A tradition full of heritage

Walhalla Oktoberfest Dancers:

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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WALHALLA — For Carolina Hoadley, directing her Oktoberfest Dancers means more than just putting on a good show.

For her and many of the people in her dance troupe, a German heritage is ever present.

"My great, great grandfather and mother were members of the group that founded Walhalla," she said. "Henning Peter Thode and Katrina Dorethea Von Stelling were both from Hanover, Germany."

The Walhalla Oktoberfest Dancers, a sub group of the Moving Company Dance Group also in Walhalla, has been performing for 17 years.

They showcase authentic Bavarian dances, many of which were created and made popular where the original Oktoberfests were held overseas.

"Southern Germany specifically," she said. "The main dances we do include the polka and the 'Seven Step,' which is an old German folk dance. We also do the schuplattler, which is German for 'foot slapping.'"

In addition, the group will also perform the "Laendler," an Austrian dance that the waltz originated from.

"The thing about the polka and the waltz is that they are the two most widely done social dances in the entire world," she added. "So many other dances come from those dances. All of American country-western dances are founded on polka steps and a lot of ballet is polka steps and waltz steps. They are very far reaching when it comes to their historical impact."

But don't stop at learning about the history of the dance, Hoadley and company will be giving polka lessons before they take the stage to perform.

"It's great to see the people come out to learn," she said. "That was a main reason we started doing this. As soon as we are finished, the Little German Band comes on. So many people didn't want to get up and dance because they didn't know how. Now, we teach them some basic steps and they can dance all day with the music. It works out great."

Hoadley will also be storytelling in between performances, both about the dances and the history of Walhalla and its German heritage.

"I think part of the reason this festival has been so successful is because it's so real," she said. "You won't find too many differences between Walhalla's Oktoberfest and the ones held in Germany. Also, it has a theme and lots of people really get into it."

Think of the festival as a homecoming of sorts as well.

"I've talked to so many people who make it a point to come home each year and celebrate Oktoberfest," she added. "People who live out of state come back for this when they may not be able to come home for the traditional holidays."

The Walhalla Oktoberfest Dancers will take the stage at 11 a.m. on Saturday. At 1 p.m. they will perform again at the Walhalla Steak house and end up at the Oconee Heritage Center for more dancing and lessons for those interested.



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The Walhalla Oktoberfest Dancers work with the audience on dancing the polka.