

MEET THE CREATOR OF KING RICHARD'S FAIRE

BONNIE SHAPIRO A PINEHILLS RESIDENT!

By Jonathan Pappalardo

Drive down Route 58 in Carver during the first weekends of fall and you can't miss it. Sprawled over 80 acres is the largest renaissance festival in the United States, the aptly titled King Richard's Faire.

The faire, which celebrates its 37th season this year, is the brainchild of Bonnie Shapiro and her late husband, Richard, from whom the faire gets its name. Bonnie is a dancer while Richard's father worked for Tri-Star, MGM, and Columbia during his career. They were inspired to create the faire after attending an outdoor hippie festival. "We loved it," Bonnie said. "It was an escape from reality."

Light bulbs went off and the pair began to brainstorm a faire of their own to be held on a 160-acre fairground in the Chicago/Milwaukee area. The hippie fest idea had already been taken, so they brainstormed and realized there was a shortage for Renaissance festivals around the country.

King Richard's Faire was born in 1972. It was successful from the start, with Northwestern University theatre students auditioning for and taking part in live productions and artisans lending their



talents to recreating, among other things, masks and jewelry appropriate to the era.

Soon it became clear they would need to find a permanent home, so they scouted locations in Toronto and Florida before turning their focus elsewhere. "We eventually looked out East," Bonnie said. "We found 80 acres in Carver we could devote to an old-time marketplace. In the process, we fell in love with the East Coast."

The faire moved to Carver in 1982 and has been in its current home ever since. "We love the culture, intelligence and good weather," Bonnie said. "New England has the least amount of rainfall during the weeks we hold the faire. It has open land we could develop, attractive zoning and access to a major population."

Today, the faire has grown to attract talent, hundreds of performers from around the world. Auditions are held in Boston, MA, and Providence, RI, mimes

fly in from Paris and stilt walkers come from as far away as New Zealand. Even Tony winners have performed, although Bonnie said, they're not household names. Attractions include animal

educational acts, where trainers oversee lions and tigers. *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones* theme weekends are also part of the fun. "The faire is visual," Bonnie said. "You have musicals, dancers, jousters. It's special because it's seasonal."

Bonnie oversees year-round operations from her home in the Midwest. "The day-to-day is crazy," she said. "We do something every day, seven days a week. I sign every check, see every bill. We have food and beverage meetings, ads that need to be run, auditions to hold. The list goes on and on. It's a twelve-month a year job. It's quieter around Christmas when we close the books."

She also has a property at Pinehills, where she lives three months out of the year, including the eight consecutive weekends the faire is in operation. Her daughter, Aimée Sedley, lives nearby and assists her mom with operations. Bonnie's other daughter, Samantha Harris, lives in California and is probably best known for her time with the E! Network and for co-hosting *Dancing With The Stars* from 2006-2010. Bonnie has multiple grandchildren as well.

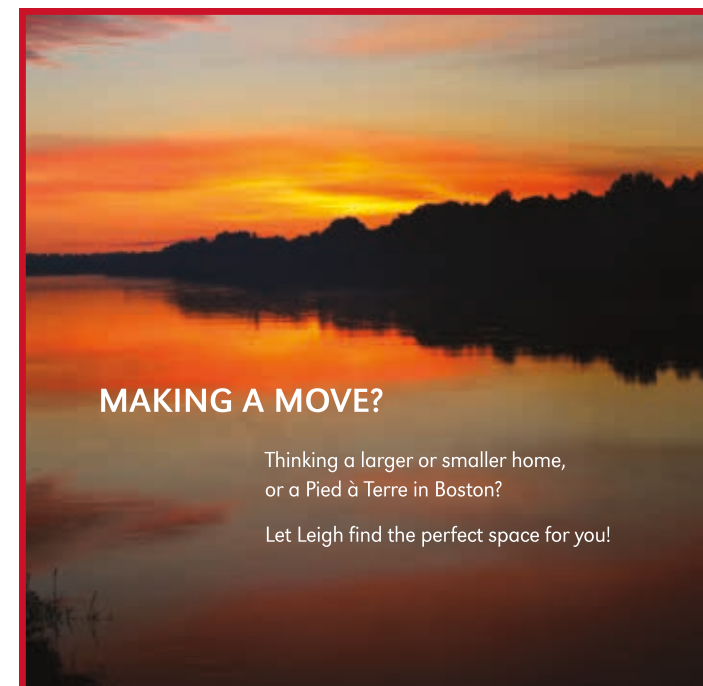
Behind the scenes, the faire is a chance for kids to hold their first job. Bonnie says the experience

teaches them life skills including friendliness and punctuality. One kid successfully completed a mentorship at age 14 and is still involved with the faire today, in their 40s.

When the faire is not running, the eight stages and other pieces of equipment remain idle, which was a challenge when the storms this past winter caused a need for cleanup and rebuilding. The additional efforts are nothing to worry about, as operations continue to run on schedule. King Richard's Faire will run September 1-October 24, 2018. **Bonnie is extending the promo code PHLOA-18 exclusively for Pinehills residents buying tickets for the faire through their website: www.kingrichardsfaire.net.**



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