

The Folk Life Festival takes place at the Katy ISD Outdoor Learning Center and includes activities for all ages



A Piece of Pioneer History

Katy's Folk Life Festival Celebrates Texas in the 1800's



Enjoy the sweet sounds of the dulcimer and other instruments the pioneers played



The festival features a variety of hands-on activities for kids

Written by Krista Kessler

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With horses and goats walking around, blacksmiths working in their shops, and children making corn husk dolls, Katy ISD's Folk Life Festival has brought Texas' pioneer history to life for the past 25 years. Katy ISD's Outdoor Learning Center will once again transform itself into scenes of Texas in the 1800's on April 10 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a slew of pioneer activities planned. Kids can observe honeybee keeping, blacksmith demonstrations, horseshoeing, and a soldier reenactment, where they yell out, "Fire in the hole," as gunshots resound.

Everyone from kids and adults to volunteers is invited to join in the festivities. Judy Blanchard says, "I have 200 pigeons, which I use military materials to train. The kids can pet them and even release them if the weather is good." Smoke, animals, the smell of food cooking, music, and costumed people will fill the atmosphere, bringing back memories for some and creating new ones for others.

Festival Origins

The Outdoor Learning Center stands as 35 acres of land kept in its natural state for the sake of teaching young students lessons in science and social studies, usually during school field trips. In 1985, Kenneth D. Welch decided to extend the lessons to do something special for the Texas Centennial, by creating an entire day reserved for pioneer experiences brought to the modern world, a moment in time captured in one place. Ray Wolman now runs the center and the festival, which has a low entrance fee of \$1 per person. In the beginning, Wolman and Welch threw everything together themselves, a somewhat overwhelming feat. Over time, the festival

has turned into a fascinating learning experience, where people offer constructive criticism and help it to grow and improve each year.

Gearing up for Fun

Preparations for the festival start way back in August, when Wolman and a few others go out to the corn field and spend a day single-handedly picking two truckloads. "It is the only time you can get the corn," he says. From here, he goes down a to-do list for each month to efficiently gather up the necessities in a timely manner. More hands-on and with more volunteers than ever before, the festival has become well known as news of the event spreads over the internet to thousands of people at the click of a button. "Now, people will even contact me first to remind me about something," says Wolman. "It's that much of a team effort."

As far as new ideas, the festival expands every year. Sometimes a new group appears or a talented individual with an interesting craft wants to join in. Christine Sanchez, who teaches clay molding and calligraphy, says, "I volunteered three years ago and was so impressed that I insisted on being a part of it for years to come. The people know what they're talking about, so you really learn." At times, a Native American group will show children native dances or a band of dulcimer players will teach others how to play. The most recent addition to the festival is homemade ice cream.

Volunteers consist of several of teachers, specifically art and history, and groups that volunteered over the years to help, such as the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the Texas Wildlife



Discover the old-fashioned art of quilting with a hands-on activity



Kids can learn how to make corn meal on the festival's antique grinder



Blacksmiths show how tools were made and designed in the pioneer days



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The festival's dedicated volunteers help showcase Katy life in the 1800's



Kids of all ages practice their hand at calligraphy



The festival features a reenactment of Texas soldiers firing their muskets



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Rehabilitation Coalition, the Texas Master Naturalists Coastal Prairie Chapter, the Gourd Society, and Cane Island. High school students in the National Honor Society also help out for community service hours. Many people have participated for decades, like Bill Brookshire and his wife, Carol, whose ancestors founded the city of Brookshire. "I find it extremely rewarding learning about folk life and working with the children," says Carol, who demonstrates how pioneers washed their clothes during the festival.

Experiencing the Early Days

All age groups can enjoy this event, with plenty of excitement for all ages. The festival especially reaches out to kids, though, since they first start to comprehend the historical significance of Katy in elementary school. "These are urban and suburban kids who've never seen this stuff before, so they are in awe," Wolman explains. The festivities highlight all aspects of pioneer life, and with enough activities to fill an entire day, families can split up and meet later. "Some kids don't understand that this is a one-day event," Wolman says. "They say, 'Mommy, can we come back tomorrow?'" KM

KRISTA KESSELER has never been to the Folk Festival, but will be taking her little brother this year, for sure.



Folk Life Festival Fast Facts

When

Saturday, April 10 from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Where

The Outdoor Learning Center, located west of the Katy ISD Administrative Building at 6301 S. Stadium Lane

Admission

\$1 per person

Hands-on Activities

Includes roping, tin punching, weaving and quilting, dulcimer lessons, gourd painting, clay pottery, making corn husk dolls and rag dolls, calligraphy, and corn husking, shelling, and grinding

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Horses played a major role in early Texas pioneer life



Kids can learn how to start a fire using a piece of flint and steel



Kids can fashion their own corn husk doll at the festival

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