

Children's Festival

By Patricia L. Blair

Each July, the Storytelling Guild of Medford presents the Children's Festival in Jacksonville. This all-volunteer program, begun in 1967, is designed to present a positive message to children and parents and to promote reading as important to a child's development. The festival is held at Jackson County Britt Park (previously known as the Peter Britt Gardens) in Jacksonville. Attendance averages between 8,000 and 10,000 people.

More than 2,000 volunteers work at the three-day festival, telling stories, sharing picture books, and performing music, theatre, and dance in the Britt Pavilion. Magic and puppetry are performed in smaller venues around the grounds. Arts and crafts booths blanket the eleven-acre Britt Park, and children can choose from throwing clay pots, creating and pulling a silk screen image, painting a mural, making a candle, creating a sandcasting, making something out of leather, and building with hammer and nails. Children are encouraged to perform during the festival on the pavilion stage.

All performers and craftpersons volunteer their talents, and many are professionals. Local organizations and businesses contribute time, resources, and money to make the festival a success.

Nationally known artists Jim Robinson and Judy Morris, as well as local artists, have demonstrated their art at the festival; and in 1976, for the national bicentennial, Oregon Shakespeare actor Rex Raybold portrayed photographer Peter Britt. The Oregon Shakespeare Dancers and Tears of Joy Theater puppets have performed, and local journalists and county commissioners have told stories to children under the giant Sequoia tree.

The Storytelling Guild was formed in the mid-1960s by a small group of women who regularly read picture books for children at the Medford Public Library. There were no public kindergarten programs in the Jackson County schools, and they wanted to help area children prepare for first grade. The founding group—E. Susan Bates, Gail Caperna, Lois Cousineau, Jeannette Paulson, and Jody Pfeifer—together with the children's librarian, Myra Getchell, held its first Children's Festival in 1967.

The Storytelling Guild maintains the focus and commitment envisioned by its founders and continuously evaluates community needs. The Guild provides many programs: Pre-School Storyhours at the Medford Library; Bookwalk, a fashion show for books, designed to pique the interest of third-grade children in Medford; Pass The Book, a program that distributes new and used children's books to twenty-one agencies in Jackson County; a scholarship to students studying early childhood development; and Dial-A-Story, where children can hear a story over the telephone.

Sources

"The Women Behind The Magic." *Medford Mail Tribune*, June 2009. <http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090617/JOY/906170324/-1/JOY12#STS=g0ilf67b.zg9>.

The Storytelling Guild website: <http://www.storytellingguild.org/>.

The Oregon Encyclopedia

http://oregonhist-oep-dev.azurewebsites.net/articles/children_s_festival_in_jacksonville/