

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

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For immediate release

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THE ANNUAL NEW JERSEY FOLK FESTIVAL CELEBRATES 35TH ANNIVERSARY

The annual New Jersey Folk Festival is celebrating its 35th Anniversary this year and is celebrating old ways in New Jersey. Admission is free for this all-day family event, which will take place on Saturday, April 25, 2009 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., rain or shine, on the grounds of the Eagleton Institute, George Street and Ryders Lane, on the Douglass Campus of Rutgers, the State University, in New Brunswick.

The festival will be featuring a variety of different ethnic musical acts and demonstrations. “The Mother of Folk Music” Jean Ritchie will receive the 2009 *Lifetime Achievement Award* at the festival. Jean Ritchie earned this honor because of her contributions to American folk music. It is impossible to place one label on Jean Ritchie, a traditional musician by virtue of her life and works, but also a commercial performer, author, recording artist, composer, and folk music collector.

The festival is also excited to be presenting an authentic replica of the New Jersey Devil, as seen on The History Channel special *Monster Quest: Devils in New Jersey*. The program recruited sculptor Mike Melillo of Clark, New Jersey and comic book artist Frank Thorne of Scotch Plains, New Jersey to create a three-dimensional version of the Jersey Devil. Thorne was responsible for drawing the creature based upon the eyewitness accounts from an Egg Harbor Township family in 2004. Melillo then took Thorne's sketch and constructed a sculpture from a variety of materials, including PVC pipe, insulation foam and liquid latex. The project, which took three weeks to build stands 5 feet tall. Thorne pointed out that most Jersey Devil images in existence were not made by professional artists, “This is the first time that it's been realized by experienced, practiced image makers,” he said.

Also coming is musical group Atzilut, a ten-member high energy Middle Eastern ensemble that features Arab and Jewish musicians in concert together to make a powerful statement for peace through shared music. This project exemplifies the potential for artistic collaboration and shared creativity that emerges when musicians representing two traditions with common roots, overcome conflict to celebrate hope and trust through music. The resulting musical collaboration is infectious, joyous, deep, sweet and passionate. The performance becomes an inspiring statement of triumph of shared creativity over despair.

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Adding to the eclectic mix of this years festival performers is Bajaly Suso, from The Gambia, a kora player and singer of the Griot caste, hereditary storytellers, musicians, artists and historians of the West African Mandinka empire. He has inherited the tradition of the kora from his father, who in turn learned from his father, who learned from generations of ancestors, from the first known kora player, Moussa Suso, his ancestor. He sings ancient songs relaying the history of Mandinka West Africa, as well as original songs both based on traditional themes such as stories of ancient battles or historical figures, and about contemporary life, even including the events of today, making every performance unique.

A Violanta Street Organ, hosted by Johanna Vanderheysen, will also be at the festival. The organ originally constructed by the Limonaire Brothers in Paris, France, was deconstructed and hidden in pieces from the Nazis during World War II. It was then reconstructed in Holland after the war ended. This intricate mechanical organ was originally designed to play in a carousel, but was then converted to a street organ. The interior and all of the inner workings of the organ are visible. The Organ uses program books inserted into a player that directs special pipes to play at a specific time. These special pipes are constructed to assemble the sounds of flutes, drums, violins and even cymbals.

Bill Hamilton, a Long Island Brookhaven Bayman, will be coming to the festival this year as well. Bill has extensive expertise on all aspects of Bay Fishing. This legendary fisherman also serves as the Vice President of the Brookhaven Baymen's Association, a non-profit organization with the intentions to conserve the rights of Long Island Fisherman's ways of life. Bill has much experience in pound traps and fyke nets, with expertise in boat building, particularly garvies and sharpies.

The Renaissance Art Puppet Company, based in Norristown, PA, have been in business for over fifty years, providing quality educational programs and entertainment for kids of all ages. The Puppet Company has put on many shows throughout the tri-state area and various types of theatrical performances, all using their own custom designed and intricate hand made puppets. The Renaissance Art Puppet Company has much to offer festival attendees, varying from their many types of theatrical puppetry, to the educational and entertainment shows; surely something for all to enjoy!

The festival is also excited to be presenting the Sea Rats Atlantic, a group of historical re-enactors who recreate aspects of the Golden Age of Piracy, which lasted from 1690-1730. Sea Rats Atlantic have done extensive research to ensure their presentations are historically accurate as well as using theatrical elements for additional entertainment. Demonstrations will be given throughout the day on basic tactics and maneuvering techniques, not to mention mischief and mayhem.

Festival attendees will get the chance to sample both American and ethnic food throughout the day. In addition to four stages of music, dance, workshops and a wide array of American and ethnic food vendors, the festival also offers a diverse craft market of approximately 75 booths, craft demonstrators and a folk marketplace where performer CDs and information on area folk organizations are available. For children, there is a designated activities area with games, a clown, and free crafts to make and take.

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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.

The 2009 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 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.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is proud to be a key component of Rutgers Day, a day of learning, exploration, and fun at New Jersey's State University. The Folk Festival is the main attraction of Rutgers Day on the Douglass Campus, but visitors are encouraged to check out the many workshops and live performances at the other Rutgers campuses throughout the day—all designed to demonstrate the impact and value of our world-class university. Admission, parking, and on-campus bus shuttles are all free. For further details, including stage schedules and directions, visit the web at njfolkfest.rutgers.edu or call the festival office at (732)-932-5775 or Rutgers Campus Info Services at (732)-445-INFO.