



# Renaissance man heralds 19th fest

By Mary Maher

"Don't you lose a lot of tennis balls?" This is a question Gary Parker of Circle Pines (better known as Renaissance Festival-goers as Pulio, Master Juggling Teacher) hears frequently.

As a juggling master, he starts each day with a bucket of 100 dyed tennis balls. Most of the balls end up scattered around the festival grounds.

One day he was approached by a 4-year-old who had found one of the tennis balls.

"My mom said I should give this to you," he told Parker.

Parker rewarded the child with 20 of his dyed tennis balls.

Love of such human interaction has kept Parker coming back for 17 years. He's now in his third year as the Renaissance's artistic director.

Over the years, Parker has watched the festival grow. The Minnesota Renaissance Festival, in its 19th year, is currently at its third site, where it is now one of the summer's biggest attractions.

"The first years," Parker said, "were small potatoes."

In the beginning, the festival lasted two weekends and attracted about 10,000

people. The Renaissance now gathers close to 300,000 people each summer. Parker said the festival will see around 25,000 on a busy day and 7,000 in the pouring rain.

The Renaissance Festival began as "an offshoot of the movement of the times."

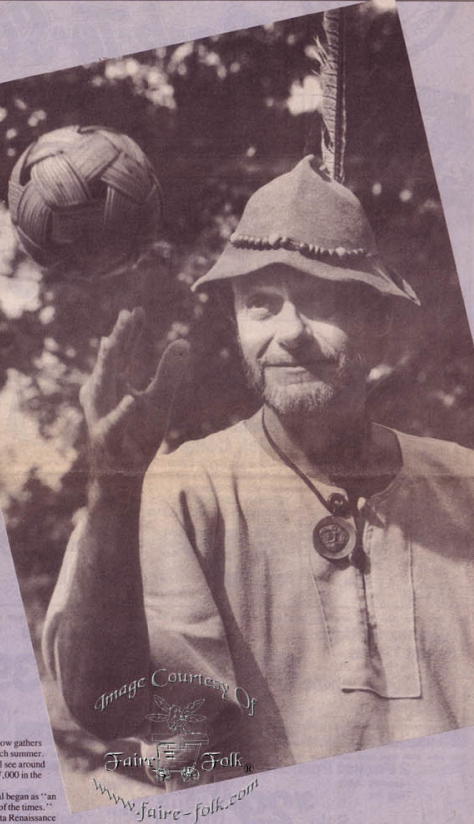
Parker said the Minnesota Renaissance Festival is reminiscent of the "real Renaissance festivals" where artisans and craftsmen would gather in the woods to display artwork and acts would perform and "pass the hat."

Now, as in medieval times, "towns" like Kansas City and Tampa have Renaissance festivals. Parker says there are 25 to 30 festivals going on around the country.

Most acts are made up of local performers. About 600 actors perform each year, either as "street" characters or in the 100 acts.

Many of the festival's acts have enjoyed success and "headed for the big time." Past acts include Penn & Teller and the Flying K's.

Some acts, Parker said, are there for one year, some stay 10 or more years—but two or three years is the average



lifespan of an act.

Preparation for the Renaissance Festival begins long before the first visitors step through the gates. Auditions are in late April and May and actors who are chosen attend the Renaissance academy, a rehearsal for the festival, at Macalester College in St. Paul. There they learn about costuming, improvisation, language and character.

It isn't as easy as it sounds.

The Minnesota festival, Parker says, spans the time period of the 1500s, from Michelangelo's era to the height of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

"The academy generally deals with things that would help make the acts better."

"The problem is," Parker said,

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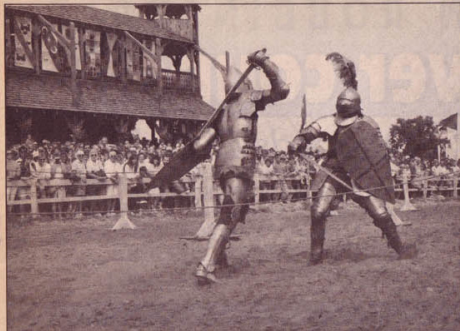
### Renaissance Festival

A visit to the past—16th century Europe's harvest festival—is an enthralling experience because of the talent of Pulio, the Master Juggler (Gary Parker in the adjoining photo) and the Grave-digger (story and photo on next page). More about this weekend festivity inside.

### Entertainment & Arts

Highlights of metrowide activities Aug. 6-15 are on inside pages, along with other columns, news and advertising all the way to the back.

# Minnesota Renaissance Fest opens season



Clang! Crunch! Sword meets armor as knights engage in medieval combat.

## Medieval weekends return to Shakopee

The knights will be a jousting, the winemakers a stomping and the dancers a-bellying.

It will be the 19th annual Minnesota Renaissance Festival Saturdays, Sundays and Labor Day from Aug. 12 through Sept. 24. The festival recreates a European harvest festival of the 1500s with a cast of hundreds of medieval artisans, performers, cooks and just plain folks. Add to this lusty brew a crowd of visitors that was in the thousands on the wettest day recorded and into the 10s of thousands when the weather was glorious.

The site is a vast tract of wooded land reached from Highway 169 four miles south of Shakopee. Admission (\$11 for adults, \$5 for children 12 and under) permits visitors to park their cars and wander all day (9 a.m. to 7 p.m.) through the picturesque village.

Craftspeople demonstrate their skills and sell their wares. Athletes perform their arcane games — sometimes challenged by the public. Grapes are stomped and wine is made. And the variety of edibles is almost endless.

Major spectator activities include jousting and sword combat on foot by knights in armor plus equestrian competitions. Perhaps the king and queen will join the throng in enjoying music, theater, bellydancing and acrobatics.

The fantasy delights young and old.

Tickets may be purchased in advance and arrangements made for groups. Information is available from Minnesota Renaissance Festival, 3525 145th St. W., Shakopee 55379 — phone 445-7361.

## Medieval grave-digging is a far cry from Armstrong High

By David Duff  
Weekend Editor

"Come early, stay late," the gravedigger says. "There's time to smell the peacocks."

The speaker is, forthwith, an Armstrong High School grad ('76) whose fate has turned into a digger of graves or, as he would say, "the last person to let anyone down."

Terry Foy loves the Renaissance life. He's artistic, director of the Arizona Renaissance Festival (January-March), a performer at the Georgia (April-May) and Colorado (June-July) festivals and has now come home for August and September at the Minnesota event. He'll take time off this fall to be married in North Carolina. He met his future wife at the Georgia Festival, where she was involved in "sweat work."

He calls the Renaissance Era "a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there."

"I'm glad we have advanced," he said thoughtfully. He brightened and said, "It sure beats working!"

His goal is to perform in a comedy club. He enjoyed working at the Dudley Riggs Theater, Minneapolis, over

Christmas, 1986.

But he also enjoys the action at the Renaissance Festival, where performers must hold their audience in a "theater without doors" amid constant competition. "It hones a performer," Foy said. "You have to be tougher and stronger or you lose your audience."

As a gravedigger on the street, Foy can be heard proclaiming, "No one shall kick off — the business is real dead."

He also performs on stage, where he burlesques his speech with spoorisms. Sponserisms are "kitching your swoonsoms back and forth."

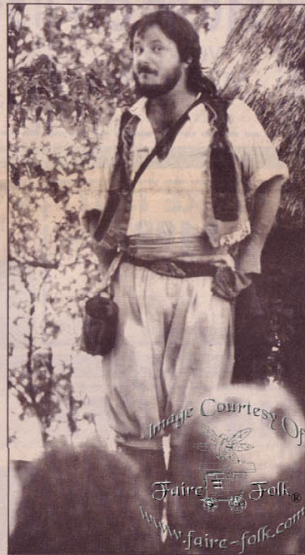
In contrast to a low form of speech like pug latin:

"He pay ain't lay."

"So," a visitor asked him last year, "do you take all these buildings down when you're done (at the festival)?"

"Everything stays," the gravedigger replied. "But we deflate the elephants and pack them in their trunks."

Terry Foy of Northeast Minneapolis, formerly of Crystal, is one of hundreds of lighthearted performers celebrating the harvest season each weekend at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival.



Gravedigger's life is jolly one at Renaissance Festival. Above, Terry Foy is "into his character."

## Renaissance man

From preceding page

"how Renaissance-y can we be? True Renaissance would make it as funny. We have to make a decision how accurate we can make it. It's my job to see it's authentic."

"But it's not necessary to take in phrases that were used in Shakespeare. There's no 'okay' and you don't say 'you guys.' You avoid modern slang expressions." The village is all wood and "the whole fair," Parker said, "is not electric."

This rule carries into the off-hours. Parker goes home after a day at the festival, but many acts camp out at the campground outside the gates. There, Parker said, is the "spirit of the Renaissance in the modern sense."

Many actors spend their non-working hours at the campground, practicing acts from the festival. "Like the old days," Parker said, "it's lax — but a lot smaller."

"The people into the festival play down the electricity," Parker said. "If anyone turns on a boombox, they get glances from people."

"It's a return to human

endeavor. Crafts have to be handmade. The craftsmen have to be there with the people."

Parker likes the Renaissance Festival to a visit to the local grocery store. "You can stand in line at Country Club and the person helping you will be friendly and direct. There's true interaction."

"The characters (at the festival) will chat with people in a kind of real sense. Acts can pass around the hat, but there is no begging." Their attitude, Parker said, is to "reach out to people who want interaction and leave those alone who don't."

"Seeing a couple of characters interact with people — that's the heart of the festival."

Visitors can look forward to several new attractions at the festival this year. The Renaissance has hired its first light choreographer, David Doeche. There will be rapier and dagger fights, a combat chess match and armored jousting will take place four times a day.

There are new attractions, too, for people who like entertainment of a less violent nature. There is a new belly dance troupe, new musical acts and the Renaissance's

first brass ensemble.

But not to worry, Parker said: "Many of the same old favorites will be back. That's one of the real draws."

Past visitors to the Renaissance will be happy to hear that Pele and Soot and the Rat Catcher, in their 16th and 15th years respectively, will be back.

Parker enjoys Renaissance time. "For seven weekends in the fall, you stop back in time and get to see old friends." He especially looks forward to working outdoors, which he says is a "really positive experience."

The Renaissance Festival will take place rain or shine, on seven weekends: Aug. 12-13, 19-20, 26-27, Sept. 2-4 (including Labor Day), 9-10, 16-17, 23-24. Hours are 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The festival is four miles south of Shakopee on Highway 169. For ticket or other information, call the Minnesota Renaissance Festival at 445-7361.

Mary Maher is a staff writer for Minnesota Suburban Publications.

## Next week in Weekend

The romance of a bygone era — 16th century Europe — will draw thousands and thousands of visitors to the Minnesota Renaissance Festival each weekend through September.

The clash of sword and armor aside, it was a gentler, quieter world, at least at harvest festival times. And that's the idea bringing artistry and imagination to the woodland acreage south of Shakopee.

The fast and noisy years of the late 20th century are the subject of Weekend's cover story next week. We'll travel to Brainerd for the 1989 Northstar National Races at Brainerd International Raceway.

We'll meet the internationally known Dennis Forell, who drives his dragster along the straightaway at speeds well beyond 200 mph. He'll tell us what those high speeds are all about.