

ACUA VITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

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SMALL TOWNS BIG ART

**VEGREVILLE'S
PYSANKA POWER**

IS THAT WHAT I THINK IT IS?
Ukrainian Food Immortalized in Rural Alberta

**FESTIVALS THAT WILL
GO DOWN IN HISTORY**



A PUBLICATION OF THE ALBERTA COUNCIL FOR THE UKRAINIAN ARTS

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VEGREVILLE PYSANKA, PROVIDED BY KEVIN M KLERKS



GRANDSTAND SHOW 2022, PHOTO BY PROVIDED VEGREVILLE PYSANKA FESTIVAL

VEGREVILLE'S Pysanka Power

By Lyrissa Sheptak



PHOTO BY STRIATIC, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

IF SOMEONE WERE TO ASK A ROOM FULL OF UKRAINIAN ALBERTANS TO NAME ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC SYMBOLS OF UKRAINIAN CULTURE IN THE PROVINCE, MOST WOULD BLURT OUT, “THE BIG PYSANKA!”

This “big pysanka” is the famous Vegreville Pysanka which stands 31 feet tall, is 25.7 feet long, and weighs 5,512 pounds. Commissioned by the town of Vegreville, Alberta, to honour the centennial of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in 1974, a giant pysanka was chosen to exhibit the positive relationship that the RCMP held with early Ukrainian pioneers. Through its colour choices and symbolic designs, the Vegreville Pysanka expresses, “the peace and security the Mounties had offered the area’s pioneers and their descendants.” But this Pysanka has a strong by-product. It is also a symbol of Ukrainians in Canada, their pride in their traditions, and their tie to their cultural homeland, Ukraine.

A pysanka is a Ukrainian Easter egg that is decorated with beeswax and dyes. Using a wax-resist method, the colours, designs and motifs which are “written” on the egg, tell a story, a prayer, or share a message. When commissioned, artist Paul Maxym Sembaliuk chose to tell the pioneer success story through traditional symbolic designs written on Ukrainian pysanky. The size of the egg is not the only significant feature. Rather, people are encouraged to decipher the code (so to speak) and interpret the message that Sembaliuk chose to communicate through pysanky symbols. For instance, on each end of the pysanka there is a sunflower, which symbolizes the Love of God and life.

Paul Sembaliuk was a graphic artist who worked for the Government of Alberta. Through his extensive work, and many years of service, he contributed considerably to the, “visual identity of the province and Ukrainian Canadian community.” In receiving the commission to design and oversee the construction of the Vegreville Pysanka, he planned a rather elaborate motif which, in order to be carried out, ended up being full of mathematical complexities. Sembaliuk consulted Dr. John Ruptash, the Dean of Engineering at Carlton University, who also happened to be his cousin and grew up in the Vegreville area. Ruptash suggested that Sembaliuk collaborate with Professor Ronald Resch, a computer scientist from the University of Utah. Resch and his team of graduate students created several new and innovative computer programs for the project, bringing the Pysanka one step closer to fruition.

Just like the intricacies written on a traditional pysanka, this giant egg is no different. It is a massive, elaborate jigsaw puzzle whereby Sembaliuk chose to use, “...anodized aluminum tiles in the shape of equilateral triangles and star-shaped hexagons, [formed] over an aluminum framework.”¹ The colours of bronze, silver, and gold were used to symbolize prosperity. The bronze colour also symbolizes the earth—“the land on which our forefathers struggled for survival and existence.”

In addition to the huge sunflower motif, there are five distinguishing pysanka symbols that make up the egg’s design and give it an embroidered appearance. The silver bands that divide and wrap around the pysanka have no beginning or end, signifying eternity. On each end of the egg are gold stars. These symbolize life, growth, and prosperity. The three-point triangles (or “stars”) that alternate between silver and gold represent the Holy Trinity. In a lesser way they also represent the family, the faith of family, or the afterlife. On the central part of the barrel of the egg are designs that look like diamonds with six-pointed stars in the middle. These designs signify a windmill and a rich harvest. Finally, the ribbon of silver wolf’s teeth on each end of the dividing bands symbolizes



ARTIST SKY HOFFOS AT THE 2022 FESTIVAL, PHOTO PROVIDED BY: VEGREVILLE PYSANKA FESTIVAL

protection—which would speak to the security that the RCMP provided for the local pioneers.

There is a dedication message written in four languages: Ukrainian, English, French, and German. It reads, “The Pysanka (Easter Egg) symbolizes the harmony, vitality, and culture of the community and is dedicated as a tribute to the one hundredth anniversary of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who brought peace and security to the largest multi-cultural settlement in all of Canada.”²

Whether planning a daytrip or making a quick stop on a road trip, visiting the egg is an enjoyable detour for people of all ages. It is perfect for photo opportunities and is a wonderful place to have a picnic. There is also a park for children to burn off some energy. Every year thousands of tourists stop to either pay homage to their pioneer roots, or take in the site for the first time. If you haven’t seen the Vegreville Pysanka lately, perhaps this year will be a good time to revisit and look upon it with the artist’s eyes.

FUN FACTS ABOUT THE VEGREVILLE PYSANKA:

- As of the year 2000, this pysanka is the second largest in the world; the largest egg is in Kolomyia, Ukraine.
- The Pysanka is like a giant 12,000 (+) piece jigsaw puzzle. It has 3,512 visible facets, 6,978 nuts and bolts, and 177 internal struts.
- There are 524 star patterns and 2,208 triangles on the egg.
- It rests on a 27,000 pound base of concrete and steel, and turns in the wind like a weather vane.
- You can find it along the Yellowhead Highway (at the north side of Alberta Highway 16A in Elk's Park).



This July may be the perfect time to visit the big egg, because it is also the 50th Anniversary of the Vegreville Pysanky Festival. Running on the weekend of July 7 to 9, it promises to be an extra special event.

In the early 1970s citizens of Vegreville spearheaded the idea to create a celebration to honour and showcase the “finest aspects” of Ukrainian culture. Vegreville seemed like the logical location because it was the largest hub of Ukrainian settlement in Alberta. But people didn’t want to just share their culture with others, they wanted younger generations of Ukrainian Canadians to connect with it and learn the richness of their traditions. Creators of the festival also wanted to give Ukrainian Canadians a place to express this cultural understanding through dance, song, and music. Thus, this group brought forth their idea to the Vegreville Chamber of Commerce where it was widely accepted. After thorough planning and several meetings, the Vegreville Cultural Association was organized and incorporated on November 15, 1973. The first Vegreville Ukrainian Festival was held on June 28, 29, and 30 in 1974. It was so successful that the Association agreed to make it an annual event.

Since then, the festival has come to stand for many things, especially the value of the freedom to celebrate one’s ethnicity in Canada. As well, through the celebration of Ukrainian Canadian culture, organizers demonstrate respect and understanding between people of various ethnicities in Alberta. Through its diverse exhibits, the festival encourages dialogue between the cultural community and the greater Canadian community.

The festival boasts annual dance and folk art grandstand shows, pysanka games, a pioneer village, and markets. If you are looking to be impressed by vivid costumes and Ukrainian dance prowess, or you just want to sing along to beloved folksongs at the bandstand, then you won’t want to miss the Pysanka Festival. While there, you can connect with the history of the Ukrainian pioneers while satisfying your craving for a

delectable plate of Ukrainian cuisine (or two). Rain or shine, the *zabava* will go on!

Visit www.pysankafestival.com/festival-2023 or www.pysankafestival.com to plan your visit to the Pysanka Festival. While you are there, make sure to take the five-minute detour and pay homage to the giant Pysanka. Like a homing signal, this Pysanka beckons tourists and Ukrainian Canadians alike and encourages us to reflect on the efforts and dedication of Canada’s earliest Ukrainian pioneers, the security that the RCMP has delivered for generations, and the privilege of having a thriving Ukrainian culture within Canada. 

1. EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/VEGREVILLE_EGG
2. PYSANKY.INFO/HISTORY/VEGREVILLE.HTML

PYSANKA FESTIVAL DANCE COMPETITION MEDALS, PHOTO PROVIDED BY: VEGREVILLE PYSANKA FESTIVAL





PHOTOS PROVIDED BY UKRAINIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE VILLAGE

Festivals That Will Go Down in History

By Izzy Sheptak

Edmonton is Canada's self-proclaimed festival city, hosting celebrations each month dedicated to interests and activities as diverse as ice carving, Caribbean culture, and the circus arts. The city's multitude of festivals lend it a vibrant annual rhythm and seasonality, and provide a welcome respite from the stresses of daily life.

While the many events which populate Edmonton's entertainment scene are enjoyable celebrations featuring a myriad of amusements, they can bring with them the typical hassles of a busy city in summertime full-throttle festival mode. Those who want to enjoy a summer festival season with less traffic and rush should turn their attention to rural festivities! They provide the same excitement but feature lower-density crowds, easier parking, and a pleasant drive on the way over. Festival-goers can choose from a wide selection of festivals in Edmonton's surrounding areas which offer much in the way of demonstrations, music, dance, food, and other amusements. For those who like their festivals with a side of history, the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village has it all.

The Ukrainian Village—familiar to many Edmontonians who fondly recall visits during elementary school field trips—is an open-air museum featuring historic buildings and costumed interpreters that bring to life the rural Ukrainian communities of east-central Alberta during the years 1899 to 1930. On the drive over to the museum twenty-five minutes east of Edmonton, visitors pass the woods and wildlife of Elk Island National Park, perhaps spotting a bison or two, and upon arrival find themselves surrounded by a serene lake, gardens, farm animals, and wildflowers. The Village is a peaceful and educational respite from the hum of city life, and is ideally suited to being, "a unique festival location." It hosts three of its own festivals in the summer months—Celebration of Dance, Music Fest, and Harvest of

the Past—and many more events such as the Vintage Day show and shine and Children's Fun Day—while also often serving as one of a few locations for Ukrainian Day, which is hosted by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Branch (UCC-APC).

Visitors to the Ukrainian Village during the summer months can find the historical interpreters weaving different seasonal practices into their interpretation—filling the farm houses with fruits and flowers to celebrate the Transfiguration, or with leaves, long grasses, and entire trees to celebrate *Zeleni Sviata* or Pentecost. Harvest time, however, is a much larger event which the Village celebrates with its own dedicated festival, Harvest of the Past. The event provides an opportunity for curious festival-goers to observe traditional harvest practices, made possible by the hard work of the historic farming team throughout the spring and summer months. Although tractors had trickled onto the farming scene

FEATURE



FESTIVAL PASSES, PHOTOS PROVIDED BY: UKRAINIAN VILLAGE MUSIC FEST


in Alberta by the early 1920s, many Ukrainians continued to use horses for a number of years, primarily due to the cost and maintenance requirements of a tractor. Therefore, when bringing to life the agricultural practices of early 20th century Ukrainian Canadians, the farming staff ploughs, harrows, seeds, reaps, and binds their crops using historic, horse-drawn implements. Visitors to the Village throughout the summer months may catch a glimpse of the ploughing, harrowing, or seeding of the barley, wheat, and rye, but at Harvest of the Past they are guaranteed the full show of all harvest operations, from the horse-drawn reaper-binder or engine-powered threshing machine to the grain elevator in full swing. The festival is a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the excitement of an old-fashioned threshing bee without any of the sweat and stress typically involved. The weather at the juncture of summer and autumn is often pleasant, with frosty mornings and warm afternoons that envelop visitors in the changing of the seasons. The whirring and rumbling of the threshing machine, the light cloud of dust in the air from the chaff, the horses plodding through the fields or pulling visitors on wagons all infuse the Village with the excitement that comes with reaping the rewards of a summer of hard work. However, the festivities are not just limited to the field! As visitors stroll through the rest of the Village they will find demonstrations of manual threshing in the yards of the farmsteads and preserving and wood-stove cooking in the farmhouses themselves. After spending the day taking part in the fun and working up their appetites, visitors can head



to the front of the Village to buy some Ukrainian food from the Kalyna Kitchen food kiosk, listen to live music, and watch Ukrainian dancing.

Live entertainment takes centre-stage at the two other festivals held at the Ukrainian Village— Music Fest and Celebration of Dance. These events, rather than celebrating a historical seasonal event, showcase contemporary Ukrainian-Canadian culture. Unlike Harvest of the Past, the festivities do not take place in the historic village itself, but in the sprawling, park-like overview zone at the front of the museum. The area features four historic buildings, several monuments, the bandshell, and the Kalyna Kitchen food kiosk. The Village's summer season is kicked off by Celebration of Dance, which is held on Victoria Day and features Ukrainian dance groups from across Alberta. The Music Fest is held in mid-July and is hosted by the Friends of the Ukrainian Village Society. It is a multi-genre festival with a blend of traditional and contemporary Ukrainian Canadian music. With both festivals, visitors are free to wander into the historic village in between watching or participating in the performances held at the bandshell stage.

The Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village festivals are hosted in an idyllic location and have something for everybody away from the hustle and bustle of festival season in the city. Consider adding them to your festival rotation this summer and enjoy all the Village has to offer!

Visit <https://ukrainianvillage.ca/events> to learn more! 

HRUBY

By Izzy Sheptak

VILNA MUSHROOMS, PHOTO BY: AL HUNT



THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSHROOMS

The town of Vilna has the claim to the World's Largest Mushrooms. Built in 1993 by local artists and tradesmen, the steel and fibreglass sculpture of three *Tricholoma ustale* mushrooms stands 20 feet tall and weighs a whopping 18,000 pounds. The sculpture symbolises the excellent mushroom hunting in the area—a practice well-beloved in Ukrainian culture. Mushroom hunting is a passtime the entire family takes part in in the spring and autumn months, with grandparents being the best instructors for the young ones on identifying which mushrooms are poisonous or edible, how to identify them, and how to best eat and preserve them. Ukrainians love mushroom hunting so much they have numerous folk songs dedicated to the topic, which portray foraging as an opportunity for people to get together, show off, and perhaps flirt a little. Mushrooms show up in other important cultural areas as well, being one of the 12 dishes of *Sviat Vechir*, Christmas Eve, supper. In Ukraine there is even a hotel built in the shape of a mushroom! All-in-all, it is easy to say that mushrooms are held in high esteem by Ukrainians, and it makes perfect sense why the predominantly ethnically Ukrainian town of Vilna, meaning freedom, selected them as the subject of their roadside attraction, and, by extension, a symbol of their town.

AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSHROOM HUNTING

If you are looking to try foraging for yourself, it is wise to go with somebody who is experienced in mushroom hunting. There are many fungi which are toxic and telling the edible from the inedible is not always an easy task. We do not recommend eating foraged mushrooms without being 100% confident of their species! If you do not know anybody who is able to be your mushroom guide, you can study up ahead of time by going through a book or website which has visuals of the local variants. There are also foraging apps which can be downloaded to help with easy, instant identification.

Early autumn is the best time to go foraging in Alberta, although there are many mushrooms that can be found in the summer months. It is ideal to go during a dry day following heavy rainfall, and it is best not to wait too long as mushrooms perish quickly. Older mushrooms get infested with worms and must be discarded. Take a paring knife and a basket or ice cream pail with you and be prepared to do lots of walking!

Commonly foraged mushrooms include:

- *Agaricus campestris* (*pecherytsia*) or meadow mushroom
- *Armillaria mellea* (*pidpen'ky*) or honey mushroom, bootlace fungus
- *Boletus edulis* (*bily* or *pravdyvy hryb*) or porcini, cep, king mushroom



BASKET OF WILD MUSHROOMS, PHOTO BY: PXFUEL

- *Boletus luteus* (*masliuk*) or slippery jack, sticky bun
- *Cantharellus cibarius* (*bysyckky*) or chanterelle
- *Lactarius deliciosus* (*ryzhky*) or saffron milkcap
- *Morchella* (*smorzhi*) or morel
- *Sullius granulatis* (*masliuk*) or granulated bolete, ringless slippery jack

Each type of mushroom is best eaten and preserved in a different way based on the texture and flavour of the mushroom. Ukrainians have collected an abundance of recipes that play to the strengths of each type of mushroom, many of which can be found in the cookbooks that abound in every Ukrainian Canadian kitchen. If you've never foraged or cooked with wild mushrooms before, it is most definitely worth a try, and perhaps a trip out to Vilna for some inspiration! Happy travelling, hunting, and eating! 🍄



Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

Ukreations

by **Nikoli the Ukrainian Guy**

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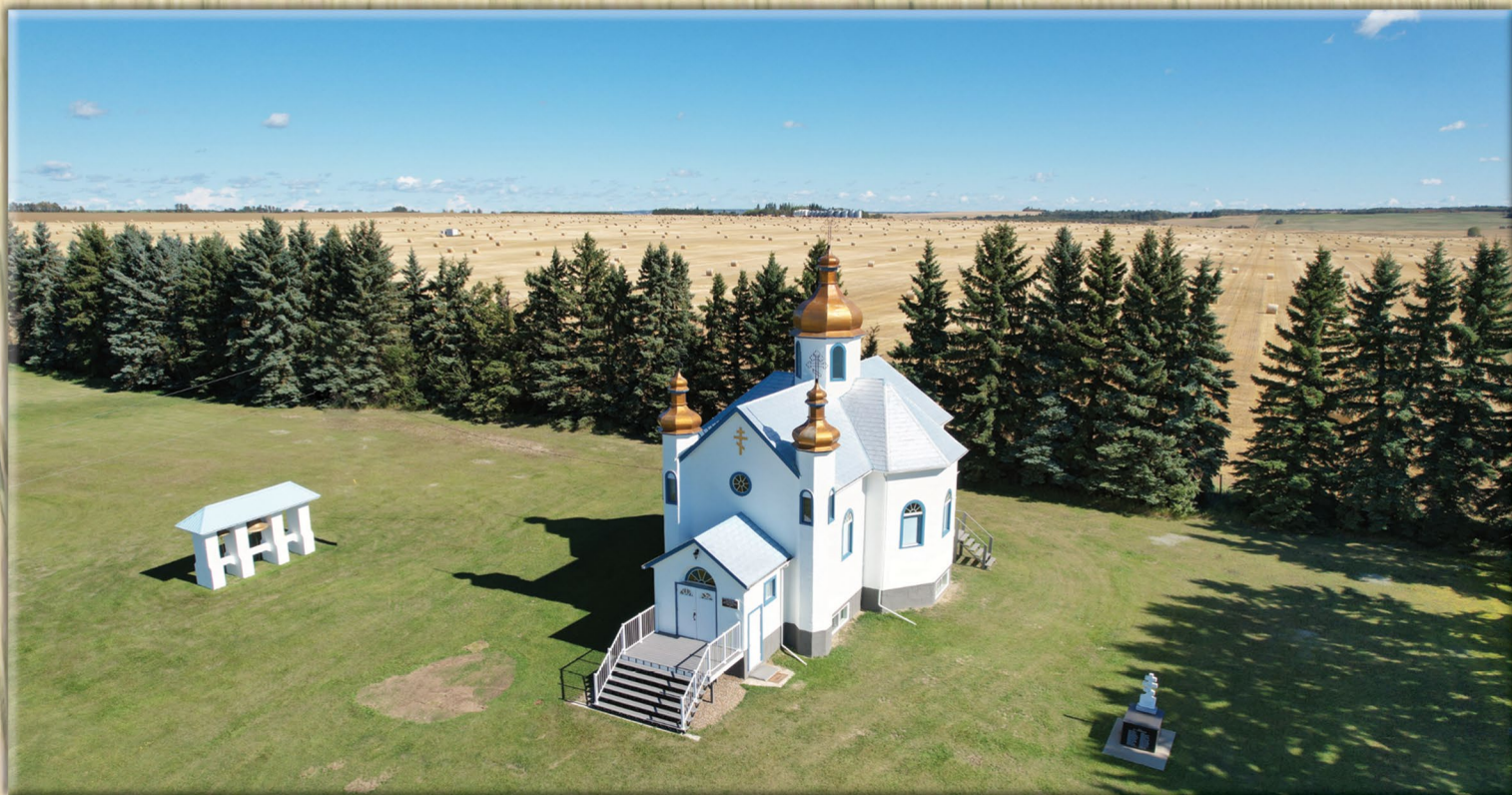
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Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



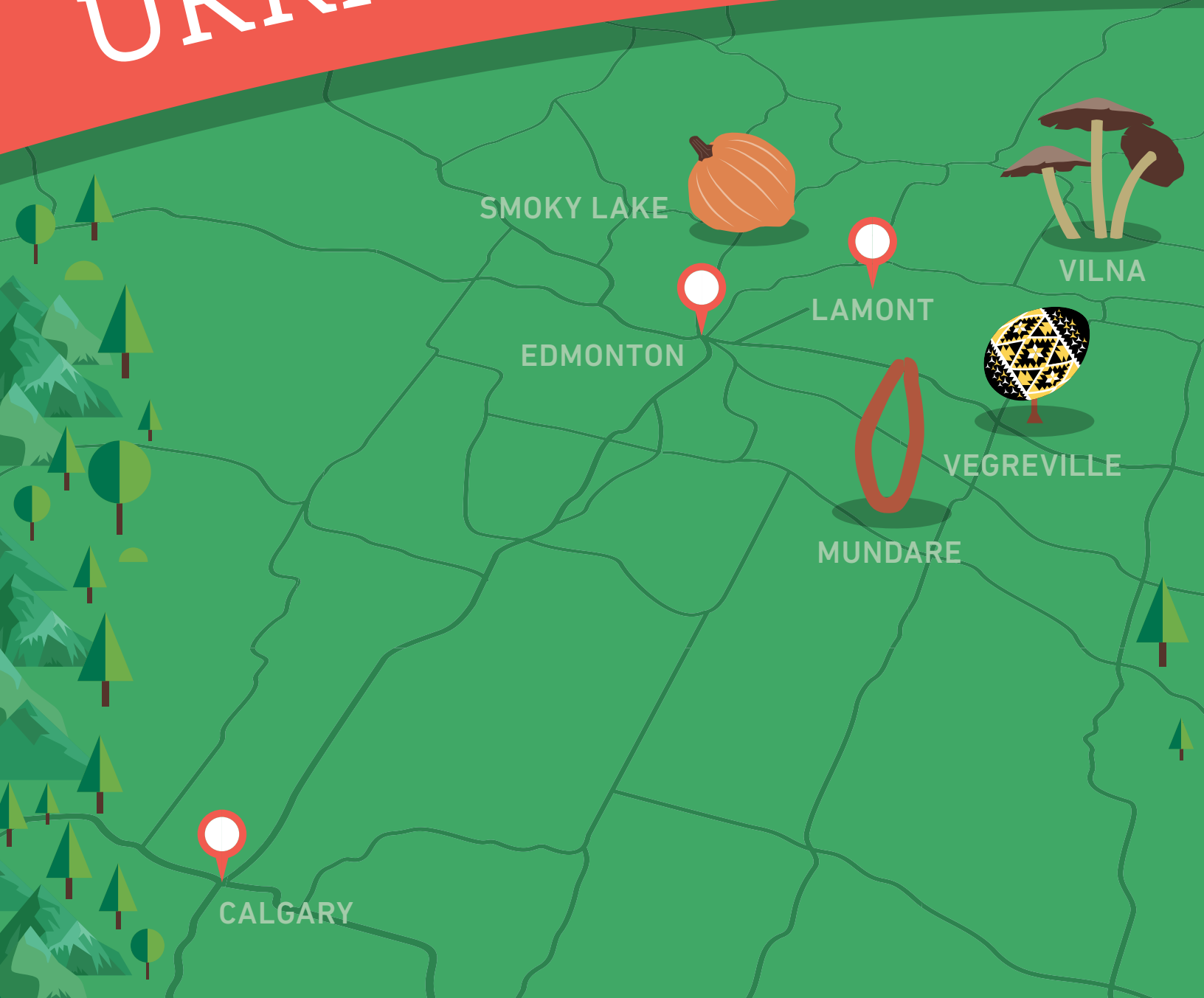
The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing project to record and document the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The earliest immigrants arrived in the late 1890s and continued to come for decades afterwards.

So far, the project has recorded 83 different churches and their cemeteries from six different denominations. Due to declining rural populations and increasing costs, many of these parishes are closing. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these historic churches. Our dedicated project website has:

- Drone and regular high-resolution photos of each church and its cemetery
- Short description and history of each parish and cemetery
- Links to a cemetery website with listings of burials and information on deceased
- Photo galleries with 2,300 images of 65 different churches and their cemeteries
- Videos and video tours of some of the historic churches
- Digitized sacred, festive, traditional and folk Ukrainian music
- Large canvas prints, postcards and cards of these churches are available
- Clean website – no ads, registrations or popups.

Visit: PioneerChurches.ca

UKRAINIAN ROAD



SMOKY LAKE

VILNA

LAMONT

VEGREVILLE

EDMONTON

MUNDARE

CALGARY

TRIP

TAKE A ROAD TRIP TO VISIT ALL OF THE PRAIRIE GIANTS YOURSELF THIS SUMMER!



UKRAINIAN FESTIVAL SCHEDULE 2023

MAY 22

CELEBRATION OF DANCE (UKRAINIAN VILLAGE)

MAY 26-27

UFEST EDMONTON UKRAINIAN FESTIVAL (EDMONTON)

JUNE 3-4

CALGARY UKRAINIAN FESTIVAL (CALGARY)

JULY 7-9

50TH ANNUAL PYSANKA FESTIVAL (VEGREVILLE)

JULY 16

UKRAINIAN VILLAGE MUSIC FEST (UKRAINIAN VILLAGE)

AUGUST 5-7

HERITAGE FESTIVAL (EDMONTON)

AUGUST 20

UKRAINIAN DAY (UKRAINIAN VILLAGE)

AUGUST 27-28

BABAS AND BORSHCH (LAMONT)

LATE SUMMER

GLENDON PYROGY FESTIVAL (GLENDON)

SEPTEMBER 9

HARVEST OF THE PAST (UKRAINIAN VILLAGE)

OCTOBER 6-9

GREAT WHITE NORTH PUMPKIN FAIR (SMOKY LAKE)

GLENDON



MUNDARE SAUSAGE



SMOKY LAKE PUMPKINS



VILNA MUSHROOMS



VEGREVILLE PYSANKA



GLENDON PYROGY

Is that w

By *Joyanne Rudiak*

UKRAINIANS ARE KNOWN FOR MANY THINGS: COLOURFUL PYSANKY, INTRICATE EMBROIDERY, ENERGETIC AND POWERFUL DANCING, AN AWE-INSPIRING FIGHTING SPIRIT, AND SO MUCH MORE.

One of the most popular items, however, is Ukrainian food. You just have to type in “Edmonton Ukrainian Food” into Google and several results pop up, such as Shumka Ukrainian Foods, Malina Ukrainian Bakery, and Yo Baba Ukrainian Foods. One of the more established results is Uncle Ed’s Restaurant in northeast Edmonton. It’s named after the famous Edward Stawnichy, son of Woytko Stawnichy,



What I think it is?

UKRAINIAN FOOD IMMORTALIZED IN RURAL ALBERTA

who took his father's original sausage recipe and smoker, and, together with his wife Jane, grew the business into Mundare's "world-renowned" Stawnichy's Meat Processing.

Stawnichy's Meat Processing has always had a special place in my heart. You always knew it was going to be a good day if, while driving down Highway 16, on our way to Two Hills to visit Baba and Dido, Tato turned on the left-turn signal and veered into Mundare, pulling into one of the parking stalls abreast of SMP. We'd walk into the store and the mouth-watering aroma of all Stawnichy's delicacies would waft over from the display cases. They were filled with meats of all types: award-winning pepperoni, jerky, bacon, and a variety of deli meats. What I was excited for, however, was the classic Mundare sausage. Wrapped in ever-recognizable reddish-brown paper, the well-spiced *kubie* would hardly make it into the truck before my brother and I were begging for a chunk of the still-warm sausage.

Who knew that a ring of the *kovbasa* we always put in our Easter *koshyky* would become the symbol of Mundare in a 12.8-meter fibreglass homage to the Stawnichy family business? Where once I looked out for the water tower with "Mundare" inscribed on its imposing side, now I focus my gaze towards the giant sausage that stands northeast of Main Street. Erected in 2001, the giant sausage became a reality thanks to the Edward E. Stawnichy Charitable Foundation, created in 2000 in order to give back to the community who gave them so much. Why the sausage? No doubt it is the most recognizable deli product to come out of Stawnichy's, as you

can find it in multiple grocery outlets across town if you're hankering for a piece (or two, or three).

Of course, though the *kubie* is tasty – salty and smoky in all the right places – some have their doubts as to whether a ring of the stuff makes for an appropriate monument. This is especially evident by the nickname locals have given the landmark: the "Big Turd." Others see... something else entirely. Regardless of what you call it, however, one can't argue with the fact Mundare's giant *kovbasa* is striking and sure to get people talking, not least of which is how important Ukrainian

HANGING SAUSAGE, PHOTO PROVIDED BY: STAWNICHY'S MUNDARE SAUSAGE HOUSE



food has become to mainstream Canadian culture. *Pyrohy/varennyky* are all the rage – even with the anglicized moniker, *pyrogy* – and some good, old cabbage rolls are to die for. Not only do the lines at Heritage Days and UFest point to this, but so do the popularity of Ukrainian dishes with a twist at more chain-type restaurants, like Boston Pizza’s spicy pyrogy pizza.

If you’re looking for something more traditional, however, and long for the wide-open prairies as a backdrop to some family fun, you can find it at Lamont County’s Babas and Borshch Ukrainian Festival. At about 60 kilometers from the eastern edge of Edmonton, Lamont is closer to the city than Mundare, with just as big a heart for Ukrainian culture and food.



Babas and Borshch’s inception was in 2013, with the inaugural festival held in Andrew, Alberta, to rousing success. After three more years of Ukrainian-style family-fun, the festival moved to the Town of Lamont in 2017. Lamont is Babas and Borshch’s biggest sponsor, and is also dubbed, “the cradle of Ukrainian settlement in Canada,” as the first Ukrainian immigrants to grace the prairies settled in Edna (now known as Star). In fact, this was recognized formally in the recent 2021 twinning ceremony between Lamont and Nebyliv, the region from which the first Ukrainians emigrated. Having a festival take place in the area where the Ukrainian community and culture first established themselves gives attendees a


TRYBZUB UKRAINIAN DANCE SOCIETY IN ACTION, PHOTO PROVIDED BY: BABAS AND BORSHCH



chance to dive into the past on the land that helped Ukrainian people flourish and develop into the dynamic diaspora community we have today.

Babas and Borshch is a two-day festival chock full of delights to entice the senses: various demonstrations, from writing *pysanky* and Ukrainian stage dance to wheat weaving and *kapusta*-making; displays with Ukrainian artifacts, genealogical history, and Ukrainian bilingual programming; a kids’ zone full of activities for the youngest attendees; live music and dancing featuring some of Edmonton’s premier polka bands and Ukrainian dance groups; and presentations on Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history on various topics.

Oh, and did I mention the food? With a delightful food concession and free *borshch* samples, one’s taste buds are sure to be dancing. No doubt the biggest draw, and part of the reason for the name of the festival, is the annual *borshch* cookoff. Nervous hopefuls pre-register to be one of three winners dubbed masters of *borshch* – no mean feat when everyone’s answer to the question, “whose is best?” is the same: Baba’s! This year, in addition to judging different *borshch* samples, there will also be a separate pickle competition, something that makes Donovan Workun – famed Edmontonian improviser and dedicated Borshch Cookoff judge – shed tears of joyful anticipation.

Whether immortalized in a massive sausage monument or by a festival that celebrates *borshch* and our ancestors, there is no doubt that Ukrainian food plays a giant role in announcing to the world who Ukrainian people are, their values and gifts. It is with food that Ukrainian people welcome others into their homes, churches, and communities. By enshrining this hospitality in rural areas, where Ukrainian immigrants first settled, we have the opportunity to dive into the past and look toward the future on the land that gave Ukrainians these fruits. Or, at the very least, we can stand in front of Mundare’s giant sausage, scratch our heads, and remark, “You know, that kind of looks like a...” 



BABA’S BAZAAR, PHOTO PROVIDED BY: BABAS AND BORSHCH

Smoky Lake Pumpkins


By Izzy Sheptak

Smoky Lake may not have a roadside attraction counted among “The World’s Largest,” but the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Park’s six massive concrete pumpkins are impressive nonetheless. What is even more impressive is what these pumpkins pay homage to—the town’s legacy as the Pumpkin Capital of Alberta, a moniker well-earned by the record-breaking produce that has made its way through the town’s annual Great White North Pumpkin Fair. Contestants come from across Alberta and neighbouring provinces to participate, some being known to travel from over 1000 kilometres away to participate in the event, bringing

their pumpkins, squash, and gourds to compete in the weigh-off. At the most recent weigh-off, Donald Crews of Lloydminster broke the record for the largest pumpkin ever grown in Canada, with his pumpkin coming in at 2,537 pounds. The pumpkin is the eighth heaviest in world history! However, while pumpkins have a positive association with the town of Smoky Lake and the beauty of autumn, in Ukrainian culture they have another, less desirable connotation. Traditionally, if a young man asked a girl to marry him and she rejected his proposal, she would turn him down by giving him a pumpkin. One can only



PUMPKIN PARK WALK, PHOTO PROVIDED BY: MAYURI SALIL

imagine how devastating such a rejection would be if Ukrainians 100 years ago had been growing pumpkins the size of those that now compete at the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Fair! This year the town is celebrating its 100th anniversary, and its Fair will be back from October 6th to 9th. In addition to the weigh-off, the Fair will feature pancake breakfasts, a petting zoo, a show and shine, a large farmers' market, garage sales, a corn maze, beer gardens, food trucks, a pig roast, and more! 

Written & Directed by
Mariana Markovska &
Maryna Khomutova

Directed by
Larisa Semaliuk

Production Design by
Daniela Meszler

First Métis Man of Odesa

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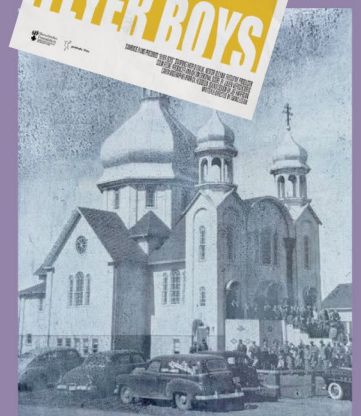
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FEATURE

BIG CITY CELEBRATIONS

By Tamara Soltykevych

EDMONTON IS PROUD TO HAVE ITS OWN CELEBRATION OF UKRAINIAN CULTURE, KNOWN AS UFEST, THAT OCCURS ANNUALLY AT THE END OF MAY. HOWEVER, IT IS A FAIRLY NEW FESTIVAL, AND IT IS LIKELY THAT MANY PEOPLE WOULD SAY IT IS WAY PAST DUE, ESPECIALLY FOR A CITY WITH SUCH A SIGNIFICANT UKRAINIAN POPULATION.

In 2014, inspired after returning from the Toronto Ukrainian Festival, Daria Luciw began speaking with family and friends about the possibility of an Edmonton Ukrainian festival. In January of 2015, Daria invited leaders from Edmonton's Ukrainian cultural scene to a meeting to gauge the level of interest in such an undertaking. After that, Daria and Christine Teterenko continued the conversation. With the support of their families, they began meeting with other key individuals including Steven Chwok, Adrian Warchola, Ann Slevinsky, and Monica Palahniuk. In July 2016, the Edmonton Ukrainian Festival Society was legally formed and the first UFest was held in May 2018 with great success. The organizers were happily surprised that there was such an overwhelming response to the festival; the number of performers, food and retail vendors, volunteers, and attendees were all much higher than anticipated. After the 2019 UFest, the committee began making plans to move the next festival to the east end of Borden Park to accommodate a larger space, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced those plans to a standstill. After cancelling UFest in 2020 and sensing that restrictions would remain in place for a while, the organizers created "UFest at Home" to keep the excitement and momentum going. This was a bi-weekly series of short videos led by Adrian Warchola that showcased new and lesser-known aspects of the Ukrainian community, including a Ukrainian tattoo artist, *Motanky* doll making, holiday traditions, and many more. There were 10 installments of "UFest at Home" between October 2020

CALGARY UKRAINIAN FESTIVAL JUNE 2016, PHOTO BY: CAYDENCE PHOTOGRAPHY



CALGARY UKRAINIAN FESTIVAL, PHOTO BY: CAYDENCEPHOTOGRAPHY

and March 2021, which all remain available for viewing online. UFest was ready to relaunch in May 2021, however, the ongoing pandemic required the festival to be cancelled again. In May 2022, UFest officially returned and enjoyed great success, with about 50,000 attendees over the two-day event.


UFest's vision is to offer, "the largest celebration of Ukrainian spirit in Alberta, showcasing the best of Ukrainian arts and culture." And they do just that. Over the two-day celebration in central Edmonton, hundreds of performers take to the stage to wow audiences with cultural song and dance. But, there is much more than performances – the festival has a market with Ukrainian crafts and merchandise for sale, food vendors, displays, beer gardens, and more. Since 2018, UFest has evolved significantly, with growing opportunities for vendors and community organizations, increased activities for children and hands-on cultural craft activities, more community organizations profiling their important work, and more opportunities for local businesses to sponsor and profile their company with this dynamic event. This year's UFest is on May 26 and 27, 2023 at Borden Park, 11020 75a St NW in Edmonton. And take note - they are always looking for new volunteers - including recent newcomers from Ukraine! Regardless of language skills, there are opportunities for everyone. The committee is always scouting for new entertainment and activity ideas for the festival, and suggestions are always welcome.

Not long after UFest, another exciting festival kicks off in southern Alberta – the Calgary Ukrainian Festival. This two-day event aims to celebrate and promote Calgary's Ukrainian culture by offering an inclusive and welcoming festival full of Ukrainian arts and culture. Its mission is to, "provide to the citizens of Calgary an informative, educational, and entertaining festival that celebrates all aspects of our unique and rich Ukrainian heritage." The festival pays homage to the rich culture that Ukrainian immigrants brought to Canada over 125 years ago. The catalyst for the festival was when a fellow by the name of Darren Lemke approached two members from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) Calgary, Mike Ilnycky and Mike Hantsch, with the idea. However, it was determined that this type of event would not be aligned with UCC's goals, and an exploratory committee was created. After three years of meetings and securing funding commitments, they formed the festival board. The first Calgary Ukrainian Festival was held in 2010 in a small northwest community centre with nine vendors and was greatly successful. After that, the festival moved to the Acadia Recreation Complex (ARC), a much larger space with ample parking and access to public transit. The Calgary Ukrainian Festival has been building momentum each year, reaching attendance numbers in excess of 3,000 people over the two-day festival. It now occupies six areas in the complex, offering over 20 vendors and several local community tables. The only exception to this was during the COVID-19 pandemic

when the festival had no option but to move online. It was offered virtually through a live stream on Facebook and a delayed stream on YouTube the weekend of June 13 and 14, with almost 2,000 Canadian viewers, several from Ukraine and the United States, and several from other countries. Calgary's virtual festival hosted several dance groups performing at their own homes, offered craft demonstrations and promoted local businesses. The online festival even offered a virtual *kolomeyka* so you could dance along at home!

In 2021, the festival sold about 400 Ukrainian dinners through a pyrogy drive-through where patrons could pick up their dinner and listen to live music. In 2022, the Calgary Ukrainian Festival took a brief hiatus since they did not have enough time to prepare for a June festival after pandemic restrictions were lifted in March 2022. Furthermore, the Ukrainian community was focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since then, the Board has taken time to regroup and set a strong foundation for its comeback in 2023. This year, the festival has expanded and has more to offer than ever. There's a market offering a wide variety of Ukrainian merchandise, a community table exhibition where local groups can showcase themselves and build relationships with their fellow community members, food kiosks, live demonstrations and children's activities, and of course,

several live shows throughout the day featuring Ukrainian performers from Western Canada. There is also an after-hours party, commonly referred to as a *zabava*, where you can dance the night away to lively Ukrainian music. This year's festival takes place on Saturday, June 3, from 10 am to 12 am and Sunday, June 4, from 10 am to 6 pm at the Acadia Recreation Complex, 240 90 Ave SW in Calgary.

Each year, Ukrainian Albertans have been proudly celebrating Ukrainian Independence Day on August 24. The UCC-APC typically organizes an event to mark Independence Day with celebrations in several local cities. However, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this day has become even more significant. In August 2022, people across the world honored the ongoing courage and sacrifices of the Ukrainian people. The UCC called on municipal governments to hold flag raising ceremonies at city halls, and to light public monuments, buildings and signs in blue and yellow. In Edmonton, the UCC held a concert at CYM Hall and also commemorated Independence Day at the Babas and Borschch Ukrainian festival in Lamont. The exact details of this year's event are still being confirmed, so continue to check the UCC-APC's website and social media platforms for the latest information. 

U FEST 2022

U FEST 2022



CALGARY UKRAINIAN FESTIVAL, PHOTO BY: CAYDENCE PHOTOGRAPHY

U FEST 2022

PYROGY POWER

HOW THE PYROGY PUT GLENDON ON THE MAP

By Lizzy Taylor

Perched on a giant fork, the Glendon Pyrogy stands 25 feet tall, weighing in at a hefty 6,000 pounds of fibreglass and steel. The pyrogy had a simple purpose: to bring tourists into the village of Glendon. The 1970s and '80s had seen an explosion of giant sculptures across Alberta's small towns, and Glendon's mayor wanted in on the game. The only question was, what would be Glendon's claim to fame?

As told by the late former mayor Johnnie Doonanco in CBC's *Big Things Small Towns* in 2019, "After a curling game, we were talking about what we could get [to save the town from dying]. We were eating pyrogies at the time." And so, the idea of the giant pyrogy was born, alongside the formation of the official Pyrogy Committee spearheaded by Mayor Doonanco.

Initial designs for the pyrogy imagined a smaller, bronze "four-metre sculpted Ukrainian dumpling," according to a March 1991 Edmonton Journal article. When it was realized that bronze would be too heavy, the design was adapted to fibreglass and steel. Missing from these original designs was one important utensil: the giant fork. While the fork allows for the pyrogy to be lifted high in the sky, it also provided much-needed context for the sculpture. Without the fork, many who






PHOTO PROVIDED BY: PEROGY ON A FORK RESTAURANT

viewed the original design felt it bore an unfortunate resemblance to another familiar sight, a cow pie.

While the cow pie look-alike issue was resolved, not everyone in Glendon was on board with the sculpture, with some Glendon citizens going so far as to hold an unofficial survey to stop its construction. However, the potential power of the pyrogy as a tourist attraction won out, and the \$69,000 sculpture was funded largely in part by community donations. Those who donated were commemorated by the plaque at the base of the statue.

The giant pyrogy was unveiled on August 31, 1991, marking the start of Glendon's inaugural Pyrogy Festival. To commemorate the day of celebration, Glendon also put together a time capsule of mementos. In 2016 that time capsule was opened as part of the festival's 25th anniversary and reburied


the next year. This new time capsule is set to be opened in 2042, full of videos, photos, newspapers and more.

Last summer marked the return of the festival after its postponement due to the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In past years, the festival has brought together over 500 people for celebration in Pyrogy Park, including a trade show, live music, and a pyrogy eating contest. For a village of 496, the Pyrogy Festival is one of the biggest days for the community, bringing in people to celebrate the village and enjoy local music, businesses, and of course, eat a lot of pyrogy. Based on previous years, this year's festival will take place on Labour Day weekend, so mark your calendars and plan to go celebrate an iconic Ukrainian food! 

MEET THE STAFF

Izzy Sheptak

Izzy Sheptak began working with ACUA as a coordinator for *ACUA Vitae* in May 2020, and has stayed on as a gallery assistant and writer since then. She first became involved in ACUA at a young age, helping her mother Lyrissa Sheptak, a regular contributor to *ACUA Vitae*, run pysanka workshops at the gallery.

Izzy is going into her fourth year at the University of Alberta. She is in the Faculty of Arts, taking her major in anthropology and her minor in theology. She is passionate about pysanka writing and textile arts. 



SHUMKA for Everyone

Summer 2023

SHUMKA SUMMER DANCE CAMPS is an internationally attended program offering camps for every taste, age, and ability. We inspire dancers to pursue the art of Ukrainian dance and become passionate about Ukrainian culture while making friends, having fun, and improving their abilities. Choose from a one-week day camp experience and a one or two-week overnight adventure at Wabamun Lake. Camps available for youth ages 3-18 and seniors 55+.

Fall 2023

SHUMKA'S SILVER SWANS is an opportunity for adults of all ages to enjoy safe and inclusive ballet and movement classes, and to experience firsthand the benefits of dance in improving health and well being.

A success since it began in 2016, **SENIORS CAN SHUMKA** offers seniors an opportunity to enjoy Ukrainian music and movement in a weekly program of fun and fitness.

SENIORS CAN SALSA is a safe and feasible exercise program for older adults that enhances strength and balance. Meet great people, try something new, and move your body to the exciting beat of Latin rhythms.

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