of Pittsburgh Steel Man and his Steel Dog on Saturday and Sunday. The festival opens Friday and continues through July 4 at Twin Lakes Park, east of Greensburg.

The Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival opens Friday at Twin Lakes Park and continues through Monday, with a full component of arts and an additional emphasis on heritage this year.

The free, family-friendly festival, held annually over the long Fourth of July weekend, draws more than 150,000 visitors to its tree-canopied lakeside site east of Greensburg. Heritage is reflected in traditional artist market crafts, such as pottery and woodwork;

foods that include stuffed cabbage and Italian sausage sandwiches; and stage performances such as button box players and old-time fiddlers.

In its 37th year, the festival will offer even more to look at and learn about along the park's expanded Heritage Trail --from writers to the Pittsburgh Steel Man.

"We've tripled the activities," said Adam Shaffer, marketing coordinator. In addition to talking with artisans, visitors may chat with members of some regional historical societies and with several local authors on subjects ranging from the elusive Bigfoot to the Three Stooges. Panels prepared by additional groups will address other aspects of the region's past and present.

"We're looking back to the origins of the festival, showcasing some of the things that we have in the community," Mr. Shaffer said.

One highlight is Pittsburgh Steel Man, billed as "Pittsburgh's Official Super Hero," who will be dressed in his steel workers' costume inspired by Pittsburgh's industrial past and present.

The character, portrayed by a Whitehall resident who is a third-generation steel industry worker, is often seen at sporting events and has appeared nationally as his superhero persona. Following in the tradition of super heroes, he doesn't reveal his actual name.

His comic book, "Steel Man, Volume 1," illustrated by Loran Skinkis, debuted at the 2009 Pittsburgh Comicon and has become a collector's item.

The suit that Pittsburgh Steel Man wears, according to his website, is a compilation of safety equipment collected over the years in trash bins and "beneath mounds of ash and debris on steel mill floors across the world where the Steel Man has worked and traveled." The costume is "a salute to Pittsburgh's Industrial Past which will never be forgotten because there would be no Pittsburgh without [it]. The suit is also meant to remind America what it must go back to doing to be great again."

Steel Man particularly likes his costume's appeal to "old-timers [who] remember the silvers that they toiled in for countless hours, in extreme heat, tough working conditions and close to hot metal when steel was king in Pittsburgh."

Steel Man creates balloon art for children who are drawn to the super hero and to Steel Dog, a white female boxer, who will present her new book, "The Adventures of Steel Dog," at the Heritage Trail from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Also along the Heritage Trail artisans Jim Mikula will demonstrate quilting and Linda Metzger will work with beaded leather and hemp jewelry. A certified gemologist, Ms. Metzger will identify gemstones and minerals for visitors. Members of the Fort Allen Antique Farm Equipment Association will demonstrate blacksmithing and rope making. Benedictine monks from Saint Vincent Archabbey in Unity will talk about the history and milling process of their gristmill, and artisans from the archabbey will demonstrate weaving and stained glass making.

Re-enactors and other volunteers will bring to life the Battle of Bushy Run, which took place a few miles from the festival site Aug. 5-6, 1763. It was a decisive battle against Native Americans that opened Western Pennsylvania to settlement.

Westmoreland Library Network staff will talk about its initiative regarding E-books and downloadable audios and offer children's activities.

These are some of the authors, and their topics, who will sign books and discuss their research:

James Greenwood, Jumonville Glen and colonial trader George Croghan; Paul Estronza, La Violette, War of 1812 and his Blairsville farm; Marci McGuinness, George Washington to Frank Lloyd Wright; and Helene Smith, Murrysville and Export; Stan Gordon, Bigfoot, UFOs and Kecksburg; James F. Titus Jr., supernatural Pittsburgh; Jim O'Brien, dubbed by Myron Cope as "Pittsburgh's Premier Sports Book Author and Sports Historian"; nationally recognized Three Stooges film historian Rich Sanner, "My Friend Moe"; and Norvelt 75th Anniversary Committee members Michael Cary, Sandra Wolk Schimizzi and Valeria Sofranko Wolk, on what it was like living in a New Deal subsistence homestead.

Check the festival site for scheduled days.

And that's just on the Heritage Trail.

More than 230 artists and craftsmen will sell in the Artist Market, 37 booths will serve meals and snacks, 150 fine artists will be exhibited in the Westmoreland Art Nationals, special events will take place throughout the grounds, and more than 50 acts will appear on four stages.

The festival is open from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

Parking is available in private lots across from the festival at varying prices, but they fill early. The festival runs shuttle buses from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg and Saint Vincent College during festival hours, with the last bus to the

festival leaving at 7 p.m. Wheelchair-accessible vans also run from both locations. The fare is \$2 round trip; children younger than 10 ride free.

Details: www.artsandheritage.com or 724-834-7474.

- Festival schedule in today's Weekend Mag, W-15.

Mary Thomas can be reached at mthomas@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1925.
First published on June 30, 2011 at 5:14 am

Original article at: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11181/1157082-56-0.stm?cmpid=localstate.xml>



