

## Promenades and Puppetry: Chester to Host Midsummer Stroll and "Puppet Speak"

**By: Emily Dreyfuss**

The town of Chester will not need to pull any strings when, next month, it offers two unique programs designed to satisfy your appetite for fine food and entertainment.

On June 16, the Chester Merchants will hold their annual "Midsummer Stroll," and the Art Center at Killingworth will host a rare pupeteering event, "Puppet Speak," in Chester.

The hosts have banded together to create a cohesive evening of entertainment and community togetherness. The evening begins at 5 p.m. when Chester Center will team with street performances, businesses will keep their doors open late, music will fill the air, and hungry visitors will savor food from around the globe.

Many art galleries and shops -including the Leif Nilsson Spring Street Studio and Gallery and the Connecticut River Artisans Cooperative- will hold opening receptions for new exhibits and previews. The Chester Gallery's summer group show will open on

Midsummer's Night, featuring work by Vincent Connolly, Andrew Gemmill, Claude Martin, Duane Perreault, and Janet Lee.

The Chester Historical Society invites strollers to celebrate "Pastime Summer" at the society's Mill at 9 West Main Street. The Historical Society will demonstrate how 19th Century Chesterites played and dressed during the summertime. On display will be an exhibit of vintage summer clothing and bathing suits as well as antique Chester Baseball accoutrement.

Artist Helene M. Johnson will open her personal studio to the public. Strollers may enjoy wine and food while gazing at her original drawings and sculpture.

Also open for browsing are Déjà vu Gallery, Hammered Edge LLC Studio and Gallery, Scandinavian Gallery, Ceramica, Dina Varano, Wyeth Architects, Chez Manon, R.J. Vickers Herbery, Souleiado, and many more.

Afterwards, visitors have a number of dining opportunities available. Sage American Grill and Riverside Bar will feature live music during the Midsummer Stroll. River Tavern Restaurant and Wine Bar will introduce its new summer menu, featuring local produce and special cocktails made with local fruit. River Tavern also will present its own version of "street food" for those strollers preferring to eat on the run.

Once the Midsummer Stroll has satisfied their appetites for both the aesthetics and fine wine, strollers can head to the Chester Meeting House to watch "Puppet Speak." The program features short vignettes with different mask and puppetry styles. This theatrical event is sponsored by the Art Center at Killingworth.

"A cool and exciting evening can be built with creative performers and well-crafted puppets, which are "free" to speak their minds," said Barbara Nair, artistic director of the Art Center.

According to Nair, puppets are able to "discuss" topics that may be too controversial for humans to broach. The five puppeteers performing at "Puppet Speak" have found their true voice through wooden puppets.



**Larry Hunt, an actor, director and mask-maker, has performed with the internationally acclaimed theater company MASQUE for the past 30 years.**



**Marilyn O'Conner Miller, a multimedia storyteller performs on the classic, syndicated television show, "Hot Fudge." O'Conner Miller performs with two signature hand-built foam puppets, named Tiffany and Piccolo.**

cover up her insecurities. Piccolo, a precocious, Italian-speaking bambino flirts with girls and shows off his charming, but often self-centered personality," Nair said.

The final performer is Larry Hunt, an actor, director and mask-maker. Hunt has performed with the internationally acclaimed theatre company MASQUE for the past 30 years. A master of pantomime, Hunt will perform a number of short pieces, including his signature piece about progressions of Ghandi's thoughts on nonviolence.

When the puppeteers lay down their strings and the performance ends, the audience will have a chance to ask the performers questions.

The Chester festivities of June 16 will begin at 5 p.m. when Main Street will become a promenade, showing off its wares and inviting natives and tourists alike to enjoy the community. "Puppet Speak" begins at 7 p.m. and ends at 9 p.m. For more information about the Midsummer stroll, please call Leif Nilsson at (860) 526-2077. For more information or to purchase tickets for "Puppet Speak," please call The Art Center at Killingworth at (860) 663-5593.

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Many of the "Puppet Speak" performers trained in Waterford at the Eugene O'Neill Theater. Jim "Nappy" Napolitano, a Milford resident, will be performing. He has appeared throughout the world performing his puppetry. Most recently, Napolitano appeared on the PBS show *Between the Lions*.

Lindsey "Z" Briggs is a puppeteer and a puppet builder, who currently performs on the PBS show, *It's a Big Big World*. "Her well-received piece, *This Will Only Hurt a Little*, is a funny and macabre true account of her visit to the dentist," explained Nair.

Children attending "Puppet Speak" might recognize the puppetry of Marilyn O'Conner Miller, the multimedia storyteller who performs on the classic, syndicated television show, *Hot Fudge*. O'Conner Miller performs with two signature hand-built foam puppets, named Tiffany and Piccolo.

"Tiffany, a sometimes shy, sometimes outspoken girl with street smarts, wears a mask of bravado to