

A History of Heritage

Even after 40 years but this writer finds something new to love at Edmonton's Heritage festival

By Nicholas Spillios

but as in the past Edmontonians put such concerns aside; by afternoon the clouds had disappeared and the crowds returned.

Many times in the past I attended as a volunteer in the Greek pavilion in support of St. George's Greek Orthodox Church. Volunteering gives me the satisfaction of connecting with other cultures. I took advantage of my breaks to sample other foods and performances but also to take in a new addition: the Seniors Rest Tent sponsored by the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation.

I bought tickets for food in advance and was impressed by the efficiency of our Edmonton Police, assisting in keeping the crowds moving smoothly. New pavilions this year included Rwanda, Morocco and Haiti giving, more scope to the event.

I had no difficulty getting enthusiastic interview subjects. Larry Ofner, 74, says he likes to see the changes in foods. "I come back because I never finish covering the festival the first time," he says. Charlotte Spillios, 82, is an annual volunteer in the Greek Pavilion. She has been volunteering since the first festival in 1976. "I like meeting the many diverse people who stop by to chat. Making a contribution to our church convinces me to return," she says.

I returned a couple of times to the Peruvian Pavilion for arroz con leche (rice pudding) consisting of rice, cloves, raisins and cinnamon. Comparing the shish kabobs from various Middle Eastern countries became a welcome challenge. I was



also attracted to the Panama hats in the Peruvian Pavilion and made a note to buy one later. The line at the Afghanistan Pavilion was permanently long; people seemed to be enjoying the shish kabob with its tangy spices. By the end of the weekend, I concluded that Edmonton was not only a true multicultural city but provided a lesson in tolerance and respecting difference. I made a silent wish that Mayor Iveson would find a way to help us all emulate such a spirit of cooperation and collaboration year-round.



Four decades in the making, and what a journey it's been! Back in 1975, I joined the Heritage Days planning committee in Minister of Culture Horst Schmidt's office to spearhead the first weekend event. From a modest 11 pavilions to this year's 61, what an amazing achievement; it has been a glorious ride.

On August 1-3, the Servus Heritage Festival (as it is now called) was once again located in Hawrelak Park. The draw for the more than 350,000 annual visitors is always difficult to pinpoint. For me, it is the excitement and the range of offerings, from crafts to ethno-cultural culinary choices, to performers representing the world on 25 stages. This year a little rain put a damper on opening day

