

Faire days ahead

Hawkwood drawing crowds again

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HAWKWOOD FOREST – Don't be surprised if you happen to see a familiar face in this forest. Producers of the Hawkwood Medieval Fantasy Faire say the event is drawing record crowds this year, and even Robin Hood and Merlin have been spotted wandering along the pathways.

What's the attraction? That's easy, according to the many fairgoers and staffers – the entertainment.

"This is our second trip up this year – we're here to see The Bilge Pumps," John Wilburn of Norman, OK said. Wilburn and his wife, Cathy, brought their three children to Hawkwood again last Saturday to see the family's favorite pirate band perform. "The first time we were here – opening weekend – we stayed in a hotel. But today we're just here for the day and we'll drive back tonight," Wilburn said. "We just love these guys."



The Bilge Pumps, a North Texas-based pirate singing group whose members dress as pirates and entertain crowds by singing sea shanties, first performed at Hawkwood in 1999.

"That first year, we weren't really a group yet," Bilge Pumps founder Craig Lutke said. "We were just a bunch of guys walking around singing. Our first real gig was Mardi Gras Galveston in 2000."

The group has since performed at Dickens on the Strand in Galveston; the Seabrook Music Festival in Seabrook, Texas; several renaissance fairs in Oklahoma and Louisiana; Shakespeare festivals in Fort Worth and Alvin, Texas; and pubs in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

The Bilge Pumps' performance isn't the only crowd-please at Hawkwood. The Dragon Attack Stunt Show features a fire-breathing dragon, pyrotechnics galore, and plenty of stunt-falls and slides. The stunt show regularly draws visitors to the Old Gate Theater. "This is our fifth time to see the show," Wilburn said.

Lutke created the stunt show, too, and writes a new script for each Hawkwood season. "This year, we expanded the stage and added a new tower," he said. "We're redesigned the dragon, too. Now Yohko (the dragon) can breathe fire, and she has more moveable parts." Lutke said additional stunts were added this year, and for the first time, the show uses guns. "The good guys use guns – the bad guys still use magic," he said.

And, while many visitors to Hawkwood come from nearby Tarrant, Denton, Dallas, and Wise counties, others, like the Wilburns, travel further.

Burton and Tammy Culley, along with daughters, Caitlyn, Brenna, and Rhiannon, drove from Austin. The family, who came wearing traditional Celtic costumes, simply enjoys Renaissance and medieval faires, Burton Culley said. The Culleys' three daughters especially enjoyed the

Dolunay Rose Traveling Gypsy Show, which features traditional Middle-Eastern folk dances, more commonly known as belly-dancing.

The Dolunay Rose Dancers also perform throughout the region and will dance at the State Fair of Texas later this month.

Although the medieval fair was filled with singing, dancing, and laughter last weekend, there were also somber reminder of the national tragedies. Hawkwood Marketing Director Lisa Beardmore's midriff bore red and blue letters proclaiming "Red Cross Donations"; a stage was decorated with American flags and a sign that read: "All tips donated to the relief effort"; and the pirates of the Bilge Pumps wore red, white, and blue ribbons pinned to their shirts. Beardmore also said that \$1.00 of each paid adult admission would be contributed to eh New York Fire Department Relief Fund.