

PORT CALLS:

Mobile International Festival

Thousands will converge at the Mobile Civic Center and Expo Hall in November as the 27th Annual Mobile International Festival spotlights the "World of Languages."

The festival, which started in 1983, was established as a family-oriented event that showcases the many international cultures that surround the City of Mobile. The festival also plays a key role in education focusing on world culture and tolerance.

More than 70 countries will be represented at the three-day festival. Thursday, November 18, and Friday, November 19, are reserved for students from Alabama and nearby states. On Saturday, November 20, the festival is open to the public in what is referred to as "Family Day." The festival features a wide range of attractions, including musical and dance performances, arts and crafts, flavorful international cuisine, and much more.

The festival's members operate cultural booths that inform visitors about the traditions of the lands from which they or their ancestors originated. Members include associations, such as the German Friendship Association, various heritage societies and families. Some members just carry the flag of their nation while others have food booths, cultural exhibits and performances. Most of the festival's acts are based in the United States, but many do travel from the nations they represent. Some local acts appear, such as the Zuri Dance Company and the Celtic group Mithril. Others on the bill include the Brazil RX4 Steel Orchestra from Trinidad & Tobago; Maturiza Japanese Drummers; Indonesia's Citra Nusantara; and dancers representing Greece, India, China, Iran and numerous other countries.

"You really can travel the world in a day as the entire Mobile Civic Center and Expo Hall is occupied by continents, food and cultural booths, a storytelling area, and an art gallery," said Estela Dorn, the executive director of the festival. "Children can even learn about pirates by meeting look-alike Captain Jack Sparrow."

This year's theme, "The World of Languages," will be projected in several ways. The cultural booths will display their native language alphabets and the University of South Alabama will be conducting classes in Arabic, Chinese, Latin and German. There will also be Ikebana demonstrations and all the food will be translated in both English and native languages.



Cindy Scott poses in front of her International doll booth.



The Mobile International Festival plays a key role in education with its focus on world culture.



The festival is also known, to some, as Mobile's International Food Festival, offering perhaps the most diverse menu in Mobile.

"We are hoping to encourage the community to sample less-familiar languages through many cultural activities and mini-lessons," said Dorn. "Language ties us together, denotes education, and promotes interaction and awareness."

Dorn, a native of the Philippines, has been with the Mobile International Festival since 1985. She felt a connection to the diversity, as she herself was an immigrant. She saw a profound grassroots effort started by people proud of their heritage and she immediately knew she wanted to get involved.

"Mobile is a seaport city and attracts people from all over the world. This festival simply reinforces what the city is already all about," said Dorn.

The festival would not be in existence without all the wonderful sponsors, including the City of Mobile, Mobile County, University of South Alabama, corporations, state arts council and foundations.

"We are expecting as many as 21,000 people this November. And I have no doubt that the festival will continue to grow because it has a life of its own," concluded Dorn.

Please visit mobileinternationalfestival.org for more information or call 251-470-7730. Admissions: Adults \$10.00; Seniors 65 and over \$8.00; Children 7-15 years, \$5.00; Children 6 and younger, Free. Advance tickets are \$1.00 off from Mobile Civic Center Box Office at 251-208-5812.



An Aztec dancer demonstrates his skill



The Dragon Dance is an integral element of Chinese traditions and customs.



Mobile International Festival members, David Bayne from Scotland and Kaz Zaremba from Poland.