



### Highland dancers

Two contestants get ready to perform in the Highland Dancing Competition at the Scots Irish Festival in Dandridge. (Staff Photo - Steve Marion)

# Scots-Irish Festival becoming a big hit

## Event held each September on streets of Dandridge

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Indeed, tis a proud and lasting legacy our Scots-Irish forebearers passed along, and what better way to commemorate such a grand legacy than with a grand festival.

Over the past four years, Main Street Dandridge has presented an extraordinary event called the Scots-Irish Festival, which has grown exponentially with each passing year. Its Gaelic music, customs and traditional cultural arts have made this festival such a wonderful attraction that visitors from as far away as Ohio, Virginia and South Carolina journey here to take part. One special guest, Karl Walker of BBC Belfast, traveled all the way from Ulster (Northern Ireland) to attend last year's Scots-Irish Festival. It appears that such distant Scots-Irish cousins are as interested in what ever became of the kinsmen who left their verdant shores so long ago, as their descendants here in the green hills of East Tennessee are today. BBC Belfast actually did a radio program featuring the Festival.

Main Street Dandridge was founded in 2005, and its first Scots-Irish Festival in 2007 was a trial balloon. When it was obvious that it had been a smashing success, the street festival honoring the region's historic legacy would become an annual event. Sponsors and patrons have so far ensured that the Scots-Irish Music Festival remains a free event for the community. In January, Dandridge Main Street also held a fundraising dinner celebrating the life and works of Robert Burns, the official poet of Scotland. Proceeds from that dinner will be added to the patrons and sponsors fund.

On a Saturday late in September, Main Street in Dandridge may be closed to traffic, yet it teems with life during the festival. Vendors from near and far come to peddle their Celtic wares, such as handcrafted musical instruments, surname histories and authentic Coats of Arms, Scottish photos and portraits, traditional Scottish and Irish antiques, handmade Celtic jewelry and medieval armory and weapons.

Visitors can stop by and enjoy a range of the victuals available at the festival, including Scottish meat pies and pastries, haggis, and pork-chop-on-a-stick, plus a whole lot more. Scottish Clan Societies and Heritage Organizations operate booths on Main Street where festival-goers can check to find out if their own clans are registered.

Last year's barnyard exhibit included a small herd of Highland Coos (Scotland's own breed of shaggy cows), as well as a few Blackface Sheep whose ancestors roamed



### Not baaad

This Scottish Blackface ram "Boomer" was part of an animal display at Saturday's Scots-Irish Festival in Dandridge. Lakin Farms of Strawberry Plains also had Highland Cattle at the event. (Staff Photo - Steve Marion)

the highland moors. Visitors may also get to see a Border Collie in action, performing his appointed task of herding sheep.

The dog show is tons of fun, with the competition being 'Not for Prime Time Dogs.' People can bring their special pooches and enter them in one or both categories: A) Tricks & Stunts: dogs that lay down, roll over, or spin around on command; and B) Athletics: Does the dog fetch, play ball, catch a Frisbee? Well, just enter him and see what happens. It doesn't cost a thing to take part in the fun.

Last year Robert and Kate Fandetti of White Pine brought their colossal canine, an Irish Wolfhound named Farrell, to visit with the festival crowds. Farrell is in the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest dog in the world.

But what people especially come out for is to clap, jig and sing-along with a hearty session of ancestral music. Traditional Appalachian music, for the most part, has its roots in Anglo-Celtic folk ballads and instrumental dance tunes typically played on fiddles. Pure and poignant Gaelic ballads were almost always sung unaccompanied by women whose roles were as keepers of the family's cultural heritage through storied songs. Appalachian folk music is a distinctive genre of folk music believed to have developed from traditional Scottish, English and Irish music brought to this country by immigrants from those countries, as well as from Northern Ireland's Ulster-Scots whose homesteaders left lasting impressions on the East Tennessee landscape. America's modern-day country music is heavily influenced by the harmonies and jig-type tempos derived from Scots-Irish music that settlers brought with them to America. Likewise, Bluegrass music

is imitative of Scots-Irish laments. The plaintive strains of this type of Bluegrass can still be heard emanating from the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee.

Along with drums, pipes and fiddles, dancing became very common in the region. Early settlers did Irish jigs, flat-foot buck dancing and reels. Square dancing is a merged style of Scots-Irish dance. It has a nimbleness not found in other dances originating in Europe. All of these dances rely on spirited musical accompaniment, primarily fiddle playing, as well as the energetic Appalachian style that has its foundation in lively Irish and Scottish folk dances. The fiddle and dance often served as social events that brought communities together, much like the Dandridge festival.

The upcoming Fifth Annual Scots-Irish Festival – on September 24, 2011 – will present an excellent lineup of musical talent and various Celtic/Gaelic styles ranging from the touching ballads sung by Scotland-born Colin Grant-Adams, to the Thistledown Tinkers, a Celtic guitar and fiddle duo presenting traditional Scottish and Irish music. Also featured will be Cutthroat Shamrock, who play and sing an unforgettable acoustic Celtic rock style; the Martin Family Band from Pennsylvania that plays traditional Celtic music and performs Irish step dancing; the Knoxville Pipe & Drum Corps, a bagpipe and drum marching band wearing Mackenzie tartans and kilts, and Jefferson County's own Kelly Shipe, who plays bagpipes, as well as the Celtic harp. She becomes the lone piper on the dike whose somber melody concludes the day's festivities.

This year the Festival's lineup will include a new group. Coyote Run is a band with Celtic folk roots that has evolved into one of the hottest bands on the Celtic Rock circuit today. With their bagpipes, guitars, accordion, whistles, didgeridoo, electric bass, and drums, the band blends traditional tunes with rich lyrics and produces compelling songs so memorable and stories so rich that they can advertise themselves as 'The Thinking Person's Celtic Rock Band.'

As always, the bagpipes' melancholy strain born of the wind across the seas stirs the souls of descendants and causes them to remember. Anytime is a good time to remember those courageous, resilient men and women who tamed a wilderness and created an enduring legacy of faith, education, music and volunteer spirit. Join with friends and neighbors this fall as they come together to celebrate this rich heritage our ancestors left to us.

The Dandridge Community Trust, Corporation manages Dandridge's Main Street Program. The DCT was founded in 2005 as an IRS Section 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that certified the Town of Dandridge, and its National Register Historic District, as a Main Street Community.