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This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete Country Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

Rhubarb Festival Celebrates 7th Anniversary

Seven years ago, Winnie Wood and Bob Sorenson dreamed up the idea of hosting a thematic celebration that would bring people to Native Wines, the winery they started in the small town of Mt. Pleasant, and to other attractions in Sanpete County.

The chosen theme? The ubiquitous rhubarb.

OK, so the common garden plant is used in making all kinds of food products ranging from pies and bread to jams, jellies and ice cream sauce. Bob and Winnie, who make wines from native fruits and plants, also use rhubarb in some of their products. But does that warrant holding an annual celebration to honor the rhubarb plant?

Winnie and Bob thought so. They even came up with some funky events for the special day: a rhubarb pie-eating contest, unique foods made from rhubarb, wine-and-cheese tasting, an ugly truck contest, and even crowning someone "the rhubarb queen."

Thus, the Sanpete Rhubarb Festival was born. Now in its seventh year, it's a smashing success, attracting people from all over the state to Mt. Pleasant City and Sanpete County.

The local Mt. Pleasant company Peel Furniture Works, which crafts heirloom quality replicas of early Utah pioneer furniture, came on board in recent years as a sponsor, and has added its own special twist to the celebrations. In addition, for the past few years the festival has also included a soap box derby, one of the few remaining in the state, to help bring the once-popular races back to the streets of Mt. Pleasant.



This year's Sanpete Rhubarb Festival is set for May 13 from noon to 6 p.m. at Native Wines, 72 S. 500 West, and at Peel Furniture Works, 565 W. Main Street. It will include a lot of interesting things to eat and drink made from the plant, including ice cream, soda pop, salsa, syrup, pies and pickles, as well as musical performances, vendors, sidewalk sales and more.

The celebration begins with the Ugly Truck Contest and Parade at noon. Ugly trucks from all over the region enter the parade, which runs down Mt. Pleasant's Main Street. The only stipulation is that the truck must run.



The parade will also include "The Rhubarb Royalty" float. The Royalty include a "Queen of Rhubarb," a "Defender of the Rhubarb" and "The Rhubarb Maiden." The royalty also preside over events such as the pie eating and raw rhubarb eating contests.

There will be live music following the parade, including "old-time cowboy music" at Peel Furniture Works, as well as heritage craft demonstrations, food, contests and more until 5 p.m.

Native Wines will also be releasing the rhubarb wine made in 2004 and will be open for wine and cheese tasting from noon to 9 p.m. At 3 p.m., judging for the "best rhubarb pie in the world" begins and at 4 p.m. a raw rhubarb eating contest. An awards ceremony for all the day's contests will be held at 5 p.m.

The soap box derby will begin after the noon parade, hosted by local resident John McClellan and Mt. Pleasant City. Soap Box Derby races used to be a popular event in Sanpete County, with a lot of local residents taking part as children. Nationally, races have grown in sophistication over the years, but Sanpete County's races remain true to the original "anything goes" soap box derby philosophy. Cars can be made of any material, including plastic, wood, metal. They should be about six to seven feet long and about three feet wide. Drivers should range in age from about eight to 16 years. For additional information on the derby, contact McClellan at (435) 462-3808 or Mt. Pleasant City at (435) 462-2456.

For more information on the festival, call Native Wines at (435) 462-9261 or Dale Peel at (435) 462-2887.

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