

Northfield has makings of a charming weekend

By AMY ACHESON

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Nestled in the sunlit countryside just south of the Twin Cities, the historic river town of Northfield is celebrating autumn's vibrancy with traditions of arts and culture -- making for a memorable weekend ahead. The picturesque town embraces life's simple pleasures found in the season as visitors find welcome reprieve in a small-town atmosphere.

Some of the weekend's highlights:

Contra dance hits the streets

The Northfield Harvest Stomp kicks off the weekend from 7 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Friday in downtown Northfield, inviting newcomers to join in the fun of community-spirited contra dancing. No dance experience is necessary, and no partner is required. Contra dancing is easy to learn and a great deal of fun. This annual fall event, and the other contra dances held in Northfield each February and April, always attract a packed house and are quickly becoming a regional draw. This dance will feature the lively accompaniment of Contratopia, with fiddle, banjo, piano and mandolin, making it easy to step to traditional tunes including favorite jigs, reels and waltzes.

Contra dance instruction is provided at 7 p.m. led by popular Twin Cities dance caller Robin Nelson. All are welcome (but participation in the dance is recommended for youth aged 10 and up). Admission: \$9 adults, \$6 students and youth under 18 (\$20 cap per family). Northfield Armory, 519 Division St. Festive swing-ready attire and comfortable shoes are recommended. For video, see tinyurl.com/2ab9f8z.

Fine art and fresh produce

Visitors can stroll and shop for one-of-a-kind regional fine art and crafts at the Riverwalk Market Fair 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday in downtown Northfield's Riverwalk and Bridge Square. Discover fall decor to warm up the home and unique gifts for the holidays. There's also a local farmers market with a plentiful array of fresh produce from harvest's bounty including organic apples, pumpkins and squash. Find canned pickles, jams and honey as well as homemade treats such as candies, pies, scones, and other artisan foods. Open-air music adds to the flavor of this leisurely morning activity. <http://www.riverwalkmarketfair.org>.

Artist tour has 14 stops

Step inside artists' personal studios to gather a glimpse of inspiring work at the sixth annual South Central MN Studio ArTour from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. A wide variety of media

will be shown and demonstrated over the two-day event, including watercolor, pottery, wood-turned bowls, jewelry, metal sculptures, handmade books, textile art and more. A map is available online at www.southcentralartour.com. This self-guided tour weaves through the communities and country roads of Northfield, Faribault and Morristown, visiting 29 artists at 14 studio stops.

Actors bring past to life

The Northfield Historical Society hosts "Cemetery Stories" from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Saturday at Calvary Cemetery. Actors dressed for the part portray various influential individuals of Northfield's past at their gravesites, such as a barber/business owner, a seamstress for the St. Olaf band, a Civil War hero who was awarded the Medal of Honor and more. As visitors travel by torchlight from tombstone to tombstone, the anecdotes unfold and history comes alive. For details, see www.northfieldhistory.org. This is a family-friendly event, and hot cider and cookies are included. Tour admission is \$4 per person, \$1 for kids ages 5 to 13 and \$10 for a family of four. Call for reservations at 507-645-9268.

Check out downtown, too

In between the weekend events, try out Northfield's new, high-tech history tours available at the Historical Society. Transport yourself into a different time as the narrator takes you on a downtown tour of old-time Northfield. View vintage photographs while standing in the same spots where they were taken over a hundred years ago. iPods are available at no charge, or download podcasts to your own device. The Northfield History podcasts are available online at www.northfieldhistory.org/podcasts. 507-645-9268.

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