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## 'Faeries' have fluttered around Minnetrista for decades. And they're back this weekend.

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(Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

MUNCIE, Ind. — Before fairy gardens were popular, Elisabeth Ball spent her afternoons frolicking in the garden at Oakhurst, her childhood home.

“We filled fairy baskets with leaves and wildflowers and hung them in the shrubbery around the house and in the woods, hoping to attract the faeries,” Ball said to Angie Pruis in 1980.

An avid fairy lover throughout her childhood, adolescence and adulthood, Ball, daughter of George and Frances Ball, spent a lot of time reading and writing about the mythical characters when she wasn't looking for them in the garden.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, fairies, along with brownies, nymphs and sprites, were a big part of popular culture, said Jessica Jenkins, a curator at Minnetrista.

“You would see their images on lamps, you would see them in wallpaper. They show up all over the decorative arts. They showed up as characters in a lot of ways,” she said. “A lot of the books that Elisabeth read, when you look at them a lot of them are titles that aren't really familiar today, but if you start to dig into what they are, fairy-like creatures very much were popular in those. So, it makes a lot of sense to me that Elisabeth was really into faeries.”

Ball lived at the 5.3-acre estate until she died in 1982. By that time, she let the gardens go —she didn't want anyone else in them because she knew where everything was, according to a May 1991 edition of The Muncie Star.

### Faeries, Sprites and Lights returns to Minnetrista

In 1991, Minnetrista started the Oakhurst Project to revitalize the estate, including reviving the garden. Ball's cabin-like studio toward the back of the property.

Four years later, Oakhurst Gardens reopened in May 1995 and Minnetrista was looking for a way to get people there, said Karen Vincent, director of collections. So, a couple of years and a ballet company later, the first Faeries, Sprites and Lights event was born.

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“Reading about Elisabeth and her fascination with fairies as a child, her belief in fairies and as an adult using fairies in her poetry and different writings, it was decided to focus something around that,” Vincent said. “The first few years we worked with a local ballet company and actually taught little girls to dance through ... the woods down at Oakhurst, and now it’s morphed into a little bit more of a focus on theater and characters.”

Though little girls are no longer taught how to dance through the woods, they spend the evening in fairy-like costumes, peeking into fairy houses. Because the event is so popular, Vincent said, it was expanded a couple of years ago to include Thursday night. Last year, there were probably 2,500 attendees on Friday alone, Vincent said.

Now, the three-day event has become a tradition for families like the Copes, who have gone for the past few years. The first year, Kandas Cope made her then-1-year-old daughter’s costume. Now, she makes her children’s costumes every year.

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Families braved short rain showers for Faeries, Sprites and Lights at Minnetrista Thursday evening. Costumed attendees enjoyed music, games, skits and crafts at the event which continues Friday and Saturday. (Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

“My oldest really loves it. This is her third year going, this year and she always likes to go and see all the little houses that they have throughout,” she said.

Each costume can take up to four hours of work, not including the hunt for materials, she said.

However, the costume is what defines the event to many.

When the event began Thursday evening, little girls ran from the fairgrounds to the check-in line, their colorful, delicate fairy wings fluttering behind them.

Then, they were greeted by fairy house-maker Ryan Shelley, who ushered the small fairies, sprites (and sometimes mermaids and butterflies) through the fairy door. There they found trees wrapped in vibrant ribbon and tulle, with fairy houses dotting the forest floor.

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Families braved short rain showers for Faeries, Sprites and Lights at Minnetrista Thursday evening. Costumed attendees enjoyed music, games, skits and crafts at the event which continues Friday and Saturday. (Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

"It was just something that I did when I was little," said Gracye Stewart. "I love fairies, so I wanted her to like the same thing, and she does, so we keep coming."

Stewart started attending the event when she was around 5 years old and now she brings her daughter, Arianna, to the event.

"I like to smell flowers," Arianna, 5, said.

"Faeries, Sprites and Lights" continues 5-9 p.m. Friday, July 27, and Saturday, July 28, at Minnetrista and Oakhurst Gardens. Tickets are \$8 (\$7 for Minnetrista members); children age 2 and younger are admitted for free. Tickets can be purchased in person at the main building prior to the event or at the gate the day of. Information: [minnetrista.net](http://minnetrista.net) (<http://minnetrista.net>).

Mary Freda is an intern at the Star Press. Follow her on Twitter @Mary\_Freda1, and email her story ideas: [mfreda@muncie.gannett.com](mailto:mfreda@muncie.gannett.com).

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