

Summer Fun

Experiencing 'Happily Ever After' at the Georgia Renaissance Festival

Once upon a time, in two lands far, far away, lived a fair young maiden and a dashing white knight. She was from the land of Georgia, and worked in the shire of "Days Inn" as an aspiring young graphic artist. He was from the land of Illinois, well-schooled in theater, with dreams of a career in acting.

One fine day, a stranger named Serendipity led them to a site near Chatt Hills where an English village, circa 1533, had been carved in the woodlands. There they discovered a magical world of pageantry, chivalry, and kindred artisans and crafts people. They joined the merrie troupe and soon found each other, and like fairytale magic sparks did fly. So began the courtship of Maria and Dave Hanson and their long-lasting affinity for the Georgia Renaissance Festival.



Dave Hanson rides in as the white knight, while Maria Hanson greets her queenly court, in their early days as performers at the Georgia Renaissance Festival.

The Georgia Renaissance Festival, founded in 1986 on 20 acres of land in Fairburn, has grown into a 100-acre medieval theme park filled with fun and whimsy. The Festival offers a full day of endless entertainment for all ages on 10 stages with hundreds of costumed characters performing in over 150 shows each day. Over 130 skilled artists inhabit the quaint village cottages creating unique artful treasures and offering tantalizingly delicious authentic food, such as the 1-1/2 lb. roasted turkey leg, a favorite of the Royals for generations. The 2016 Festival opened for its 31th season on the weekend of April 16 and runs for 8 consecutive weekends through June 5th, including Memorial Day Monday. For the program line-up, tickets, and directions visit www.GArenfest.com.

Maria first heard about the Georgia Renaissance Festival in 1985 when she read a poster calling for artisans. One of her co-workers had previously worked at a Renaissance fair in California, so when Maria asked if they had caricature artists, her friend encouraged her to apply.

The day she arrived for an interview, workers were still clearing space from the dense forest that would soon become the 20-acre festival site. She was offered a job as village caricature artist and learned that her first task would be to fence off her work area and create her shop. Over the next two months, the Renaissance village emerged with 80 festively decorated craft shops, rolling carts, and food booths, all hand built by vendors to be permanent structures that would be re-used from year to year.

In 1986, Dave had been invited to perform in a jousting show at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival soon after college. Prior to that, he had little experience riding a horse, let alone using a lance. But after only one season, he became hooked on the art of medieval warfare and soon began designing and making his own chainmail and armor.

The following year Dave made his way to the Georgia Renaissance Festival with plans to sell his wares. Like all other vendors, Dave was required to fence in his vendor space. He was dirty and sweaty from digging fence post holes when

he met Maria for the first time. Sparks didn't fly between the two that day. It was more like, "Hey how ya doin?" then back to digging the fence post holes. But Maria began to take notice the following season when Dave took on a new persona in the jousting arena. There's just something about a knight in shining armor.

Dave moved to mid-town Atlanta a few years later and took a job at Atlanta Costumes to help pay the bills and satisfy his theatrical cravings. He also continued his seasonal work at the Georgia Renaissance Festival and began dating Maria.

The couple relished the Renaissance fantasy; re-enacting the culture and period by playing different characters, creating authentic costumes and art work, performing interesting parts, and becoming a part of the creative team of artisans.

Dave eventually owned and operated a professional jousting troupe, "The Knights of Pendragon," and the couple moved to Chatt Hills (then unincorporated Fulton County) to have acreage for their many horses.

Dave & Maria married on their property in Chatt Hills, complete with a horse drawn carriage. Before too long, they started their family, raising up the next generation of village folk for the Renaissance Festival – Amelia and Augusta.



**Maria with her children
Amelia and Augusta.**

Over the years, Dave and Maria have played many roles in the Renaissance village. One season Dave played the part of Sheriff of Nottingham, only to get his tooth chipped during a skirmish with Robin Hood. He made a mad dash to the dentist (and the 20th century) for a quick fix between performances. Another season, Dave and Maria led pony rides which eventually led to a side business outside of the Festival. And then of course, was Dave's stint as a joustier. He owned and operated his professional jousting troupe for 14 years.

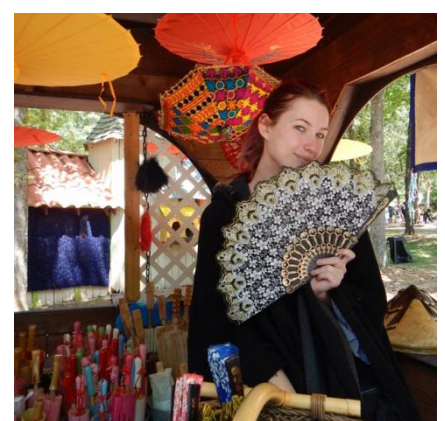
Last month, three out of the four Hanson clan returned to the Georgia Renaissance Festival for another season of fun. Maria welcomed guests at the front gate and information booth, sharing her infectious smile and enthusiasm, and answering the question of the day at least 1,000 times, "Where's the privy?" Augusta (Augie) worked the Columbus boats, giving young and old a swinging ride on the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. And Amelia sold sultry fans and parasols in her brightly decorated shop in the market place. As for Dave, he was absent from the Festival this year, working overtime at a job he loves at Turner Broadcasting. But the family plans on returning to the Festival for one last blast from the past before the season closes at the Georgia Renaissance Festival.



**Maria Hanson welcomes guests
to the Renaissance Festival**



**Augusta Hanson works the Columbus ride
at the Renaissance Festival**



**Amelia Hanson sets up shop selling fans
and parasols at the Renaissance Festival**