

The Celtics are coming to Alton Mill this weekend

By Constance Scrafield

What could be better than to spend the last weekend of April at a Celtic festival at the beautiful Alton Mill Arts Centre in the village of Alton?

At a time when spring is finally in full boil, the Mill itself is a wonder to visit, sitting in a mini wilderness, the old stream still running along the property, the same wildlife still in the neighbourhood.

Jeremy Grant, co-owner of the Mill with his brother Jordan, told us a little of their intent and hopes for the property.

‘‘Since we took it over from our father, Jack Grant, who was a great enthusiast for the arts, we always felt that the property should be used as a commercial space, but open to the public,’’ he explained.

At the beginning of the very extensive renovations needed for the building, two government grants – one federal and one provincial – paralleled well to provide some funding for the project, although very far from all that was needed. Now, in business and as a major supporter of the arts community and, specifically, those with studios in the Alton Mill, the Celtic Festival coming to the Alton Mill Arts Centre April 29 and 30 is to ‘‘spur renewed interest of Celtic theme as part of a celebration of spring,’’

‘‘This event is intended to bridge the Celtic arts and culture,’’ he added. ‘‘We want this as an annual event.’’

While the Mill rents studios and gallery space to visual artists, other arts are represented as events that take place there: theatricals, music concerts, along with social and business gatherings. All these go toward financially supporting the Mill and offering an marvellous venue. Win-win.

Participating in the Celtic Festival will be interesting and artistic people creating in various mediums, specifically Celtic designs or work which goes back hundreds of years to the time of the Celtics.

Sean Donnelly, a dry stone artisan, is going to create his vision of a Stone Wave, a project which is supported by a Ontario Arts Council grant. Using stone from the property of the Mill and the local area, Donnelly will build this on the Celtic weekend. Visitors are welcomed to come and learn (briefly) how to etch a stone and these will be included in the Wave wall as a tribute to the weekend.

Having met the Grants at the Alton village town square dry wall project, Donnelly later approached them with the idea.

‘‘I knew they might like the idea of the Stone Wave,’’ he told us, ‘‘from their enthusiasm for the town square wall.’’

Jeweller extraordinaire, Anne-Marie Warburton has an important visitor to her location at the Mill on the ground floor, Noam Carver, who will be at the Gemma Gallery in person for the whole of April 29 to talk about engagement and wedding rings, both those on display or others to be created.

A strong supporter of the arts and of the Alton Mill, Warburton is very pleased about the upcoming Celtic Festival that weekend.

‘‘It will be a great family event,’’ she remarked. ‘‘And Noam Carver is certainly ready to create Celtic designs in the jewelry he makes as custom work.’’

Diana Skeates, contemporary Celtic artist, will be in attendance both days. Her fabulous Celtic paintings will adorn the walls of the Made of Wood Gallery on the ground floor of the Mill and she will be there herself to meet people and to give talks on the subject of the Celtic mind, as she sees it.

The Made of Wood Gallery will also host other craftsmen.

The remarkable film, *Rivers and Tides: Goldsworthy Working with Time* will be showing continuously throughout the weekend in the Bartlett Gallery, as a drop and out exhibit.

Both artists CJ Shelton and Linda Augustin are holding workshops on creating Celtic designs: Shelton in her studio teaching the over/under weaving of the knots and how to do them, and Augustin will guide youngsters to make Celtic coats of Arms. Shelton designed the Celtic Tree of Life logo for the festival.

Blacksmith George Church bends bars of raw steel into the Celtic story; Anne Randeraad will help people make a small Celtic plate; and there will be encaustic workshops and baby lambs.

For entertainment, there will be Celtic musicians playing throughout the weekend.

Sunday afternoon the Rhythmfoot with the Frank and Chandra Leahy family will be putting on a concert of what they do best by way of music and dance. This will be a rare opportunity to seeing this remarkable gang in such an intimate venue.

No such event would be complete without food and merchandise vendors and these are promised in full.

In the marketplace will be Celtic merchants with nice quality goods to browse and buy, including silver jewelry, textiles, candles, horn drinking cups.

There will be a wide food menu of choices of old recipes and dishes.

For lots more information, go to info@altonmill.ca