

# West Kootenay Women's Association

## PRESS RELEASE

On August 17 & 18, women from all over the Kootenays and beyond will be celebrating their lives at the West Kootenay Women's Festival, at the Vallican Whole Community Centre in the Slocan Valley. The main, annual fundraising event for the West Kootenay Women's Association, this festival has become a tradition over the years, and still manages to take a fresh approach every time.

This year, the festival's theme, showing up all over on posters and T-shirts, is "Doing It For Ourselves," and features workshops on various rural skills, such as chainsaw-handling and gardening, as well as self-help health workshops and other miscellaneous manifestations of women's culture. These include: a workshop by the Raging Grannies; another singing workshop, "Singing our own songs", which includes learning some simple songs in World Sign; "Ourselves, growing older: Menopause;" "Celebrating our survival" – for sexual abuse survivors only; a workshop on feminism and spirituality; bodily ways of knowing, informative political discussions, Reiki, and more!

As well, there will be various workshop/support groups to make the festival as safe and comfortable as it can be for as many women as possible. At lunchtime on Saturday a Newcomers' Tea Party will give all the women who have never been to the festival before a chance to meet and talk with one another. A couple of old hands from the festival and from the Vallican Whole have agreed to answer questions and provide information about the event and the setting. Another group, "Am I the only straight woman here?" co-facilitated by a heterosexual woman and a lesbian, will help clarify why a woman-oriented event looks like a lesbian event, and will deal with such questions as: "How can I tell?"; "Why does it matter?"; and "Do they really think I'm sleeping with the enemy?" Another safety feature at this festival is "Sober, Strong, and Free," a sobriety support group, on Saturday afternoon before the dance.

Some workshops will take place out-of-doors; women should bring rain gear, as these workshops will be outside unless there are torrential downpours, gale-force winds and tornado warnings.

Saturday night, after the giant potluck dinner, the Raging Grannies will perform, there will (hopefully) be some line dancing, with help from skilled line dancers, and then the dance itself, DJ'd by local women from their extensive musical collections. Also on Saturday night, women will be forming bidding cartels during the fabulous cake auction, featuring another scrumptious example of total decadence from one of the Slocan Valley's legendary dessert makers.

Throughout the festival, women will have a chance to support women's culture and obtain beautiful objects at the Arts and Crafts Bazaar, featuring handmade work, mostly by local artisans. As well, there will be food and drink available, sold as fundraisers for local non-profit organizations.

On Sunday, starting at 11am, there will be live entertainment, featuring both local and imported talent. This year's line-up promises to be varied and interesting, including juggling, story-telling, singing, movement, theatre and hopefully a visitation from the infamous Nerdwoman, who was a great hit as the MC of this year's Five Feminist Minutes Cabaret during the International Women's Day celebrations. Norma Kilpatrick, known to many as the director of the Light and Power Theatre Company, is coordinating this aspect of the festival. As well on Sunday, videos from the National Film Board will be shown throughout the day.

Admission to the festival includes free camping on site, breakfast Saturday and Sunday, dinner Saturday night (bring a potluck item), and two days of entertainment and education, as well as the opportunity for women to experience the difference between an all-female environment and their normal life in the real world. All attendees are requested to make the festival their own by contributing a work shift to ensure its success. This is a women-only event. Children 11 and under are admitted free; women are invited to bring their boy-children if they are 11 or younger. There is supervised childcare on Saturday. Only seeing-eye dogs and other such animal assistants are allowed. (This is in a rural neighbourhood that has its own dogs as well as other animals.) The hall is more or less accessible; there is a ramp to enable chairs and other mobility devices to get into the building, but there is not adequate washroom facilities nor is the hall well set up to deal with people who have trouble seeing.

Women who are interested in knowing more about this event can call the Nelson and District Women's Centre at 352-9916, or drop into the centre, 507 Hall Street, Tuesday to Friday between noon and 4pm. The West Kootenays was the site of the first women's festival in Canada, and the women's community here continues to be proud of this unique event: a rural, feminist festival where all kinds of women get together to discover more about themselves and one another.



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