

Cultures unveiled at Children's Museum folk festival



Oneida Indian Birdy Burdick creates a cornhusk doll Saturday, July 17, 2010, during the 2010 Family Folk Arts Festival at the Children's Museum in Utica. photo by WILLIAM P. CANNON / Observer-Dispatch

By LISA KAPPS Observer-Dispatch

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The Children's Museum was alive with the cultures of the Mohawk Valley Saturday, with the sounds of lively Bosnian folk music and traditional Italian music to a performance by a contemporary African dance troupe.

Folklorist Lisa Overholser, who helped to organize the 2010 Family Folk Arts Festival, said the folk arts serve an important purpose in people's lives. "Folklore is all about relating to the past and understand that everyone, every single individual, has traditions," she said.

Overholser said it is through those "unspoken and everyday traditions" that an individual is able to both connect to their past and have an influence on their culture as it moves forward.

For example, Ron Patterson, 40, a member of the Oneida Indian Nation, demonstrated how to craft and lace a lacrosse stick. "Not a lot of people make these sticks anymore. This is part of our heritage," Patterson said, adding that he still makes the tool the same way his ancestors did.

Overholser said children learn about Native American culture in school, but may not realize that the people still practice the same customs. "It makes it more real. I think it kind of enlivens history," Overholser said.

Kathleen Williams, of Herkimer, brought her daughter Lyla, 5, to Saturday's event and helped her make a traditional Haudenosaunee headdress out of paper while her husband and other daughter played traditional Italian songs in La Banda Rossa. "It's awesome," Williams said of the festivities. "It was Bosnian, the Italian. It's a good mix."