

Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games marks 80 years of celebrations

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

The Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games is pulling out all the stops for this year's 80th anniversary Aug. 8-10.

Elisabeth Bender, the festival's executive director, took time to talk to the Citizen about this year's 80th year celebrations.

"We're very excited about the 80th anniversary, especially since the 75th was virtual and online only," she said. "We are really making up for that this year."

She spoke to the longevity of the loyalty of the many participants that make up the Scottish fibre of the festival.

"The athletes coming year after year, the bands, the clans, the vendors, volunteers - everything that has brought us to this point."

This is Bender's 10th year with the festival and some volunteers have been on deck for as long as 50 years.

"I call it the festival bug," she joked, with the note that everything is on the website.

Back to the festival, coming in from Scotland this year is Toronto-born Charles Vandervaat who plays the role of William Ransom in the Outlanders television series. There are scheduled several opportunities to see and meet him over the three days, some ticketed and others by chance.

Charming, in any event no doubt.

Friday night opens the festival with the traditional Tattoo, the amassing of the bands "with" great lighting and a brass band highlights," Bender promised.

A huge draw this year and as a part of the \$90 weekend ticket price is Saturday night concert featuring Albannach, Bay City Rollers, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, an impressive line up.

The festival runs late for this concert and some of the food vendors will hang in for most of it.

This just in: the Canadian Heavy Events Championship hosting has been passed to the Fergus Scottish Festival this year, according to the information Bender has not long-since received.

"Every area of our festival will have a special event going on," she said.

The Highland Games tradition is to hold competitions on many aspects of the culture, highland dance competition, the pipes and drums bands competitions, plus others and the heavy events competition, including the Toss the Caber, which has to be seen to be appreciated.

The classic elements here in Fergus and unique to the Fergus Scottish Festival is the memorial Flaming Caber which is a special moment to cherish.

Bender explained, "There is a moment of silence to honour specific individuals who died during the year and, more than that, for people who have lost someone through the year. The huge crowd just goes quiet "it's pretty special."

Along with the souvenirs of which there is "lots of 80th merchandise, programs with history" and more, there are also many

independent vendors selling their wares and their goodies to eat, traditional dishes and try the haggis!

Many more than one would think have also been coming to Fergus for many years. They travel to any number of such events during the season, most of which are smaller but still imbued and enthusiastic with the Scottish culture, putting up their tents and set-up; talking and talking to the very many people who come and admit that part of their attending is to shop here. At the end, vendors pack up their gear and a like a circus circuit go on to the next.

Yet, the merchants provide excellent benefits to those highland games with the fees they pay to attend, the confirmation of tradition they bring with them and the fun they add to the whole.

The entrance ticket prices at Fergus are unchanged for the last three years and there are reduced prices for youth and seniors.

Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games will be at the Centre Wellington Community Sportsplex.

?I truly love this festival. I get to see all the things that happen and watch the volunteers all the hours they spend,? Bender said.

The average attendance is 24,000 people but, with the extras for the 80th, they are expecting to see more people on site to celebrate.

She said, ?When the drums are going, every sense is satisfied; everything is all here in one event, put on by such a dedicated group.?

Why come? It is just truly unique, the music ? rock and roll with the Celtic theme.

You have to come, according to Bender, because you will not leave disappointed. Every box will be ticked.