

Missouri Folk Arts Program

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One hundred and fifty years ago, President Lincoln signed a legislative act sponsored by Congressman Justin S. Morrill, ultimately establishing land grant universities across the country to broaden access to higher education “for all social classes.” Forty-five years ago, folklorist Ralph Rinzler co-founded the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, a living museum held outdoors each summer on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and billed as “an exercise in cultural democracy.” This summer, those two milestones and missions came together as the University of Missouri and over two dozen public land grant universities gathered to illustrate

the largest of the 2012 festival’s themes: “Campus and Community.” Smithsonian curators helped MU staff develop activities, exhibits, lectures, demonstrations, and performances to showcase the ways a twenty-first century land grant university “puts research into action.” To coordinate Missouri’s contributions to the festival, I partnered with LuAnne Roth, folklorist and Mizzou Advantage education coordinator, along with a team including Ana Compain-Romero of University Affairs; Jo Britt-Rankin, facilitator for MU’s Food for the Future initiative; J. Sanford Rikoon of Rural Sociology; and Letitia Johnson and Lisa

Palmer on behalf of the Mississippi River Hills Association in Ste. Genevieve. MU Folklore graduate student Claire Schmidt also provided assistance. After a year of planning, drafting, brainstorming, building, organizing, coordinating, and staging, MU and our peers from all corners of the U.S. welcomed visitors at several venues within the festival. From Reunion Hall and Smithsonian U (a site for short, engaging lectures) to the Test Kitchen, Morrill Stage, and The Commons, MU staff engaged thousands of festival visitors, despite a major heat wave and historic storm that closed the festival for an entire day.

Photos courtesy of MU University Affairs; photo credit, MU alum Lisa Knipp.



Dennis Stroughmatt et L’Esprit Creole performed “Missouri French” tunes at the Justin S. Morrill Performing Arts Center, a venue with seating for 500 and a large dance floor. “Missouri French” music is an old tradition in a southeast Missouri region roughly between Old Mines and Ste. Genevieve. Audiences also enjoyed the University of Texas-Pan American’s Mariachi Aztlan; University of Hawai’i’s Tuahine Troupe and Unukupukupu; and—believe it or not—West Virginia University’s Trinidadian Steel Drum Band.



Stroughmatt joined Natalie Villmer, an Old Mines, Mo. native, under a wooden arbor called The Commons, a narrative or “talk stage.” As presenter, I encouraged them to share stories about traditional life around Old Mines, including roving parties that traveled from door to door for *La Guillanee*, an irreverent New Year’s mumming custom. Barry Bergey, National Endowment for the Arts’ director of folk and traditional arts (a Missouri native and MU alum), observes from the audience.



This die-hard MU Tiger family learned about the Mississippi River Hills Association, an economic development organization and collaboration between MU Extension and local businesses. MRHA promotes agricultural tourism grounded in culture and terroir, or taste of place, along the great river. Local partners include the Bolduc House Museum and the Saxon Lutheran Memorial, representing the regional French and German history.



No folklife festival is complete without foodways, or culinary traditions. Campus and Community featured this “Test Kitchen.” MU Extension representatives Stacy Robb and Cindy DeBlauw join forces at the stove to prepare and talk about recipes from the consumer guidebooks and mobile app “Seasonal and Simple.” They cooked up a healthy and tasty adaptation of French toast, a recipe showcased on the festival’s “Recipe of the Day” blog.



Festival curators also created Reunion Hall, a designated area for universities’ alumni to check-in and share stories about their experiences at land grant universities. Chancellor Deaton and Dr. Anne Deaton visited on day three of the ten-day event. LuAnne Roth points out cards on MU’s wall signed by Mizzou alum, as well as some faculty, staff, and a few proud parents.



MU featured Extension projects in our large tent under our “Seasonal and Simple: A Taste of Place” banner. Extension staff introduced festival visitors to several projects that highlight the economics, culture, and production of food in the state. Project manager Stacy Robb assists visitors with the new “Seasonal and Simple” mobile app for smartphones, which helps consumers identify, locate, and prepare local produce in Missouri.

For more information, visit the Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s website and Facebook page.