

Olympic Legacy of Ancient Greece and Washington State

Series of articles by Dan Youra, travel writer

Dan Youra compares the first Olympic Games in ancient Greece with the Olympic legacy in Washington State, where Olympic Mountains cast a spell across Olympic National Park. Ancient Greek games in Olympia were dedicated to Zeus. Washington's Olympia is shadowed by Mount Olympus, "Home of the Gods". Greek cities welcomed pilgrims to Olympic festivals 2,800 years ago. Washington towns on the Olympic Peninsula host festivals in the spirit of the original Olympic Games.

Success of Ancient and Modern Olympic Festivals

by Dan Youra, travel writer

The original games were collective activities, not popular adulation of individual accomplishment. They had distinct ethical and civic objectives. Festivals and games were promoted by host cities. Invitations were sent out by local ambassadors. Guests who attended were treated with extra hospitality. The Games came together under three Grecian customs: 1. organization of great festivals, 2. promotions by sacred ambassadors and 3. warm welcomes by Olympic city hosts.

Great Festivals (Gr. *panegyris*)

Panegyris is the Greek expression for the congregation of many people who come together on the occasion of a solemn festival and particularly when the Games are held. Great festivals were encouraged in order to foster the kinship that exists among Greeks from all regions of the country and to make people feel more kindly towards each other. What mattered to ancient commentators on the games from Aristotle and Plato in Greece to Pliny in Rome was the propagation of a sense of identity that could be shared by all pilgrims and participants in the festivals.

Sacred Ambassadors (Gr. *theoroi*)

Theoroi were the Greek ambassadors who journeyed out from host cities to circulate through other regions to invite people to come to the festivals and games. The job of the *theoroi* was both to advertise the Games and to be present at them.

Welcoming Hosts (Gr. *proxenis*)

Proxenis were the citizens of a Greek city who were delegated by another Greek city to look after the interests of its people when they arrived in their town. They were more generally the welcoming hosts of Olympic towns who looked after the needs of visitors to ensure that their stay during the festivals was a joyful experience.

Inhabitants of Washington State's Olympic Peninsula live in small communities, close to nature and share a sense of stewardship for the bounties of Olympic Park and Olympic Mountains that are integrally woven into their daily lives. In reenactments of the community efforts of nearly three millenia ago in the sacred valleys of Greece, modern day trustees of the ancient Olympic traditions manifest the same values in promoting today's festivals.

Festivals and Events

Regional festivals, cultural events and music concerts are organized in the cities and towns of the Olympic Peninsula, especially during the summer months, when the weather is warmer and sunnier, and when more people have vacations and are able to visit. Events are put on by private and public groups. Summer concerts in a barn, musical events at a fort and musical groups playing on a strait are held over the days of the summer season.

Publicity and Promotion Agents

Festivals and recreational opportunities are promoted by local ambassadors in the form of non profit associations, who advertise the events and distribute guidebooks and maps in multi media formats, some produced with government supported tax money and some supported by businesses with advertising money. Local chambers of commerce help promote summer festivals. Peninsula-wide promotions of events are lead by groups such as the **Olympic Peninsula Travel Association**, actively inviting visitors to the

Olympic Peninsula since 1933.

Local Welcoming Committees

Visitor bureaus and chambers of commerce fund visitor centers to receive travelers and look after their needs to ensure that their stay during the festivals and vacations is a pleasant experience. Owners of businesses, especially lodging owners, are helpful hosts who work to help visitors while they are traveling on the Olympic Peninsula. For more information on visiting the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State call the Olympic Kitsap Visitor Bureau at 800-416-5615. Visit the peninsula portal online at OlyPortal.com and on the mobile web at OlyPortal.mobi.

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