

Davenport's Arabian Quest recreates history at GeerCrest

A Journey Through Time

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History buffs and the curious alike showed their passports this weekend for a trip on the Orient Express.

While the shuttle may not have taken Homer Davenport Days visitors to the Middle East, the travelers did find themselves at the cartoonist's childhood home of GeerCrest Farm – transformed to the Syrian desert with the help of a bit of imagination.

Over the weekend, Jeff Brekas, one of three different shuttle drivers, estimated driving approximately 300 miles just between GeerCrest and the Silverton Country Museum, where the quest both began and ended.

"I think it's a wonderful thing for Silverton to have," said Brekas. "It went wonderfully."

Upon arrival, passports were stamped, and the theatrical journey began. The audience enjoyed a series of six vignettes chronicling Homer Davenport's own journey to Syria in his successful attempt to bring Arabian horses back to the United States in 1906.

"We needed to have a retelling of Homer's story," Davenport's Arabian Quest Coordinator Carrie Brendle said.

The short plays, adapted from the annotated version of Davenport's book "My Quest for the Arabian Horse," highlighted important aspects of his journey, including Davenport's arrival to Aleppo and his initial brush with the Syrian Bedouin tribes that bred the illustrious horses.

The audience became part of the show as each act became an interactive play, engulfing viewers in Davenport's quest through hands-on play with Davenport Arabian horses, walking across GeerCrest from scene to scene and even conversing with some of the characters.

"The weekend went really well, as far as production," Project Coordinator Lori Webb said. "It was definitely executed the way we had hoped."

At the conclusion of the vignettes, visitors were invited into the GeerCrest abode in which Davenport spent many of his days.

"The location was beautiful," Webb said. "I fell in love with Silverton because of Homer's 'The Country Boy,' and even watching Jim Toller [GeerCrest home owner]

explain the lifeline brought tears to my eyes.”

After going through GeerCrest, it was hard to pass up a turn through the Grand Bazaar, manned by sisters Teresa Countryman of Oakland, Calif., and Carol Costello of Bellevue, Wash. Both women proved to be quite worldly with stories about their journeys to Lithuania and several other Middle Eastern and African nations. Costello even sold vases that she procured from Syria.

“We tried to make this the best representation of a souk as possible,” Countryman said. A ‘souk,’ she explained, is an Arabic marketplace, often in open air. “A few people even tried to barter with us.”

The Grand Bazaar also offered cool hibiscus tea, a colorful yet bitter mainstay in Arab markets, to those who would listen to the women’s stories.

“We all felt very successful in the end because there was the opportunity for people to attend,” said Webb. “We can’t measure our success by how much money we made, but how the people reacted, and they seemed to enjoy it. To see a lot of people out there really made it worth it.”