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FESTIVAL PROVIDES UNDERGRADUATES A UNIQUE LEADERSHIP & LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In a one-of-a-kind course extending far beyond classroom instruction, a team of Rutgers University undergraduate students will spend the spring semester planning and executing the annual New Jersey Folk Festival. The team of 13 students is responsible for organizing the display of over 20 musical groups and acts, 25 food vendors, and 75 craft vendors at this one-day, eight-hour event to be enjoyed by 15,000 visitors on the university’s campus.

The New Jersey Folk Festival has been student-run in each of its 34 years in existence. This free family event is the end result of a unique class offered by the American Studies Department at Rutgers in New Brunswick. In the class, Folk Festival Management, students are educated in the numerous aspects of producing a folk festival, from academic portions such as folklore and historical studies, to practical components like booking acts and stage management, handling finances, and effective public speaking skills. The students are responsible for continuing the festival’s mission of celebrating the diverse multi-cultural and indigenous folk life of New Jersey and the surrounding area.

Each student coordinator is designated a specific job or function, but only through working together can the committee achieve its final objectives, as they form a close-knit bond on the way to putting together the event. Class assembles once a week in a conference-style atmosphere, with the first half of the session devoted to the teaching of folk studies as well as strategies for publicizing the event, managing contacts with performers, and other production details. The final 90 minutes are set up as a business meeting in which deadlines, tasks, and problems are discussed and resolved. Through this process, students are continually improving their abilities in time management, problem-solving, organization, written and verbal communication, and countless other skills to carry with them after graduation. With a staff composed predominantly of young women, working as a member of the folk festival committee provides real-world leadership experience that proves to be valuable to the lives and careers of all those involved in whatever field they may enter.

The 2008 committee includes Garrett Broad, Festival Manager; Lynn Fiore, Finance Coordinator;
Elizabeth Halgash, Skylands Stage Coordinator; Kolleen Whitley, Heritage Coordinator; Meagan Ratini, Shore Stage Coordinator; Monica Garreau, Web Coordinator; Kate Burkholder, Media Coordinator; Catherine Rossi, Food Vendor Coordinator; Nadine Younes, Crafts Coordinator; Andy Glaser, Pinelands Stage Coordinator; Melody Wilding, Children’s Specialist; Stacey Balkun, Graphics Coordinator; and Mark DiGiovanni, Program Book Coordinator. The student coordinators are led by Faculty Advisors Angus K. Gillespie, professor of American Studies, and Erin Clarke, Assistant Director and a former coordinator.

Saturday, April 26, 2008, is the date for the 34th annual New Jersey Folk Festival, this year with a special highlight on German-American heritage and traditions. Festival performers include Jim Murphy & the Pine Barons; Bernie’s Orchestra; the Bayern Verein Newark Dance Group; and the Goschenhoppen Strolling Fiddlers, among others. German heritage will also be showcased through the knowledge of Professor William Donner’s “Who Are the Pennsylvania Germans,” and Dr. Simon Bronner’s “The Pennsylvania German Story.” Keeping up with the year’s current events, Roger Deitz will discuss “Political Songs in an Election Year” at the festival. Pipers Frank Watson, Philip Mylod, Rik Paleiri; folk artists Jim Albertson and the Spook Handy Trio; the Dukes of Destiny; Saul Broudy; and the Ong’s Hat String Band will be on hand to celebrate the musical and artistic traditions. Throughout the day, over 20 performers will sing, dance, and play at the festival, held rain or shine, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., on the grounds of the Eagleton Institute on the Douglass campus of Rutgers University, George Street and Ryders Lane, in New Brunswick.

In addition to the three stages of music, dance, workshops, and a wide array of American and ethnic food vendors, the festival offers a diverse craft market of approximately 75 booths, craft demonstrators, and a folk marketplace – where performer CDs and information on area folk concerts are available. For children, there is a designated activities area with games, a clown, a juggler and crafts to make and take. The festival will also feature appearances by the Rutgers Army ROTC and the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is the oldest and largest continuously-held festival of its kind in the state. Wheelchair accessible, it offers selected programs with ASL interpretation; large-print program books and audio assists are also available. Preferred parking is a nominal $5 charge.

The 2008 New Jersey Folk Festival is presented by Rutgers University and Douglass Residential College. It is sponsored in part by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Additional sponsorship is provided by The Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs of Rutgers, Picture-It Awards, Inc., the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, the City of New Brunswick Department of Parks, the Indian Cultural Society of East Brunswick, and CF Martin and Company. The festival is produced by the Department of American Studies at Rutgers, The State University, under the technical direction of Angus K. Gillespie and Erin Clarke.

For further details, including stage schedules and directions, visit the web at http://njfolkfest.rutgers.edu or call the festival office at (732)-932-5775 or Rutgers Campus Info Services at (732)-932-INFO.

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