

TRU *Life*



Kirkville Dharma

Professor starts Buddhist interest group on campus.

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The Art of Ceilidh

“ So essentially [Irish dancing is] new. It’s really only 150 years old, but the tradition goes way, way, way, back. ”

-Christine Harker

Associate Professor of English

Kirkville takes a dose of Irish culture, music

Erin Sadzewicz
Features Editor

It’s hard to say Kirkville lacks in culture after last weekend’s performance.

The Thousand Hills Highland Games and Festival introduced not only challenges of physical strength and endurance but traditional Irish dancing as well. Christine Harker, associate professor of English, performed Irish music with a band while students from her ceilidh dance class and members of the Ceilidh Club performed.

Senior Amanda Barr is part of the ceilidh class. “It’s kind of a lot of exercise, but it’s really, really fun,” she said.

Barr said her family is descended from the Irish, and she considers ceilidh dancing a way to hang on to tradition and culture.

“It’s part of my heritage,” Barr said. Junior Greg Wisa said that when he started Irish dancing his freshman year, he had no prior experience. He said people might be turned off to Irish dancing because they might think it seems too difficult and intricate.

“It looks really complicated, but it is really easy to do,” Wisa said.

Wisa said he is one of the presidents of the Ceilidh Club, pronounced kay-lee, and 10 to 12 of the members get together to practice once a week.

“We choreograph dances for the TSODA dance recitals, and we also do performances like [the Highland Games],” Wisa said. “And we perform

at Il Spazio whenever Dr. Harker’s band is performing.”

The Ceilidh Club is open to new members whether they are beginning or advanced.

“We just try to have fun with it really,” he said. “We’re not a formal dance troupe or anything.”

Wisa said they learn a number of Irish dances in the Ceilidh Club. They begin with the basic ceilidh dance step, which is usually performed in soft shoe. He said a soft shoe refers to the type of shoe worn and the soft sound the foot makes when coming in contact with the ground.

“We also do set dances, which are usually done in battering shoe, and we learn a little bit more complicated footwork,” Wisa said.

He said battering shoes are when the foot is moved very quickly to make a battering sound on the ground and a hard shoe is worn.

More recently, the Ceilidh Club is attempting to learn Irish tap. However, Wisa said it is proving to be a bit more difficult than their usual dances.

“We’re going to take a stab at it and see how it goes,” he said.

Wisa said that for performances they dress up as much as possible and usually wear black, white and green or period shirts.

Wisa said costumes were not worn by the Irish because when England occupied Ireland, Irish dancing was outlawed. He said they would have attempted to be as discreet as possible.

Some theorize that Irish dancers keep their arms so close to their sides because they would dance in kitchens or in other small spaces where they would not be caught. They would have to keep their arms at their sides to be able to move around. He said this is also why Irish dancing uses small, tight steps.

Before England’s presence in Ireland, Wisa said Irish dancing was probably very different. It was performed in public as a social dance.

Although it’s quite different, Wisa said Irish dancing is not very popular in the Midwest.

“The only reason it’s here in Kirkville is because of Dr. Harker,” he said.

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Chris Waller/Index (Above) Christine Harker, associate professor of English, teaches the ceilidh dancing class Tuesdays and Thursdays through the exercise science program for one credit hour.

Nick Corich/Index (Left) Harker also plays in a band that performs fundamentally Irish and Scottish music, she said. They performed Saturday at the Thousand Hills Highland Games Festival.

Arts festival paints downtown

Sara DeGonia

Assistant Features Editor

A starving artist in Kirkville has few opportunities to make a buck.

Sophomore Bethany Aurand said she decided to exhibit a booth at the 31st annual Red Barn Arts and Crafts Festival after visiting the Kirkville Arts Association’s table at the Student Activities Fair.

“I thought it would be a good way to get my art out there and make some money because I’m broke,” she said. “I’m a broke art major.”

The festival is 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday at the Kirkville Downtown Square.

Red Barn chairwoman Jessie Cragg said about 100 booths will display various fine arts, country crafts and student art. Each artist, craftsman or student will exhibit his or her pieces both for judging and for customers to purchase.

“We have everything from woodworking, handmade soap,

beautiful handmade jewelry ... ” she said. “The fine arts includes painting, photography, pottery, ... anything you might find in an art gallery.”

Cragg said student involvement in the Festival is important to the Kirkville Arts Association, and it made a concerted effort to attract student artist participants.

This year the student artists comprise their own division in the judging process, she said. Their entry fee is waived, and they are eligible to win one of two \$100 awards specifically for students, Cragg said. Students might be able to sign up to display their artwork for judging and sale as late as Friday, she said.

Aurand will display her artwork for judging and purchase at booth No. 52. She sells various items including pillows, jewelry and watercolors.

“I don’t know what else I’m going to do,” Aurand said. “I’ve just kind of been throwing things together.”

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Visitors from various cities and states explore the arts and crafts for sale at the Red Barn Arts and Crafts Festival last year. Photo submitted by Kirkville Arts Association