

Bilge Pumps will swab Norman's Medieval deck

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NORMAN - The Bilge Pumps may look, dress and act like pirates as they sing their sea chanteys and perform some ridiculous comedy combined with a dash of Celtic music. But they'll be landlocked for three days at the Medieval Fair in Reaves Park. The Pumps, who may have learned a trick or two in charming the ladies and lassies from fellow pirate Jack Sparrow (he of the Black Pearl, don't cha know), have hauled their frigate Pieces o' Eight to the park, though they'll be afoot as they stumble between one stage and the next.



It'd be wise to keep a good grip on your pocketbook if you see these pirates. They've got to buy their grog some way, and they'd as soon use your money as their own.

Ship's legend has it The Bilge Pumps lost their captain and search for him by going from pub to pub, because if they find him, he can order them to sail home again. So far, they've looked in vain.

Crewman Maroon the Shantyman was shanghaied from Oklahoma City to Paoli as a child, where he was known by his given name, Craig Lutke. He tried to be a law-abiding citizen, learning programming before the lure of the sea chanteys called him back to his pirate ways.

This weekend, you'll see him and his mates playing pirate card games, harassing landlubbers and hanging out with the blacksmiths, perhaps to get their weapons improved.

"This gang I'm with now, we've been milling around together since '99," Lutke said. "We've lost and gained a few members here and there."

Lutke, who emerged from Maroon's personality for a few minutes when it was time for the interview, admitted he was standing on a ladder, painting his house in Irving, Texas. Perhaps because of his Sooner heritage, he was painting the house "shades of crimson and cream."

Lutke/Maroon climbed down the ladder, taking a break to tell the story of The Bilge Pumps -- part of it, anyway.

Before they came up with the current name, several members hung around in groups that played Caledonian games and a few sang "filk" songs, which take popular tunes and make up fanciful lyrics for all kinds of science fiction, fantasy and magical stories.

They liked singing, and they liked cutting up, so a pirate gang was forged.

Members are E the Bosun, Harvey the Corpman, Phil McGroin the First Mate, Galleon O' Galleon the Pilot (and heartthrob of the motley crew), Blue the Lookout and John Crow the Cook.

Their shows are some of the most popular at the Medieval Fair and are mostly family friendly. At some shows, they let the women in the audience "bid" for Galleon to divest himself of clothing, which he does willingly.

Not at this Medieval Fair.

"Well, we're under advisement to knock that stuff off," Maroon said, stuffing Craig's personality back into submission. "We were reminded that we are now in a public park, and the local law enforcement might be interested in visiting with men like us."

"We understand there's a new stage at the fair this year, and we're looking forward to playing there. It's in Sherwood Forest. The stage was quite small there, so they've made it much bigger so we'll have more room to romp."

The pirates have been to this fair so many times -- or people have seen them at so many other fairs -- that many in the audience sing right along.

"It's really something to see 100 people singing with us," Maroon said.

Lutke managed to escape once more to give some modern information before his Maroon took control again.

"You can find out about our band at <http://www.thebilgepumps.com> or visit the Medieval Fair's site at <http://www.medievalfair.org>," Lutke said.