

BUDAFEST

Old-fashioned fest focuses on local talent

By **CHRISTIE L. SMITH**

Budafest has become so ingrained in Buda's identity that residents naturally assume everyone knows what it is. But for the non-informed, those whose radar hasn't picked up on the annual celebration, or those who are new to the area, Budafest is a rollicking old-

fashioned community festival focused on local talent.

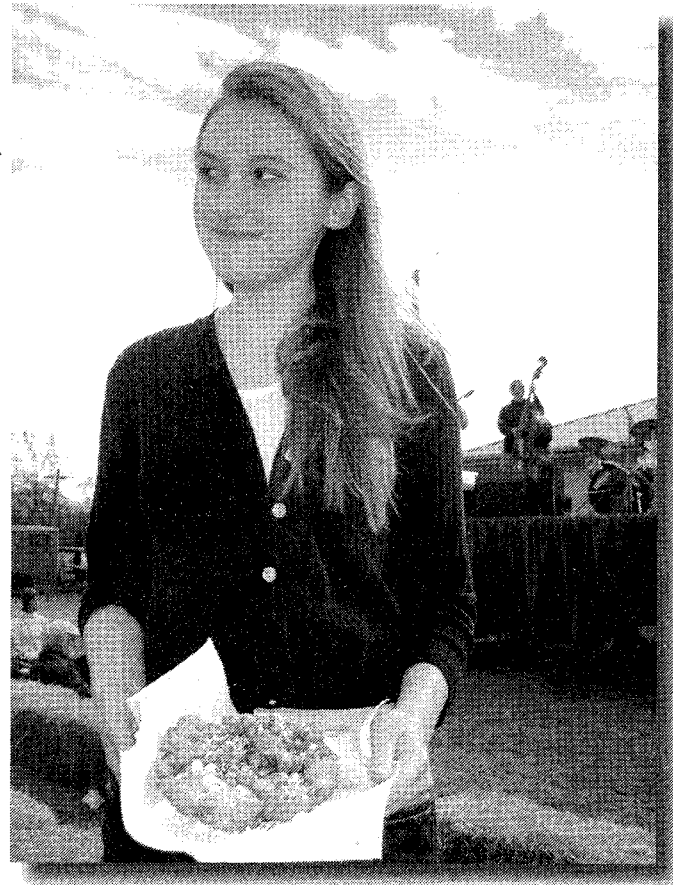
It's not just about spending your holiday budget on the wonderful hand-crafted items, it's about supporting a community enthusiastic to give back to its own. This year's celebration is Saturday and Sunday, December 1-2.

And there's nothing like Budafest to put you in a festive holiday mood—that's why each year attendance increases.

A mixture of small-town and big-city offerings, Budafest is now in its 28th year. The fest originally began as a way for downtown merchants to lure shoppers to Buda, says Annette Berry, Budafest committee treasurer. Over the years, it has evolved into a community event eagerly anticipated by residents and non-residents alike.

"We're still attracting record crowds," says Danny Levin, Buda resident and music coordinator for the event. "Three years ago, we closed Main Street to traffic during Fest hours."

Danny, an award-winning musician, has



Sara Clough of Kansas City, Missouri, catches the Budafest spirit. Photo by Shayna Brown.

worked with the fest for several years.

His musical connections continue to attract top talent to the festival, including Dale Watson and Sara Hickman, both of whom will be performing this year.

A parade that winds through Main Street downtown starts the event. Santa is a featured guest, and local celebrities, veterans groups, and floats are all part of the procession.

The festivities start in earnest after the parade. The music stage is set up on the greenbelt in the middle of downtown behind the Buda Public Library, and rows of vendors line the grassy lawn.

Annette says the best part is watching the end of the parade. "To sit in the gazebo on Saturday morning and see the parade and then the huge rush of people, it's a great sight and a great way for everybody in the community to get together," she explains.

In addition to the parade and live music, there will be food vendors, pony rides and craft vendors. "What is unique about Budafest is our craft show. We do our best to restrict items sold to homemade crafts," says Danny.

Last year vendors tendered such diverse items as hand-carved wooden crosses, homemade soy candles and soaps, pottery, and one-of-a-kind handcrafted jewelry.

A handmade quilt from the Buda Senior Citizens Center will be on display, and will be raffled off at the end of the Fest.

Santa and Mrs. Claus are also available for visits from children, and parents are free to take pictures.

Across the street in the City Park, a

full carnival with rides and games—sure to please a child of any age—will be operating. At the carnival, guests can enjoy traditional fare such as popcorn and cotton candy. All of the food vendors are members of local charitable organizations.

The Fest has evolved into a way to give back to the community. "It's not only a community event, says Annette, "but a fundraiser to support charitable giving. We help fund scholarships to graduates of Hays High School, we've given to Project Graduation, the Buda Senior Citizen's Center, the Hays-Caldwell Women's Center, Shoes for Kids, youth sports and 4-H, and more.

Annette adds that money from the fest also gets donated to community projects. "When you can give back to the community, it's wonderful," she says. Annette is serving her 12th year on the all-volunteer Budafest committee.

In addition to some better known talent from the Austin area, local talent gets a chance to shine at Budafest. Dance Unlimited students perform, local public school choirs sing, the Buda United Methodist Church Goldrush Band, and belly dancers from Wimberley are all expected this year, as well as plenty of other gifted locals.

"We do get some luminary professional musicians who like to contribute to a good cause," says Danny, "but this is primarily a vehicle for local talent."

FYI • Budafest is Saturday and Sunday, December 1-2 from 10 AM to dusk at Main Street off I-35 in Buda. Plenty of parking is available, just follow the signs.

The parade begins at 10 AM Saturday. Live music begins after the parade on Saturday and at 11 AM on Sunday.

For more information call 512-694-3413 or www.budafest.org.