

Tasting history

Recruitment pays off for History Fest

By Bob Fenske

Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — John Bergquist surveyed the scene from underneath the tent and liked what he saw. All those trips he and his wife had made this summer, and past summers for that matter, had paid off for History Fest 2003.

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MERGEFORMATINET } Pat Christman

Seven-year-old Erik Danielson (left) and his 9-year-old brother, Shayne, saw a log during History Fest activities Friday.

What he saw was this:

Period campers enjoying a beautiful, albeit windy, fall day.

Forty-eight re-enactment stations covering centuries of history.

And the last of the little kids enjoying one final historical moment.

"We go to these shows all over the place and just start talking to people, 'Hey, we need you in Mankato,'" said Bergquist, who along with his wife, Edie, visits a half-dozen re-enactments a year. "But we're getting a pretty nice reputation here so people want to come."

History Fest started eight years ago with about 200 students visiting Jack McGowan's Mankato farm. It has mushroomed into an event that drew 1,800 fourth-graders from all over southern Minnesota the past two days and will conclude today with public viewing.

McGowan has but one rule for those who come to re-enact history: Keep it clean.

"We tell them it's for fourth-graders so clean up the

bad language, the dress code and all that but keep it historical," he said, "and they do. ... You know, it sparks interest because when we started the public day a few years ago, we'd see kids bringing their parents."

Thus, the first two education days of the annual festival are not a warm-up, not even close. Instead, committee members say they remain the heart and soul of the festival.

But that additional day is needed just because of the time factor.

Consider that there are 48 stations and students get 30 minutes at each station. To see them all, they need 24 hours.

To see half even, they need 12 hours. And the last time McGowan and Bergquist looked, school days weren't 12 hours long.

"Once they get a taste of history, they love it," Bergquist said. "And it doesn't hurt their parents, either. Let's face it, history out of books - just books - doesn't excite everyone. But if you can touch it, feel it and live it, oh boy, they get excited."

* * *

If you enjoyed the Festival

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