

Celebrating all things Celtic

Yukon's Iron Thistle Festival combines history, sportsmanship

By Traci Chapman

It's a combination of history and sportsmanship, culture, food and fun – as the Scottish Highlands come alive in Yukon during this year's Iron Thistle.

A celebration of everything Scottish, the annual festival is now in its 13th year. It started as a chance for United Scottish Clans of Oklahoma to gather and share a glimpse into a world with a rich past and intriguing heritage; today's festivals draw thousands of people each year to Yukon's Mollie Spencer Farm – formerly known as Kirkpatrick Family Farm, USCO President Jack Robertson said.

"We have representatives from some of the different Scottish clans – it really is interesting to get to talk to someone and discover that your name is part of a clan and what that clan has contributed to," he said. "This year for the first time we will have Viking reenactors; if you know anything about Scottish history you that the Vikings were a huge part."

This year's event begins at 7 p.m. April 26 with a Friday Night Fire Ceremony

Traditional Scottish games are a focus of the annual Iron Thistle Festival.

PHOTO BY TRACI CHAPMAN



and entertainment by Flowers of Edinburgh, although Saturday is when the festival kicks off in full swing, Robertson said. With music and Scottish Highland sporting events scheduled throughout both Saturday and Sunday, the true beginning of each annual event are opening ceremonies.

"As part of that we have all of the individual clans march in and be recognized – the honor clan for the games always leads the procession, then the different piping bands follow up," Robertson said. "It is a nice way to recognize the clans in attendance."

Sunday's activities will be similar to those held Saturday, but with an abbreviated schedule, from noon to about 5 p.m.

Iron Thistle in many ways is more than a local – or even Oklahoma – event, the USCO president said. Scottish Highland athletes come to Yukon each year to participate in the festival's games; there are activities ranging from sheep herding demonstrations and highland cattle to traditional blacksmiths, bagpipers and Celtic themed vendors booths.

The huge, multi-layered event is something that organizers begin preparing for almost before all of the tents come down at the conclusion of a particular year's Iron Thistle's activities, Robertson said, a labor of love accomplished 100 percent by volunteers.

"Not one board member or trustee



Sounds of Scotland fill Yukon's Mollie Spencer Farm when the United Scottish Clans of Oklahoma gather in Yukon. PHOTO BY TRACI CHAPMAN

Ticket to Scotland

Admission

9 and under - FREE

10 and up - \$8 each in advance, \$10 at the gate

Weekend pass advance purchase - \$15

Hours

Friday - 7 to 10 pm; Saturday - 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sunday - 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

gets paid for what we do - what we do, we do out a love of our Scottish heritage," he said. "For such a small country, Scotland has contributed an enormous amount to American history.

"We try hard to share this with our fellow Oklahomans with the various events we do throughout the year - we really love when people join us and become a part of our group," Robertson said.

Tickets are \$8 per person for a one-day pass or \$15 for an adult

weekend pass; admission for children age 9 and under is free. Advance ticket prices end April 15.

Tickets can be purchased before the event on the Clans' website.

The farm is located at 1001 Garth Brooks Blvd. More information is available online on the USCO website, <http://www.unitedscotsok.com/iron-thistle/>, as well as the festival's Facebook page, located online at <https://www.facebook.com/IronThistle>.