

For Immediate Release

John Arcand Fiddle Fest 10th Anniversary a Poignant Success Story

Saskatoon, August 24, 2007 - Mother Nature's wet blanket on the John Arcand Fiddle Fest may have hampered attendance somewhat, but it didn't dampen the spirits of those who love to fiddle around. The Fiddle Fest, named after its founder the "Master of the Metis Fiddle" John Arcand, celebrated its 10th anniversary this year and put on yet another of the high-quality events it has become renowned for in its vibrant decade of life.

"Thursday was worth the fee and all the rest was icing", touted one audience survey. Other accolades from surveys included, "Enjoyed every minute!", "Beautiful to see gathering of Métis sharing traditions with the young," and "Will tell my friends its fun for all ages...great young performers!"

A total of 84 workshops in a variety of fiddling styles, Red River jigging, guitar and piano held on Thursday and Friday drew 927 participants – 43% of them youth. Few festivals offer participants this many opportunities to learn from the pros. The workshops are one of the primary activities in the festival's work to achieve its mandate to promote and preserve the traditions of fiddle music, dance and culture. Almost every year the festival adds workshops to meet the growing number of participants and to expand the breadth of learning. This year, for the first time, an advanced jigging workshop by Métis elder Kathleen Steinhauer passed down the traditions behind the steps and dress and the told history of the Traditional Red River Jig. With health faltering, Kathleen even taught advanced steps from her chair.

Participation in both the sanctioned fiddle contest and the Canadian Red River Jigging Championships was down from prior years as was the total number of people through the gate. The decline at the gate seems to come primarily from wet weather on the first two days of the festival. The grand opening of Dakota Dunes Casino is also a likely factor. A province-wide downward trend in the number of competitors at fiddle contests began to emerge at the beginning of the competition season. No one is exactly sure why, but its possible that the number of new fiddle events cropping up in response to the resurgence of fiddling popularity – especially among young people – may be the reason.

The highlight of this year's festival was a very special edition of the annual John Arcand and Friends concert on Saturday evening. In honor of the 10th anniversary and the festival's reason for being, John was joined on stage by six young fiddlers that he has showcased at the festival over the past nine years. It was a poignant testament as these amazing young fiddlers displayed their talent, skills, and love for the instrument that John and other mentors have helped to instill and nurture. Daniel Gervais was one of the first youth ever showcased. He is now majoring in music at university, has released several recordings, and was hired to instruct a workshop at the festival this year. The concert ended with a multi-generational Arcand performance that included John, his daughter Michelle on fiddle and his granddaughter Dionna singing.

"In preparing for and then celebrating ten years of festivals, I have come to recognize how much we've accomplished," says John Arcand, the man who dreamt it all up in the first place and whose drive and determination has inspired hundreds of musicians, festival workers, and volunteers to build one of the most unique and successful events of its kind in North America. "It's been an emotional realization that makes me very proud and I look forward to finding out what the next ten years will hold."

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