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**BACK TO OUR ROOTS Series: WEEKEND DIVERSIONS**

*PAMELA GRINER LEAVY.*

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Take a deeper, sometimes radical look into the history of Pinellas County, neighboring Hillsborough and the rest of Florida, a look beyond trademark orange groves and blue-blood founding families.

On Saturday, Heritage Village in Largo hosts the Pinellas Folk Festival, featuring Stetson Kennedy of Jacksonville, a Florida legend, pioneer folklorist, civil rights activist who stood up against the Ku Klux Klan, and a friend and mentor to the Guthrie family, including singer-songwriter Arlo of Alice's Restaurant fame.

Heritage Village, with its 28 historic structures, is the ideal venue for exploring traditional folk, gospel, country and bluegrass. Musicians will play at the gazebo, on front porches of historical homes, and in the pulpit area of the tiny 18th century church.



One of those folk musicians is Bobby Hicks of Tampa, who calls himself the "Radical Cracker." Hicks once did a show for a development corporation in Pinellas County and "tore them up," said Lee Paulet, folk festival music coordinator.

"I heard it from Bobby and have heard him go on his rants," Paulet said. "Sometimes

Bobby will tell you what you don't want to hear."

The Exums, three sisters in their 20s and 30s from Thonotosassa, plan to perform what Paulet calls "unadulterated and unfettered" bluegrass music. They honed their talent at the knee of their musician father, an American Indian from the Crete tribe.

"You will hear the gospel music just the way you could hear it about 200 years ago, without sound reinforcement or anything else but the natural effects of the building, in the old-timey 18th century church," said Paulet.

Ellen Babb, historian and marketing coordinator for Heritage Village, sees Florida's varied culture mirrored in the folk festival.

"Some of the songs that are going to be playing are going to be Florida stories that have to do with certain periods of Florida culture, some political in nature as folk music always has been," she said. "Folk music casts a broad net."

Visitors are invited to join in a folk jam and, in a first for the Pinellas Folk Festival, a bluegrass jam.

"Everybody is encouraged to come and bring their instruments, as long as it's not blatant rock 'n' roll," Paulet said. "That's the one thing we don't do. This is a festival for the singer-songwriter with a traditional vein."

Jim Kauffman of Largo will lead the folk jam session. His group, Harmony Grits, has played old-time and traditional music on the folk festival circuit for more than 30 years and at Friday night open-house sessions.

"He keeps it alive by every Friday night having a jam session in his private residence and encouraging people to come and play folk and old-timey," Paulet said.

In addition to music and storytelling, there will be old-time craft demonstrations, including chair caning, quilting, spinning and embroidery.

In between, enjoy old-fashioned root beer floats, ice cream sundaes, roasted turkey legs and funnel cakes.

Topping off the day will be the opportunity to meet one-on-one with Stetson Kennedy. While Kennedy, 88, won't be giving a formal presentation, he will sign his books and recount experiences about his contributions to the preservation of folk culture in Florida and across America.

As a participant from 1937 to 1942 in a Depression-era Works Progress Administration folk life recording project, he traveled throughout Florida with another writer, Zora Neale Hurston, who grew up in Eatonville near Orlando. Traveling separately during the Jim Crow days, Stetson, white, and Hurston, black, together listened to songs and stories at turpentine camps near Cross City and at the Clara White soup kitchen in Jacksonville.

Stetson was featured in a 2002 program on National Public Radio about the WPA

project.

"Whenever anyone asks me what it was like, working with the Works Progress Administration and recording Florida folk songs back in the 1930s for the Library of Congress, I tell them we were as excited as a bunch of kids on a treasure hunt," NPR quoted him as saying in his essay *A Florida Treasure Hunt*.

Kennedy's contributions to the recorded history of Pinellas County and all of Florida are invaluable, Babb said.

"One of the things that Stetson did so brilliantly back in the 1930s was to travel the state with people like Zora Neale Hurston, and talk to sponge dock divers, to people on chain gangs and to people in the turpentine camps to find out what their lives were really like and to have that information recorded in a way that will be available for the long term."

If you go

The 12th annual Pinellas Folk Festival will be held from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, with the last performance starting at 3:30, at Heritage Village, 11909 125th St. N, Largo. Admission is free, but donations are encouraged. Event parking will be on 119th Street between Ulmerton and Walsingham roads. A free shuttle will be available. For a list of performers and times, visit [betsybolgerpaulet.homestead.com/untitled2.html](http://betsybolgerpaulet.homestead.com/untitled2.html). For information, call 582-2123.