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

Rhubarb Festival Celebrates Region, Creativity

Sanpete County is already well known for its beautiful scenery, wonderful pioneer heritage and historical cities and towns. Now it's also becoming known as a place with some pretty creative uses for rhubarb, thanks to the annual Sanpitch Rhubarb Festival.

The creative festival, started eight years ago by Winnie Wood and Bob Sorenson, pays homage to the rhubarb and its many uses. Wood and Sorenson, who make wines from fruits and plants from their Mt. Pleasant-based company, Native Wines, uses rhubarb in some of their products and they thought having a festival in honor of the common garden plant would be fun and a way to build community relations and attract people into the area.

The event was a hit, and now is an annual thematic attraction featuring pie-eating contests, wine-and-cheese tasting, a goat dress up and turkey trot, an ugly truck contest, soap box derby and even crowning someone "Queen of the Rhubarb." Not to mention all of the foods made from rhubarb. Wood says that the ideas that people having been coming up with have grown over the years. Now there is rhubarb ice cream, soda pop, syrup, and even salsa!

This year's event will be Saturday, May 19th from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Festivities are held at Native Wines, 72 S. 500 West and at Peel Furniture Works, 565 W. Main Street, in Mt. Pleasant. 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 parade will also include "The Rhubarb Royalty" float. The royalty preside over festival events such as the pie eating and raw rhubarb eating contests.

Native Wines will be open for wine and cheese tasting from noon to 6 p.m. At 3 p.m., judging for the "World's Best Rhubarb Pie" begins and at 4 p.m. the Rhubarbarian Raw Rhubarb Eating Contest. An awards ceremony for all the day's contests will be held at 5 p.m. in front of Native Wines.

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 celebration. The Peel Furniture Works Rhubarb Extravaganza will include heritage craft demonstrations, contests, and live musical performances from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The furniture company will also be the host for the pie-eating contest and "turkey trot" and "goat dress up" contests during the Rhubarb Festival, as well as the barbeque turkey sandwich luncheon.

In addition to running Native Wines and creating the festival and other unique events, Wood also runs the drama department at Mt. Pleasant's Wasatch Academy, teaching students the craft and directing productions. It is a natural fit for Wood, who is a performance artist and award-winning actor, producer, choreographer and director. She has been active in Utah's theater community for years, founding the Dance Theater Coalition 27 years ago, which continues to produce emerging, independent artists.

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

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