

Family Makes Folkfest Annual Tradition
by Rosemarie Howard
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From publicity, to lighting and sound, to housing visiting dancers, and generally making themselves useful, members of the Conover family have immersed themselves in the Springville World Folkfest each year for the fifteen years of its existence.

"I was at the City Council meeting the night Carl Allred and his wife presented the idea," said Pat Conover. While touring in Europe with the BYU folk dancers, the Allred's had observed some dance festivals and wondered if the City of Springville might sponsor such an event. Brent Haymond, mayor of Springville at the time, backed the project and the idea of the Folkfest was born.

From its beginning performance stage, a make-shift affair put up in the middle of the high school baseball field, the Folkfest has grown into a fine outdoor stage at the Springville Arts Park.

During that growth, Martin Conover and his family--along with numerous other volunteers and city employees--have persisted in making the festival happen each year.

Employees of Audio Visions, a media production company, owned by Martin's son, Craig, and his partner Mike Duffin, have donated thousands of hours over the past fifteen years, hanging the lights and stringing thousands of feet of wire to provide lights and sound for the Folkfest. Some of the equipment used is owned by the Folkfest and some by Audio Visions. Each year the system has been improved.

This year Craig is also the city councilman responsible for working with the World Folkfest. Because he is employed at Art City Publishing, he is in charge of printing the program, tickets, and posters for the festival. Over the years, he and his wife have also hosted some of the dancers.

Craig's son, Landon, age 13, started running a spotlight last year--keeping the tradition alight--so to speak.

For the past few years, Marci Conover Harris has designed the program, tickets and posters for the festival. She has also assisted her brother, Craig, as a member of the sound and light crew since the festival began.

Christi Conover Babbitt has served on the board of directors in charge of publicity for several years, creating media kits and representing the Folkfest in some TV media spots--no small task. This year she arranged for Channel 5 to come film footage of the festival for their news program. She and her husband have also served as a host family for dancers.

The leader of the clan, Martin Conover, has served for the past five years as Chairman of the Board for the Folkfest, working closely with Teddy Anderson, the general director of the event. He has also served as a board member for the ten previous years, doing everything from selling ads for the program to putting up tents to driving to the Salt Lake airport to meet visiting dancers and musicians.

Another of Martin's duties has been making sure a flag ceremony takes place each night before the performance begins. For the past few years he has delegated those duties to Brandon Degn. However, this year, Degn is out of town--serving a mission for the LDS Church. Not to worry. A few weeks ago Martin received a letter from Degn. "I've given all the stuff to my brother," wrote Degn, "and he knows exactly what to do." Martin, who had been wondering how he was going to take care of that detail, didn't need to worry about it anymore.

Pat, Martin's wife, keeps the family from falling apart during the rush of activity--in addition to her involvement as editor of the Springville Herald and head painter of signs. She has also served as a chairman for housing dancers from an individual country for several years. Her family has hosted dancers every year, with the exception of the first year when they were out of town a few days during the week of the festival.

As far as Pat is concerned, taking some of visiting performers into her home and getting to know them has been a highlight of the Folkfest. "It's wonderful for kids," commented Pat. "I think that's one of the reasons we've gotten so involved. They look forward to having the dancers stay with us every year."

A few years ago when Marci was about 14 years old, she was at the World Folkfest offices and heard that two days before the Folkfest was to begin, four male performers from China were arriving in Salt Lake--in the middle of the night, and needed a place to stay--for just that night.

"My mom'll take them," said Marci. The Conovers had already committed to housing dancers from another country, but they picked the men up at the airport and took them home. The Chinese men spoke no English and the Conover's spoke no Chinese, so the conversation was limited to sign language. After showing them the amenities, Pat and Martin went to bed, leaving the four men in the living room watching television.

Marci came home shortly after her parents had gone to bed and found the four men watching television. They pointed to the nearby Nintendo; Marci got the games out and the five of them played video games until the wee hours of the morning--without exchanging a word. The next morning after breakfast, the men were taken to previously arranged housing with another family--and Marci just sobbed because they had to leave.

"Those are the kinds of experiences you have," remarked Pat. "You don't have to speak the language of these people to grow to love them."

Another year the Conover's and the Karen and Roger Olsen family were assigned some men from Mexico. "Went down to the Art Shop to pick them up," said Pat. "It was late at night and they were kind of scruffy looking because they had been traveling for so long--probably by bus."

She and Karen wondered what kind of motley crew they were taking home with them. They men turned out to be the members of the mariachi band. One night that week after the performances at the Arts Park, the Conovers and their guests joined forces with the Olsen's and their guests. For two and a half hours the mariachi band provided the two families with a private concert.

"It was absolutely the most delightful time," Pat said. "We loved them. The Olsen's still keep in touch with some of these men."

"The thing I have learned from the Folkfest," commented Pat, "is that even though your skin might not be the same color, or you might not speak the same language, or your culture may be entirely different, you can learn to love anyone. There's no reason we can't have world peace. You just have to get to know people."

The tradition of the World Folkfest is one way to promote world peace and the Conover's, as well as the hundreds of other volunteers working with the Folkfest, are doing their small part to bring that dream about.