

Behind the gate of the Renaissance Festival

By Kelley L. Carter
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For nearly 15 years, Sherry Roth frequented the Minnesota Renaissance Festival as a customer, sometimes making it out to all seven weekends.

She participated in all there is to know in the 22-acre 16th-century village. She feasted on festive foods, bought Renaissance wares and laughed at the street performers who harassed her and her family.

But it wasn't enough. To get the entire festival experience, she decided, she needed to be a part of it.

For years, her daughter encouraged her to take her love for the festival a step further.

For years, Roth did nothing — until one day when she found herself bantering with a street performer.

The actor did something out of the ordinary for a festival performer. He stepped out of character.

"He told me that I should consider auditioning for the festival," Roth said.

This time, Roth listened. And after spending a night agonizing about her audition, she eventually crafted a poem about how nervous she was, about how much being a part of the festival meant to her.

"I wanted so much to give back to others what that festival gave to me as a patron," she said.

This weekend, Roth, 48, now a St. Cloud resident, will celebrate her 10th season as a street performer at the festival. She's a fairly popular performer, now using the character name Rosally Bud. Rosally, a character she created, is a self-sufficient English wench with an attitude. In her second season, Roth was nominated by her peers for the most-improved-veteran award.

"I'd always dreamed of this, but I never thought I'd be able to do it," she said. "I love the atmosphere so much. I'm not a big history buff, but that time period has always fascinated me."

Roth does fairly extensive research on each of her characters. When she began performing at the festival, she was known as Victoria Belardi and later as Velda Vasa. She found there was a Renaissance period Swedish king named Vasa, but that he only had sons, with no mention of daughters.

She became the lost daughter of Vasa.

"My first day out there, there were butterflies in my stomach. I was extremely nervous," Roth said. "But when I actually convinced a patron about my character, that's when I real-



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Sherry Roth, right, shares a laugh with Robert Schug at the Renaissance Festival. This is Roth's 10th year as a cast member at the annual festival in Shakopee.

ized, yes, I can pull off this illusion."

The festival, which runs through Sept. 27, is home to about 400 street performers. Each spends six weeks researching, rehearsing and organizing material for the festival. The performers also work with professionals on improvisation, history, costuming and language.

Karen Walne, marketing director for the festival, said the street performers are the event's main attraction.

"The key selling point is the whole atmosphere of the festival. From the front gate on, you're in another world," Walne said. "That's where the street performers come in. They really add a great deal to the festival, with their performances and their interaction with patrons."

"The heart of our entertainment is improv. It's something that we cultivate in our Renaissance academy," said Pamela Silver, entertainment director for the festival. "The idea is to be surrounded by people who have created a character. It's an amazing thing to see."

The performers circle the large estate of the festival all day each weekend. And the compensation is the fun, not the money, Roth said. In fact, she only makes enough to pay for gasoline from St. Cloud to Shakopee.

But it's the friends she's made over the years and the smiles she creates that keep Roth coming back to the festival year after year.

It was one of those friends who introduce to the man who eventually became her second husband, Brad Roth, who also works at the festival, and Sherry got married there three years ago.

"Some people ask if I'm getting burned out," Roth said. "But I'm going to be a lifer. I can't imagine it any other way. I don't know what I'd do between August and September. There would be a big, empty hole."

Renaissance Festival

► **Where:** Four miles south of Shakopee, just off Hwy. 169.

► **When:** Weekends through Sept. 27. Gates open from 9 a.m.-7 p.m.

► **Tickets:** Adults \$14.95, children 6-12 \$5.95, children 5 and under free. Parking is free. 612-445-7361.

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