

# Knights, princesses and a great value

Ah, dinner theater. The cheap food; the cheesy entertainment; the melodramatic, overdone story played out by a cast that doesn't always look the part. But, oh, what fun, especially for the child (or the child at heart) who finds fantasies of the imagination displayed in living color.

Of course, such entertainment is only offered in larger cities like Los Angeles and Orlando, and I've been to dinner theaters in both of those cities. Pirates Dinner Adventure, Arabian Nights, and then there's the best known of them all, Medieval Times. Despite the fact that it hardly seems worth its high price tag, something has always drawn me back to, at the very least, the idea and magic of a romantic time period long lost, filled with princesses and knights. And what would Medieval Times be without jousting? Thus, this weekend's Sonora Celtic Faire at the

Mother Lode Fairgrounds easily attracts me. And with tickets priced from \$10 to \$25, depending on which day you attend, you're getting a lot more for your money than Medieval Times offers, and likely the promise of much better food as well.

I admit, \$20 seemed like a lot to me at first. But if you talk to founder Patrick Karnahan, or if you've been to the fair before, you quickly realize just how much you get for your money. Karnahan pointed to the cost of a family dinner at a restaurant or the price of a 3-D movie and said attendees get much more for about the same price when they arrive at the Celtic Faire. There are free events out there, but those don't offer the same quality of entertainment. The Sonora Celtic Faire is no free flea market event, Karnahan said.

The fair offers 14 bands performing on five stages, 80 vendors with Celtic items that normally could only be found in import stores or overseas, whisky tasting, competitions for adults, Scottish Highland games, various cultural dances, historic re-enactments, storytellers, a fire-breathing dragon, three Scottish pipe bands, two stages with non-musical performers like magicians and fire-eaters, jugglers, demonstrations with Irish wolfhounds and other Scottish and Irish dogs on special courses, booths for people to learn about their European heritage and, of course, jousting.

The National Geographic Channel filmed a jousting show at the Celtic Faire last year that aired on its "Knights of Mayhem" TV show. This year, the Imperial Knights Production Co. comes to the fair straight from History Channel's "Full Metal Joust."

An extra performance stage has

also been added, and Karnahan said the fair takes up as much of the fairgrounds as it possibly can. He doesn't expect the fair to grow in the future, at least not in size, because he wants to keep the fair familiar to the foothills where he grew up.

"I like the fact that we are here," Karnahan said. "During the Gold Rush was when a lot of these people came from Ireland and Scotland. I like the fact that we have (the fair) here. It ties us back."

But Karnahan promised to continue to bring in the best that's out there and to showcase it for the local community.

"I think the big thing is how fun it is to be free of all your cares for a weekend," he said. "So many of the public come in costume and get into it big time. And to think that one of

these bands, Golden Bough, just performed at Bret Harte High School a few weeks ago and they charged \$25, and that's just one band. We are a great deal. And we don't just keep it to one time period. We've got 3,000 years of Celtic history."

Karnahan founded the fair in 1987 after a stay in Ireland. What started as a way to showcase his oil paintings of Ireland became a way to share the joy and history of Celtic culture. Beginning with one building and now continuing with the full fairgrounds, Karnahan and his team have come a long way. And he said he feels good about the growth and the fair's future potential.

"The whole idea is to come there and just be overwhelmed

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with so many things to do and see," Karnahan said.

I'll be there; I'll bet you'd like to go, too.

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at [hwheeler@sierralodestar.com](mailto:hwheeler@sierralodestar.com) and [mtaylor@sierralodestar.com](mailto:mtaylor@sierralodestar.com).

## Celtic Family Day

**WHEN:** 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday; Kick-off Party at 7 p.m.

**WHERE:** Mother Lode Fairgrounds, 220 Southgate Drive (off Highway 49), Sonora

**TICKETS:** \$10 for adults and \$5 for children at the gate; \$15 for the kick-off at the door



Courtesy photos

All kinds of characters turn up at the Celtic Faire.

## Sonora Celtic Faire

**WHEN:** 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday

**WHERE:** Mother Lode Fairgrounds, 220 Southgate Drive (off Highway 49), Sonora

**TICKETS:** \$20 on Saturday (\$50 all weekend passes) and \$18 for Sunday at [sonoracelticfaire.com](http://sonoracelticfaire.com) in advance, \$25 and \$20 at the gate; \$10 ages 6 to 12 and 5 and under free



Ladies in all their finery are seen roaming the Mother Lode Fairgrounds during the Sonora Celtic Faire.

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