

• Special to the Daily Leader ELKHART — The list of activities for the 10th Annual Grassland Heritage Festival, June 5 through 12, is as diverse as the plant and animal life, resources and beauty of the Cimarron National Grassland, the area near Elkhart for which the festival was named.



From experiencing life on the Santa Fe Trail and a free fishing derby to an old fashioned church service with a circuit riding preacher and bluegrass music, the events support the festival's theme of "a festival with a purpose." Some of happenings during the Saturday-to-Saturday long festival can be experienced for free and some for a small purchase of \$10 for a souvenir collector's pin that gives the wearer admission to most events. The festival supports the Morton County Historical Society's efforts to increase cultural awareness and tourism in southwest Kansas.

"We truly believe that we have a diverse enough number of acts and days that everyone will find something to do," said Myrna Barnes, festival co-chair. "Our mission is to celebrate the culture of the Santa Fe Trail's historic travelers and to tell about the need to preserve the Cimarron National Grassland and the high plains prairie."

The festival begins on June 5 with a free fishing derby hosted by the USDA Forest Service at the Cimarron National Grassland recreation area. For "kids" ages 0 through 16 and 55 years and older, awards will be presented for winning fish caught. A free lunch will be served and prizes will be given away. Call 620- 697-4621 for more information.

On June 6 at noon, a homemade chicken and noodle dinner served at Elkhart City Hall is at no cost to those who have purchased this year's collector pin. Teen singing sensation Lindee Link will provide the entertainment. Many will know Link from her performances with Disney, Veggie Tales, Delta, Kohl's and Build-a-Bear. Sunday evening is the community old fashioned church service and ice cream social hosted by Elkhart churches with a circuit riding preacher to be held at 7 p.m. in Cunningham Park on Main St. in Elkhart

June 9 is all about the kids with a free children's day with pioneer-style hands on activities by Morton County Library staff, special visitors, and Morton County Historical Museum (MCHM) volunteers. Hot dogs and trimmings will be served at noon. Thad Beach will present "Catfish County" at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. A professional musician, songwriter, storyteller and teaching artist, Beach plays the ukulele, guitar, harmonica, jaw harp and kazoo and tells leg-pullin' truth-stretchin' tales.

June 10 is Santa Fe Trail Day beginning at 6 p.m. with a chuck wagon meal. Popular storyteller and Kansas native Jeff Davidson will present stories and songs about the Santa Fe Trail and other Kansas events at the Morton County Civic Center. He mixes factual stories and humor to highlight the trials, events and life as the pioneers traveled west in the 19th Century. Stories

include the Santa Fe Trail, the farming settler, the Pony Express, and the building of the railroads. Admission is no cost with the pin.

An international luncheon begins the day on June 11 at 11:30 a.m. at the Morton County Civic Center. Food booths will be set up where lunch (and extra to take home) may be purchased. Entertainment will be provided by Cowgirl Poet Penny Forbes and Fiddler Robin Koonce.

Forbes, Koonce and Kyle Johnson will also be the guest entertainers at the 6 p.m. Cowboy Camp Out Welcome for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital "Saddle Up Trail Ride" participants at the 81 Corrals on the Cimarron National Grassland. Hamburgers and trimmings will be served. Those attending are encouraged to bring lawn chairs to enjoy the sunset and entertainment. Admission is no cost with the collector pin. Rain location is the Morton County Civic Center in Elkhart.

June 12 the day begins with a 7 a.m. cowboy breakfast for the Annual St. Jude Children's Research Hospital "Saddle Up" Trail Ride riders at 81 Corrals before the riders mount up for their ride. For more information about the St. Jude fund raiser call Vienna Lee at 620-697-2275 for entry forms and information on how to win prizes including a saddle pad.

At 10 a.m. a bus tour of the Cimarron National Grassland leaves the MCHM. Along the Santa Fe Trail and bus route living history re-enactments will be performed by the Morton County Theatre Group. The tour group will meet with the St. Jude Trail Riders for lunch at the group site at the Cimarron Recreation Area. Call the museum at (620) 697-2833 for lunch and bus reservations. Cost is \$10.

The festival grand finale begins at 7:30 p.m. at the Elkhart High School Auditorium with featured guests Redhead Express from Nashville and Branson, Mo. A reception will follow at the Fowler Field House. Admission is no cost with the collector pin.

Originally from Alaska, Redhead Express now calls Nashville home. They were featured performers in Branson for the past three years and also are in demand on tour traveling the "lower 48." The family group is made up of mom and dad, Bret and Apryl Walker, and four daughters, ages 14 to 20, and three sons, ages 7 to 11. All sing and play instruments presenting a variety of catchy original songs as well as all types of music.

For more information on how to purchase the collector's pin (\$10 for adults, \$5 for children 6 to 13, 5 and under free) contact Barnes or Becky Ellis at the Morton County Historical Society Museum at (620) 697-2833 or go to the Web site, www.ghf.mtcoks.com. The pins will go on sale soon not only at the MCHM, but also the Epic PCS retail stores in Guymon, Okla., and Liberal and Elkhart.