

Jigs, waltzes and reels to entertain audience at Orangeville's new Fiddle & Stepdance Contest

By Sam Odrowski

The Orangeville Fiddle & Stepdance Contest is coming to Westminster United Church in Orangeville next Saturday, July 6.

Contestants from across Ontario will showcase their skills in fiddling and step dancing for the contest, which gets underway at 10 a.m. with children's classes. There will be a fiddle and dance showcase at 1 p.m. and group, youth, and adult classes at 1:30 p.m.

"This is a high-energy style of music and dance that combines Celtic and French influences with old time Canadian tradition," said Charlotte Clare, who is organizing the contest. "Attendees will be entertained by individual and group performances of jigs, waltzes, and reels in both fiddle and dance disciplines."

Contestants will have live accompaniment on stage by a professional fiddler and pianist.

The contest is brand-new to Orangeville, and Clare said she's hosting it, in part, because of Dufferin County's strong roots in fiddle music.

The Canadian Open Old Time Fiddle Championships in Shelburne ran for over 60 years and awarded some of the most prestigious titles in the country.

"Hundreds of stepdance students have attended Chanda's School of Dance in Orangeville since the early 2000s, and the Orangeville Fiddle and Stepdance Camps attracted students every summer from all over North America," Clare noted. "Unfortunately, none of these local institutions are still in operation, leaving few opportunities in Dufferin to experience this uniquely Canadian art form. Our new contest aims to connect with existing fans and encourage younger generations to be involved in a community that brings people together through a shared passion of music and dance."

The contest is anticipating at least 75 contestants from across Ontario and Quebec in age divisions from nine and under to 65 and older.

"This will be the newest event in a circuit of contests that run throughout the summer, with a dedicated community of fiddlers, dancers, families, and fans who travel from far and wide to attend. We are also hoping to attract local residents who may have previously attended the Shelburne contest or taken lessons in the area," said Clare.

Over 50 cash prizes will be awarded throughout the contest, with top prizes reaching \$300. The cash prizes are sponsored by local individuals and businesses.

Tickets to the event will be sold at the door. The cost is \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors, and \$5 for children.

Following the contest, there will be an evening jam session at The Hatter Pub, where everyone is welcome to enjoy the live music.

If the event is successful, Clare said she hopes to build on it for next year.

"If all goes well this year, our goal is to hold the contest annually and expand into a weekend-long event in the future," she said.