Germans from Russia to host final Musik Fest

Musik Fest set for June 5 in Beulah

BY KATHY TANBERG

Final is a tough word to say sometimes. But it has come, a day that has been thought about for the past few years, the day the Deutsche Stammhalter Chapter of Germans from Russia have announced that the 40th annual Musik Fest held the first weekend of June each year in Beulah will be the last.

Chapter President Wilbert Harrsch said it's something that has been discussed for the past four years. Each year they delayed it another with hopes to at least continue the last two or three years. Unfortunately, it didn't work out. Their hope was to share in this day of German-Russian heritage that begins at 1 p.m. in the Beulah Middle School gymnasium. You don't need to be German to enjoy the event that includes music in both German and English languages, speakers, mid-afternoon coffee and homemade goodies and the popular Fleischkuechla feed at 5 p.m.

Harrsch contributes the end of the Musik Fest to many factors, including the fact that many of the younger generation aren't as interested in the heritage and genealogy as the older generation whose parents came from the old country were.

“arlier generation also doesn’t understand the Germans from Russia. In many ways they think to do many things and few think of them to go. They need to decide what time to do. It’s the same thing. It’s not that they don’t do it. It’s just that they don’t do it.,” Schielke, also local chapter secretary, said.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The roots of the local chapter didn't begin until 1969. Before this time, a chapter in North Dakota had already been formed. In 1963, a chapter was formed in Bismarck. In 1964, a chapter was formed in North Dakota and was planning to organize one in Beulah.

Harrison resident, Catherine Scheibline, who happen to be Irish and not German, saw an ad in a Bismarck newspaper from the North Dakota chapter. She had organized a group of 42 people in Colorado and were planning to organize one in Beulah.

Sekielske called Beulah resident Tim Dettmann and encouraged him to organize a Musik Fest meeting that would explain more.

Dettmann attended this meeting, which was his first, and decided to see if there was enough interest in North Dakota to organize a group. Judge Of course Blash, who lived in Bismarck, and Arland and Elaine Bauer of Fargo, were both very instrumental in the organization of the first international group in North Dakota.

Oficially the state articles of incorporation were accepted on July 11, 1971. Dettmann was a charter board member of the newly organized chapter.

It was Dettmann's idea to have a “Germans from Russia Musik Fest” in North Dakota. The board members of the chapter met with Gerte Buscher, to help get it started. Buscher in turn approached the Beulah board members and they agreed to sponsor the Musik Fest.

The Boosters paid for all of the advertising, for the bachen and kaffeine hour and any additional expenses. According to member Ed Kütte, Beulah the first Musik Fest was on May 29, 1972. That day they had a wedding with a mock wedding, Hochzeit, which became quite popular with family reunions and anniversaries.

The first Musik Fest, held in 1971, had more than 800 people in attendance from a large region, not just from Mercer County, according to chapter records. The purpose of the Musik Fest was to help preserve the German-Russian songs of the past.

In the early years, and in the years that followed, the program was devoted to background history.

“Especially important was trying to hold on to the music and the old ethnic sound, which was going on. It was very important to this community, as well as the history of these people who had a homelander of their own.

Throughout the years the German singing has been the greatest part of the Musik Fest programs. Audience singing was always a special treat for many people with this being the only time for many to sing the songs that were so familiar to their early years.

The afternoon sessions were always devoted to religious music and speaker on the subject of the day. The evening was for the lighter side, humor and folk songs. German-Russian humor was always a big hit as it has remained to this day.

Throughout the years, many have served as the leaders of the events. Curtis Schulz served as emcee for 14 years. The Rev. Schumacher served for two programs during the second- and third-year programs. Kütte served two years and Buscher did one year.

Gilbert Ost, emcee for the past 20 years, has the language in a dialect that all understood, and he could tell the German stories to everyone’s delight.

The Boosters continued to help with the Musik Fest until 1975 when the local chapter, called the Beulah Chapter at that time, was organized. Chartered members were: Albert Hoffmann, Sam Miller Jr., Jake Roeb, Buscher, Ernest R. Hafner, Leo Wiedrich, Leona Weil, Edwin Kütte, Dettmann, F.K. Fleen, Mr. and Mrs. Gottlieb Salier, Theo Helms, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Ost, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Jager, and Mr. and Mrs. Gottlieb Wiedrich. All are of Beulah, except for Wiedrich, who was from Yapen.

Other years there continued to be as many as 500 attendants at the Musik Fest each year.

The local chapter has tried different things over the years to change it up for the public. For many years the VFW hosted an old dance.

The Musik Fest in Beulah has been a great success. It has given people a chance to see the heritage of the old country and the music that went with it.

“vi always thought we wouldn’t end, there’s too much to do and too few who want to do anything. But it’s a big part of our heritage. I hate to see it go.”

Vi Schielke