

Turning Back the Clock

Lyle Homesteading Fair offers pioneering skills, entertaining displays and live music

By Jeanie Senior

Anyone interested in achieving a higher degree of self-sufficiency had a chance to hone their skills in a variety of fields at the second annual Northwest Homesteading Fair September 21 in Lyle.

Fern Johnson, along with her friend Amanda Richards, organized the event.

"I would see these great classes on skills I wanted, but the classes were often expensive and usually too far away," Fern says. "Amanda and I wanted to bring the classes to the Gorge and keep costs low so that everyone could learn basic self-sufficiency skills.

"We offer a full day of workshops at the fair and, so far, we have been able to keep all the classes completely free. This year, we even had a full-day sock knitting workshop from a wonderful instructor, Janelle Serio, who came in from Vancouver, Washington. That kind of class would cost a lot of money anywhere but here."

Also offered were workshops that focused on making sausage and cheese, growing garlic, solar power, cart goats, composting and emergency preparedness.

It was a typical September day, with threatening clouds and blustery winds that never quite gained the upper hand on blue sky and clouds.

Most of the workshops were in the Lyle Activity Center, with a gaggle of displays and live music outside on the green grass east of the building.

There, kids could build fairy gardens, ride in a goat cart pulled by a billy goat, visit the fire truck or try their hand at several pioneer activities, from rolling out dough to grinding corn into cornmeal, panning for gold, and learning to operate a hand-cranked clothes wringer.



Youngsters try their hand at tackling laundry with a hand-cranked clothes wringer and grinding corn into cornmeal at the second annual Lyle Homesteading Fair.

A team of Belgian draft horses circled the field or stood patiently while fairgoers checked out the horse-pulled farm equipment, and pens held a small flock of goats, alpacas and chickens. Vendors sold books, cider-making gear, honey and beeswax, tea towels, alpaca yarn, organic potatoes, peaches and plants unpalatable to deer.

"Our goal is to make the fair an annual event, recurring each year on the third Saturday of September," Fern says. "So far Amanda and I have put it on by

ourselves, but we are ready for some help. We are looking for community sponsors to help finance the fair, as well as volunteers who are interested in helping organize the fair. We are especially looking for people to help with booking entertainment and improving our marketing for next year, as well as recruiting new workshop leaders." ■

For more information, contact Fern Johnson through the fair's Facebook page or through its website, www.nwhomesteadingfair.wordpress.com.



Clockwise from top, the Strawberry Mountain Band entertains during the fair; children gather to make fairy gardens with stones, moss and smooth glass; Gretchen L'Hommedieu and Jenny Kirk look through a bag of alpaca wool; Suzanne Krieg of The Briar Rose sells wares grown on her farm in High Prairie.