

The Valdosta Daily Times

Folk Fair Dances On

By Matt Flumerfelt

March 08, 2009

— VALDOSTA — The 2009 Azalea International Folk Fair continued Saturday with the annual International Folk Dance Competition. The Sicilian Tarentella and Philippine Dance of the Flowers were two of the dances performed. Dancers in colorful costumes kicked up their heels to music from the cultures they represent. The traditional African wedding was showcased as well.

The Azalea International Folk Fair opened Thursday, March 5, and was attended by students from various parts of Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. Students and festival directors took part in a workshop at Lowndes High School Saturday, Feb. 28, to get ready for the event. The workshop featured an East Asian Demo and visual displays from countries across the world. The event gave folk fair participants, board members and area programs directors the opportunity to rehearse for the annual fair, discuss new features and take pictures.

"The folk fair is the ultimate social studies experience for the community as well as the state," said Italian representative Rosetta Coyne, who attended the workshop along with Gabriele Costa, a Valdosta State University exchange student from Ancona, Italy.

The annual folk fair and dance evolved from the vision of Director Serena Huang, who began a celebration of the Chinese New Year in Valdosta in 2000. The event grew into a celebration of Asian culture hosted by the Valdosta Asian Cultural Association, and has developed into an all-inclusive showcase of the world's cultures. Last year, State Rep. Amy Carter deemed the event Georgia's official international festival.

This year, the fair introduced a cultural geography project entitled "Are You Smarter Than A 7th Grader?" to prepare students for the annual CRCT exam. The project, coordinated by Michael Noll, allowed audience members and local community members to engage in an educational game that models the popular game show "Are You Smarter Than A 5th Grader?" Contestants were asked questions about international geography. State representative Amy Carter said the project was very technologically advanced and the questions were tough. "It was fun," Carter said afterward, adding that she was

relieved the contest ended in a draw and that "none of us had to say we're not as smart as a seventh grader."

International dishes prepared by the diverse folk fair board members were available and featured traditional Korean, Filipino, Cuban, Chinese, Mexican, and Italian entrees and desserts. There were multi-cultural exhibits for a host of nations from Asia and Latin America to Europe and Africa.

Martha Napier and Jeni Morris occupied a booth with information about the Discovery Center of Valdosta. Morris, who teaches at the Center, said they "offer various afterschool programs that are fun for all ages." Among the subjects and activities offered are quilting, Spanish, modeling, photography, karate, and science, Morris said. Napier is originally from Colombia and taught Spanish at Open Bible elementary school for five years. She said her educational experience and her decision to home-school her son led to the idea of opening the Center to promote art and other enrichment classes. "I'm a chiquita banana and a coffee bean all in one," she joked. Her experience in education led her to open the Center, which caters mostly to home-schoolers in the morning, but is open to anyone in the afternoon, including adults, Napier said.

Krystal from Krystalynformations was on hand doing free henna tattoos and promoting the Earth Day Celebration 2009 coming up on April 25 in Drexel Park.

John Barbas who teaches chemistry at Valdosta State University was there representing Greece. "A lot of students came the last few days," Barbas said. "They have a lot of questions. They want to know what their names are in Greek. People have a lot of misconceptions about other countries. They think, for example, that people who live outside the United States live in huts." Barbas said he thinks the folk fair is a valuable way to expose young kids from an early age to the history and customs of other countries, even more important in this age of globalization when so many cultural exchanges take place.

Debra Davis and Stacey Wright from VSU participated in the African exhibit, answering questions about the African artifacts on display from the Eichenberger collection, part of the VSU Archives. Davis demonstrated how to play an African fiddle, which was made from tanned animal hide, wood and string, and looked more like a drum than a stringed instrument. Davis has been with the folk fair for the last 10 years. "It's an amazing program and has grown from the little project room in VSU's Odum Library to an important regional event for international culture," Davis said.

For more information, e-mail Serena Huang at serenahuang@gainternationalfolkfair.org.



Valdosta Middle School drama students perform a hula dance at the James H. Rainwater Convention Center.



A group of children representing the Philippines perform the Dance of the Flowers on stage Saturday at the James H. Rainwater Convention Center.



Cynthia Williams, left, teaches children a move in a Korean fan dance Saturday at the James H. Rainwater Convention Center.



Chi-Valry Wu performs some tricks with a Chinese yo-yo as others from his group perform in the background Saturday at the James H. Rainwater Convention Center.



Samuel Ward, left, and Joshua Napier attempt to figure out Chinese puzzles on display and for sale Saturday at the James H. Rainwater Convention Center.

