

# Renaissance Festival extends its Shakopee lease through 2019

Medieval show to find a new home for its 50th season.

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Despite speculation of a final huzzah this year at its longtime home near Shakopee, the Minnesota Renaissance Festival will remain at its current location through 2019.

Festival organizers announced the lease extension Thursday, adding that the festival will move to a new home in 2020. This year's 46th season will run from Aug. 20 to Oct. 2. The decision comes as a

surprise because the festival had been expected to decamp when its lease expired after this year's fair. Festival organizers talked last year about possibly moving to Jordan or Belle Plaine, nearby in Scott County.

"We've been looking for land, and for the next two to three years, we will continue to do so," Deb Schaber, director of marketing for Mid-America Festivals Inc., the festival's management company, said Thursday. "Our goal is to pur-

chase land and develop it by 2020 so we can have a fresh, clean site."

Minnesota's fair, one of the country's largest, drew 315,000 attendees last year seeking the thrill of jousting, artisans and themed weekends. The location, 7 miles south of Shakopee on Hwy. 169, isn't a deal-breaker for die-hard performers like Caleb McEwen of the Danger Committee, whose members will perform 96 times this year.

"I know many people have been concerned about it, but See **FESTIVAL** on B2 ▶



The Renaissance Festival has drawn ever larger crowds, including knights and ladies in waiting.



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A repeat attraction at the Renaissance Festival, the Danger Committee — from left, Jason LeMay, Caleb McEwen and Mick Lunzer — juggled and mugged for audiences last year. McEwen said a move will not deter fans but will allow for better planning.

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◀ **FESTIVAL** from BI every year has been bigger and bigger," McEwen said. "This [news] means that hopefully we'll continue in that vein for the next couple of years."

The festival grounds are owned by Malkerson Sales Inc., which since the 1970s has leased to the festival. It's plotted beside a gravel mine that in 2014 began to eat into the festival's parking lot. The mine is not currently active, Schaber said.

The lease extension pro-

vides some short-term certainty for vendors who had been left in limbo.

Charles Knutson has owned a booth called MacGregor Historic Games with his wife since 1995 and will be returning this year.

"It's kind of both a relief and a frustration," Knutson said. "Relief that we don't have to build a new booth right away, but it's still up in the air."

Other considerations before moving, Knutson said, include the new community's

restrictions and associated expenses.

Organizers are optimistic that the vendors will come along for the haul.

"We hope they're all going to move with us to the new site," Schaber said. "We're working on programs to help them move and reduce fees and what not for incentives."

For some performers like McEwen, the site is merely a stage.

"I don't think it's going to disrupt the continuity all that much," McEwen said.

"It will be a chance for them to expand and plan better for it, rather than at the place it started so many years ago. Many people did not think this

would last this long."

As a founding member of the south metro city's RiverSouth tourist and entertainment initiative, the Renaissance Festival is a major attraction for Scott County.

Also part of RiverSouth are Mystic Lake Casino, Canterbury Park and Valleyfair amusement park — all of which are also among Shakopee's top five employers.

"We're very pleased for their location extension, and we'd love to see them remain part of the RiverSouth family," said Bill Von Bank, executive director of RiverSouth. "And I'm confident they will."

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