



JoJo Rodriguez delivers an order at Taste of a Fair at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem on Friday. Even though the fair's been canceled, organizers and food vendors are providing those special fair favorites every weekend via a drive-through parking lot so residents don't completely miss out this summer. PHOTOS BY BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Taste of a Fair offers flavors of summer

Emily Teel
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Clad in a Pronto Pup shirt and a face mask of pretzel-printed fabric, Brian Bradbury waved a car through a lane at the Oregon State Fairgrounds.

With the Oregon State Fair long canceled due to coronavirus, the passengers may not be able to ride the rides or pet the farm animals, but Bradbury has figured out how to offer a taste of bygone summers amidst the strangeness of this one.

He is a co-owner of Pacific Rim, the concessionaire at the Fairgrounds. Six weeks ago he launched Taste of a Fair, a weekend evening drive-through lane vending a weekly selection of fair food favorites.

Inspired by the way In-N-Out handled a long line of traffic when they launched in December, Bradbury devised a plan to create — in an area that is typically parking during fair season — a space for cars to come through and a low-contact pick-up option for fair food.

It's not the full menu every week, but they aim to offer a selection of about 10 sweet and savory options every week.

They're skipping things like pizza that are widely available most of the year, focusing instead on the foods specific to the State Fair and other summer concessions. Bradbury thinks that by Labor Day, Taste of a Fair will have been able to offer all of the fair's greatest hits.

The elephant ears and corn dogs are always there, as are the corn cakes, said Bradbury, "and we've held over the turkey legs another week due to popular demand." Strawberry shortcake makes its debut this weekend, competing with deep-fried cheesecake.

Without exiting their vehicles, drivers pass through a gateway framed by waving bags of kettle corn and blue and pink cotton candy. They choose their favorites from a posted menu and pay, either with cash or card, by passing their currency in a plastic bin. They then receive a ticket and proceed to a cluster of the food trailers.

To minimize contact between visitors and staff preparing the food, a dedicated food runner visits each car, assembles and bags each order, and passes it in a plastic bin back to the driv-



JoJo Rodriguez grabs a fresh elephant ear for a customer.



An order of made-to-order curly fries is seen at Taste of a Fair at the Oregon State Fairgrounds.

er. The efficiency, said Bradbury, is driven by a desire to minimize contact points. "We're trying to keep everybody safe." This is also the reason for the limited menu, so inside the trailers where

food is being prepared workers can maintain physical distance from one another.

JoJo Rodriguez is one of the food runners, and she might have the best job in the operation. Handing bags of curly

If you go

Taste of a Fair

Where: Oregon State Fairgrounds at Silverton & 17th

When: Friday 4 to 8 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 12 to 8 p.m. through Labor Day

More information:
<https://oregonstatefair.org/taste-of-a-fair/>

fries through car windows, she gets to see the joy on the passengers' faces.

"They love it," she said, "they're so happy."

Early on Friday evening, most of the cars were from the immediate area in Salem and Keizer. But Bradbury said on weekend days they see folks from Albany, Canby, McMinnville and even Vancouver, Washington.

"We've had cars come from Portland, Tillamook and Eugene," Bradbury said. "It's really cool to see it."

They've primarily promoted the program via Facebook and other social media channels. That's where Melissa Castillo and Luis Barocio saw it.

"She has been telling me for days, 'I want a corn dog!,'" said Barocio, "it's a must."

"We always come to the fair," said Castillo, "my mom, too, and we pretty much come for the food."

In the next car, a woman shrieked with delight to find, yes, they did have deep fried Oreos.

Bradbury said he's seen similar programs pop up in Florida and California but, to his knowledge, Taste of a Fair is the only one in Oregon.

Disappointed over the fair's cancellation, said Bradbury, "we're just trying to give people something." A taste of summer in a season changed by coronavirus, he said, "we're all just trying to make the best of it. It's the best we can do."

Emily Teel is the Food & Drink Editor at the Statesman Journal. Contact her at eteel@statesmanjournal.com, Facebook, or Twitter. See what she's cooking and where she's eating this week on Instagram: @emily_teel

Woodburn schools to start the fall with remote instruction only

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Woodburn School District leadership announced the district will start the upcoming school year with a comprehensive distance learning model, rather than their original plan for a hybrid model with in-person teaching.

The change of course came after staff and students were presumably exposed to COVID-19 during in-person summer

meetings.

"We experienced our first exposure during planning sessions for our summer programs," explained Superintendent Oscar Moreno Gilson in a letter. "Given that safety protocols were implemented and followed, no exposed staff tested positive."

However, he said, a second possible exposure this week prompted them to revisit the educational model for the start of the 2020-21 school year.

"Even though this second exposure

was limited ... it highlighted how disruptive these incidents can be," he said.

"As we have reflected on the impact we have seen during our summer programs ... we feel it is in the best interest of our students, families, and staff to start the 2020-21 school year using a Comprehensive Distance Learning model," he said.

Moreno Gilson said school leaders realize the model cannot replace direct instruction, and it brings with it some challenges.

Additionally, the district will be temporarily suspending on-site athletic practices as they transition to the new model.

"As we are working to create our (distance learning) plan," Moreno Gilson said, "we are exploring different options to continue to support our students, families and staff, and are committed to finding ways to safely increase on-site instruction."