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Organic festival ready to grow

By Amy Dove Victoria News

Organic Island **Festival** takes place July 8 and 9 At Glendale Gardens and Woodland While it may be early yet to see a convenient and fast organic food outlet next to the local McDonald's, Vancouver Islanders can get the next best thing once a year at the Organic Islands **Festival**.

"I want to teach people how to live organically in a fast food world and part of that is connecting them with the producer," said Deb Morse, president of Organic Islands Promotions and **festival** founder.

"We see their products in Thrifty's and other places but we really don't know the people behind them. There are so many wonderful businesses that are working towards sustainability."

Only in its second year, the July 8-9 **festival** is the largest of its kind in Canada and draws a crowd from as far away as California. There is even interest from South America - if people can get their visas on time, Morse said.

While she was shocked at how well organizers pulled off last year's **festival** - a car crash left her with 10 weeks to plan the entire event - Morse isn't surprised at how the community embraced it.

"There is so much out there and people are really hungry for this. People really want to reconnect with the natural world and make a difference. How you live on a daily basis and the choices you make - you can help make a difference in a really practical way."

Before the **festival** got underway, Morse said she was a pretty average consumer of organic food and products, mostly to combat allergies. But the organic community was close knit and it left her wondering how new people found out information about the lifestyle.

"There really wasn't one place you could go to find out about it. I really wanted to make a statement that there is a lot going on here in our own backyard that we don't even know about," Morse said.

The **festival** was born in what she calls a flash of inspiration. The more people she met - or as she calls them, "organic pioneers" - the more Morse wanted to share it with other people.

The event brings anything and literally almost everything organic into one location. Products spanning from clothing and gardening needs to facials and organic cotton tampons are intermingled with meats, produce and chocolate. More than 70 vendors will be ready and waiting with information and samples. The only thing missing is pet products, although Morse is working on bringing those in too.

Level Ground Trading Ltd. is coming back for the second year to promote its organic fair trade coffees, including a brand new one from Tanzania called Cafe Mbeya. The **festival** offers a good blend of experienced consumers who are conscious of what they are putting in their bodies and those looking to learn.

"We think it is a good fit for us," said Rich Farr, Level Ground's marketing director. The company will promote the environmental benefits of organic products with a fair trade slant, he said. While the company attends other community events this is the only avenue strictly for the organic market.

One certified organic farmer will bring a selection of beef - a sought after item on the Island, Morse said.

"In Calgary they are jealous about produce, but we don't have the meat. We need to trade," she said with a laugh.

New to the **festival** this year are the health and wellness exhibits ranging from acupuncture to massage. Located alongside the exhibits in the Japanese garden will be a farmers' market boasting everything from local scallops to mushrooms.

"I really want to support the farmers and tell people to come to the **festival** and buy your produce," Morse said. "Come prepared to buy."

Cash on hand is essential, she added, since debit- and credit-card payments will not be accepted. A children's area will run the duration of the weekend with storytelling and other activities. Keynote speakers include Carolyn Herriot of Global TV's Get Up and Grow, who will share gardening tips and practices. Guy Dauncey, a local author and co-chair of Prevent Cancer Now, will present new research on **organics'** preventative effects on cancer. The Organic Islands **Festival** runs July 8 and 9 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Adult admission is \$5, with children under 16 free. All events will take place at the Glendale Gardens and Woodland (formerly the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific), 505 Quayle Rd. For more information check out www.organicislands.ca.
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