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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.

Sanpete County to ‘Velcomme’ Thousands for Scandinavian Festival

Velcomme! That is what Ephraim City and all of Sanpete County will be saying the weekend of May 24 to 26 when thousands of people gather in the region for the annual Scandinavian Heritage Festival and Conference.

Among the largest Scandinavian heritage events in the Western United States, the arts and cultural festival includes an educational conference, an authentic Little Scandinavian Supper, costumed performers telling Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales, craft booths, historical tours, workshops, sporting events, and more. Entertainment scheduled for this year’s event ranges from folk dancing to classic rock.

Many local residents dress in Scandinavian costume for the duration of the festivities, which have been known to attract upwards of 10,000 to Sanpete County. New to the festival this year is a series of ceramics workshops hosted by the Central Utah Arts Center Thursday-Saturday. The workshops will feature alternative firing methods for ceramics and will allow participants to take home a unique creation from the event.

Sanpete County’s culture has been greatly influenced by settlers who arrived first in the Salt Lake Valley from the Scandinavian countries, says Gary Anderson, Utah State University extension and vice chairman of the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area. Many were farmers, carpenters, stone masons, cabinetmakers and furniture builders, and then were assigned to colonize central Utah. “The architecture of their farm buildings, cabins and houses were influenced by construction techniques and building forms from back home, uniqueness that is still present today,” he says.

It is believed that some 650,000 Utahans trace their ancestry to Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. The festival begins Thursday night with the Scandinavian Heritage conference held at Snow College. The free educational event, which continues Friday morning, gives participants an opportunity to learn about and reflect on the lives of pioneer founders of the Sanpete Valley.

Following the conference, the weekend is jammed packed with activities and events at the festival grounds location at Pioneer Park, 50 N. 100 W., and on the north side of the Snow College campus.

Highlights Friday include workshops on ‘fast fire’ pottery, storytelling and a bread baking contest; the 12 p.m. opening of the “Old World Craft Booths,” educational exhibits of crafts that date back to Ephraim’s Scandinavian ancestors; musical performances starting at 3 p.m., a two-day quilt show, and the gourmet smorgasbord Scandinavian dinner Friday at 6 p.m.

On Saturday there will be a fun run starting at 7 a.m., a 10 a.m. parade down Main Street at noon, and more demonstrations of Old World crafts including Blacksmithing, woodcarving, pottery making. There will be music and activities all day, a golf tournament, roast beef dinner and more. In addition, there will be tours of Ephraim’s exquisitely restored pioneer homes and cabins starting from about noon to 4 p.m. Saturday at Pioneer Park. There will also be a historical bus tour of historical spots in Sanpete Valley that run hourly from 1 to 4 p.m.

A complete schedule of events for the festival, including information on the conference, is available online at <http://scandinavianheritagefestival.com> People may also call 435-835-4241 or 435-283-4631 for information.

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