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Druids to mark solstice -- late

Why delay the ritual? Hey, they have jobs, too

June 21, 2007

BY TAMARA AUDI

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Ann Arbor's senior druid was running late.

But not even senior druids can manipulate traffic or skip out of work early. Not even to meet the head of the druids' magicians guild (who is, as it turns out, also the head of the warriors guild).

No matter. The warrior-magician, in jean shorts and running shoes, busied himself preparing lemonade and brownies for his guests.

Soon, druids would be meeting in this modest brick house in a distinctly un-magical-looking neighborhood in Ann Arbor to plan an ancient ritual for the summer solstice, which occurs at 2:06 p.m. today -- the first day of summer and the day with the longest daylight hours.

In ancient Europe, druids were a mysterious religious class of people who revered nature, worshipped many gods and were eventually wiped out by Christians. In the Bible, they're called pagans and cast as the bad guys who favored gold idols and liked a good human sacrifice from time to time.

In modern Michigan, druids are middle-class computer programmers, flower shop employees and office administrators who revere a good cup of coffee at the Ann Arbor Borders, where they sometimes meet and tend to talk about how much they adore their cats. Sacrifice, both human and animal, is out.

A love of ancient history and a sense of humor are in. They're still laughing about that disastrous winter solstice when, after freezing through an outdoor ritual, the druids' cars got stuck at the bottom of an icy hill. And no amount of magic could help Rodney Cox, 39, who had inadvertently locked his car keys in his car that night. Winter solstice rituals are indoors now.

"Sometimes the gods are trying to tell you something," joked Rob Henderson, 38, the senior druid who drives a flower delivery truck during the day.

For the summer solstice ritual, Henderson will wear long, deep-hued robes, lead ceremonial chants and offer praise to the sun god, Bel, and the river goddess, Danu, in a pretty corner of the Botsford Recreational Preserve in Scio Township. But for now, he is in tan pants and glasses, and nervous about a job interview later in the week.

Although the solstice is technically today, the druid ritual will be Saturday afternoon because druids have jobs, too.

"I guess we're pretty boring," laughed Genevieve Stoyak, 35, a druid in the Ann Arbor congregation or grove -- a reference to the preference for outdoor worship. "We're not going to draw your blood or make you kill a cat."

Ann Arbor's 20-member druid grove, started in 1994, is part of a small, international movement to revive pagan and druid practice. The Ann Arbor congregation, called the Shining Lakes Grove, is part of a larger international druid movement spread across 58 groves in the United States, Canada and Britain. The archdruid, who heads the organization, is a guy named Skip.

While they may not take themselves too seriously, their beliefs are real. "Oh, you should have everyone on the e-mail list send you positive energy e-mails for your job interview," Stoyak said to Henderson. Cox, meanwhile, readied his bag of runs, wood pieces he hand-carved with ancient symbols that he would read during the solstice ceremony to see if the gods approved.

There was practical business at hand. Henderson went through the solstice ritual list:

- Cornmeal to throw into the fire: Check.
- Lemonade to serve congregants: Check.
- Sun wheel: Check.

PHOTOS

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(Photos by MADALYN RUGGIERO/Special to the Free Pre)

Rob Henderson, 38, a senior druid, drives a flower delivery truck during the workday. But on Saturday, he will lead ceremonial chants and offer praise to the sun god and the river goddess during a summer solstice ritual at the Botsford Recreational Preserve in Scio Township.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

About druids

Ancient druids, who were also called pagans, worshipped many gods and revered nature. To mark the summer solstice, which occurs today, druids will perform rituals to honor the sun god.

History: Ár nDraíocht Féin (ADF), an Irish name that translates to Our Own Druidism, is a registered nonprofit. It started in 1983 as a network of researchers interested in ancient druids and is now a religious group called NeoPagan Druids, with congregations in the United States, Canada and Britain.

Members: Estimated 1,100 members in 58 congregations or groves, including groves in Ann Arbor, Bellaire (Traverse City area) and Sault Ste Marie.

Sources: www.adf.org and Free Press research

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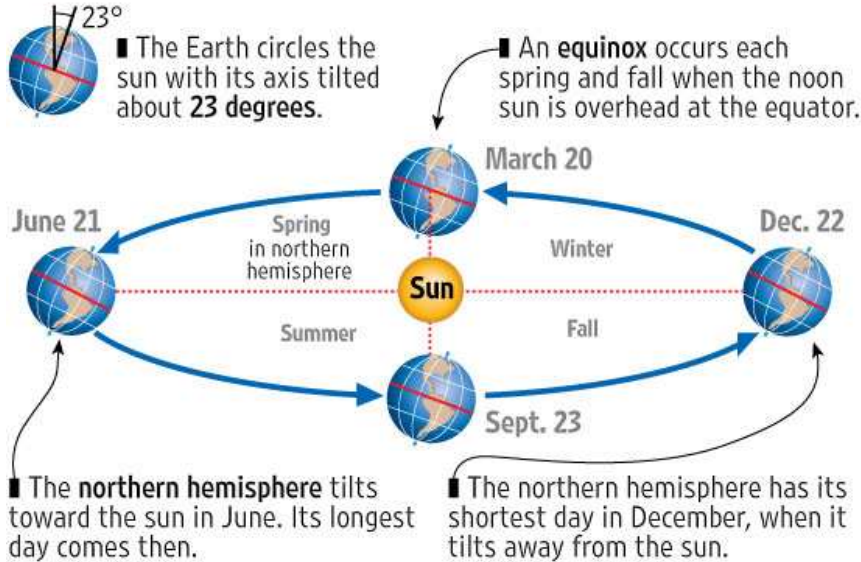
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The sun wheel, a wicker wreath Stoyak decorated in pale blue and gold ribbon, will be thrown into a fire as an offering to the gods. The druids, on a tight budget, were especially pleased with this year's sun wheel: \$1 at the Dollar Store.

Summer solstice

A solstice occurs two times during the year when the sun is at its greatest distance from the celestial equator. The summer solstice is today at 2:06 p.m.; the winter solstice is around Dec. 22.



Sources: Tycho Brahe Planetarium, World Almanac

McClatchy-Tribune, Detroit Free Press

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From the story: "bag of runs"
 One hopes there was also a bag of runes
 J

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vanhate

LMAO PapaWayne. I wonder if that lemonade is like the Kool-Aid Jim Jones gave to his followers 😊

Posted: Thu Jun 21, 2007 6:57 am

PapaWayne

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