

# FULL HOUSE



## Knights, Knaves, and Victorian Queens

Article & Photos by Phil Houseal

If while strolling around Kerrville in December or January, you happen to bump into pirates, inventors, mad professors, time travelers, knights, knaves, and Victorian queens, you have not slipped inside some chronological conundrum. You are seeing evidence of creative new events brought to you by Hill Country Festivals.

That would be Hal Robinson and April Cory, longtime performers at Renaissance Fests across the country who now make their home in Comfort.

Of all the towns in Texas that could host a festival of medieval actors or steam punk time travelers, Kerrville might not top the list.

But Hal and April Cory not only think it belongs there, they are hosting both a Renaissance Fest and a Wild West Victorian Fest in this Hill Country community better known for folk festivals and golf courses.

It's a great fit.

"Texans know Kerrville," Cory said. "They already have a concept of the town, and we can create something for our community too."

She has reason to be encouraged.

While their first Kerrville Renaissance Fest last January was not the size of the larger festivals near Dallas or Houston, the event drew a large amount

of interest from people who appreciated the opportunity to "play" closer to the Hill Country. They were buoyed enough at the response to schedule a second Kerrville Renaissance Fest and add the new Wild West Victorian Fest.

Unlike a visit to an amusement park or county fair, at these festivals you become part of the show. Hal Robinson believes it's about "breaking the fourth wall"—the imaginary barrier between the performers and the audience in a typical stage production.



Seeing birds of prey up close is always a crowd-pleasing event at the Kerrville Renaissance Festival.

"The fourth wall doesn't exist in our shows," said Robinson, who should know. Since his mother sent him to a theater camp as a child, he has spent his whole life performing as a magician, juggler, knife thrower, bullwhip act, and sculptor, including stints at Disneyland and with Ringling Brothers. "We interact with the audience. It could be a heckler. We use it. It creates a new show. We try to get the crowd to be in the moment."

Cory gives the example of the "tomato guy" who hurls insults your way to encourage you to throw rotten tomatoes his way.

"This is not like a movie," she warned. "The characters are going to interact with you. You are encouraged to put on a costume and become a part of it. It's all about doing something different and having fun."

For the Kerrville Renaissance Festival, a medieval marketplace will rise up on the grounds. Colorful booths will offer copious food options, handmade arts and crafts, and bawdy games. Presenters



Pie plates, jugglers, minstrels, and dancers engage and enthrall fest-goers.

will demonstrate knife throwing, archery, belly dance, and pottery skills. A spirited cast of jugglers, jesters, magicians, musicians, knaves, wenches, and pixies love to interact with visitors.

While more people are familiar with a Renaissance Fest, what exactly is a Wild West Victorian Fest?

The concept—more like a "shared delusion"—is that technology stopped in the Industrial Revolution. All development continued into the future based on steam power. Think Buck Rogers, Jules Verne, Dr. Who, or the 1960s TV show Wild Wild West.

The Wild West Victorian Fest creates a magical world, where time stops and fantasy lives, with Western, Victorian, and Steampunk themes. Time Travelers appear, and everyone is an inventor.

Guests are encouraged to come in costume and become part of the experience. Characters emerge out of the 1880s, or the future. Fantasy and dressing up in

costume is an integral part of "playing" at these festivals. Goggles and gears are a common theme.

Both events offer options such as teas, balls, concerts, or a séance. Themed photo ops so you can appear to belong in some imaginary era. Who knows? You might even encounter a Viking horde.

These shows also help support several local nonprofits, including Last Chance Forever Birds of Prey, Ultimate Gift of Life, and Kerrville's Art to Heart.

"A lot of people in Kerrville have told us it's so nice to have something that's not five hours away," Cory said. "At this time of year there is not much else going on. So we're bringing people to Kerrville."

They are coming from as far away as North Carolina, Illinois, and Chicago. And 1880.

**Details:**  
**Wild West Victorian Fest**  
**December 15-17, 2017.**  
**Kerrville Renaissance Festival**  
**January 26-28, 2018.**

Both festivals take place at River Star Arts and Events Park and the Hill Country Youth Event Center, 3785 TX-27, Kerrville, Texas.

**Pricing, attractions, times, reservations, and advance tickets online at:**  
**WildWestVictorianFest.com**  
**www.KerrvilleRenFest.com,**  
**or call 214-632-5766.**



Audience participation is prized at the Renaissance Festival - even if it means being hit by a tomato.