

Burgoo Festival offers Food, Crafts, and a Huge Community Gathering

by Becky Serrato

October is the perfect time to attend a festival. The temperature is usually agreeable, some leaves have turned, some are just beginning their color transformation, and the aroma of Burgoo stew permeates the air ... well, if you attend the Burgoo Festival in Utica, Illinois that is. Located a few miles from I-80, just a mile or two from Starved Rock, Burgoo Festival takes place Sunday, October 7 from 9am-5pm in the quaint town of Utica.

2007 marks the LaSalle County Historical Society's 38th annual Burgoo Festival. This event is their major fundraiser and allows them to operate all year. Over 200 crafters will be set up along downtown streets, selling everything from homemade jellies, baked goods, candles, lawn and garden art, a myriad of holiday and seasonal décor and just about everything in between. Approximately 20,000 people attend this fest. Many return year after year to experience the history, the crafts, the food and of course, the pioneer Burgoo Stew!

According to Chairperson, Dolores Passwater, Burgoo Stew is made from marinated beef stew meat, spices and fresh vegetables such as celery, carrots, onions, potatoes, corn, beans and cabbage. It is cooked for 12-14 hours in large 50-

gallon kettles over an open flame and must be stirred almost constantly. Many workers help prepare the ingredients that will go into the stew and then they work through the night cooking and stirring so it will be tender, thick and ready to eat the day of the fest. Approximately 200 gallons of the tasty concoction will be served.

If the pioneer stew just isn't to your liking, the Historical Society will also sell food such as butterfly pork chop sandwiches,



pork patties, brats, hotdogs, barbecue and even slices and whole pies. There will also be plenty of ice cream, lemonade and curly fries to go around and most of the eating establishments downtown and beyond will have their grills fired up, serving burgers and more.

In the grassy area next to the LaSalle County Historical Society Museum, the whole family can enjoy entertainment. From 9am-11am, Winifred Hoffman will sing gospel, old standards and even some of her own originals. Marvin Bowker will sing country, Broadway hits and old standards from 11am-2pm. From 2-4pm, let the Doodledoffers entertain you with a variety of music. All entertainment is free! Clowns will be making their way around too.

Kids young and old will enjoy going through the old barn, located behind Duffy's Tavern. Inside you will find a blacksmith demonstrating his craft. And all through the day you may find several other craftspeople inside the barn. In years past they have had a barrel maker, a chair maker, quilters and basket weavers. Plans are still being finalized on what will be offered. The one-room school house, located close by the Museum and Burgoo kettles, will also be open so be sure to explore that.

The day before Burgoo, Saturday, October 6th, experience classic cars from years gone by as they cruise through the town and at 7pm, take part in a historical Lantern Walk hosted by the Historical Society. Gerald Hulslander will take you through town to St. Mary's Church and explain all about Father Marquette who

explored this area in the late 1600's. Learn how Father Marquette met thousands of Native Americans who lived along the banks of the Illinois River and he introduced them to Christianity for the first time. Gerald will be happy to answer your questions and discuss the rich history of the area, so be sure to join him on this interesting walk.

Parking is available throughout Utica. For your convenience, shuttle buses will be running from 9am-5pm. In the north, you can park your car at Bennett's Garden Center, located just a quarter mile from I-80. Catch the shuttle and be on your way to the Fest. In the South, catch the bus at Consolidated Grain, which is on the west side of Rte 178 and Dee Bennett Road, right before the huge bridge. The shuttle buses are also free.

The Historical Society spends months planning this special festival each

year. All board members and staff pitch in before and during the event. One event still being planned is a huge raffle where you can win one of several fantastic prizes, including area business gift certificates and a night's stay at area lodges. So be sure to purchase your tickets the day of the event. Tickets may also be purchased prior to the event - for further information, please call the LaSalle County Historical Society at 815-667-4861.

October is the perfect time of year to get out, breathe in that fresh autumn air and stroll through the streets of Utica amongst hundreds of craft and food vendors. It's a time to bring the whole family out for one last hurrah before the cold wintry days set in. It's the season for gathering with friends and community and trying some new local fare. It's definitely the perfect time to try an old pioneer stew and the bounty of other tasty treats offered.

Burgoo Festival will take place October 7th, 2007, 9am-5pm - rain or shine - so mark your calendar now for one of Illinois' largest fall fests! It's a must go event for all families!

