

Josephine County Fairgrounds continue upward trend

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The Josephine County (JoCo) Fairgrounds is a hub of activity - and its continued existence is a testament to the power of community involvement and commitment. To prevent the fairgrounds from shutting down several years ago, the county board stepped in with funding to keep the venue afloat until it became self-supporting - and now, in the past few years, the fairgrounds has earned its keep.

"The fair has done an amazing job, they were in the red and now they're sustainable," said JoCo County Commissioner Lily Morgan, who serves as fair board liaison. "I'm impressed with where the fair board has taken the fairgrounds. There's events year round now, and we want to continue to invest in shoring up the fairgrounds so that it can be used for another 100 years."

"We're continuing to upgrade facilities," said fairgrounds manager Peggy Anderson. "Last year we painted the Floral Building, added new tables and chairs, upgraded counter tops and installed new sinks and toilets; and two years ago we did improvements to the Arts and Crafts Building. In the Commercial

Building, in partnership with the Winter Growers Market and VISTA, we put in new gas utilities. Also, the Winter Growers Market people put in over-head heaters, to make the building comfortable for events year round. We're moving forward with the support of the community and the fair board," she added. "JoCo's fair can be what it used to be and more. We have great opportunities and we're ready to take it and go."

A new partnership with Dutch Bros. promises big things for the county's soccer community. Morgan said Dutch Bros approached the fair board about putting a regulation soccer field inside the horse track.

"We're working out final details for this new sports facility - it's been several months in the making," Morgan said. "There's an amazing amount of soccer buzz in JoCo. It's a growing sport here and now we have the opportunity to have a good soccer field for our youth. It's kind of like the Field of Dreams; if you build it they will come."

"We're really excited for our whole community about our growing partnership with Dutch Bros.," Anderson said. "There's 92 soccer teams in Grants Pass, including Cave Junction and all the outlying areas. This is really a big deal and will support so many kids

county wide."

The fair board met November to establish long-term planning goals for the next three-to-five years; and one idea gaining traction is to build a convention center on 7 acres of county property behind the fairgrounds.

Several fair board appointees were recently reinstated for another four-year term on the seven member board. "I expect this board to have boots on the ground and be involved with the hands-on work that we accomplish with such limited staffing," said Anderson, who took over as fairgrounds manager about 18 months ago.

As the only fulltime fairground employee Anderson is assisted by two part-time administrative staff members and two part-time maintenance staff. She utilizes funds from grants, rentals and donations to "keep going forward, including the cost of maintenance and upkeep. This is a 50 plus acre complex, so we're always looking for volunteers to help with painting, landscaping and more." She added that "during fair, I hire additional temporary workers, but we always need more volunteers to help monitor vendors and keep the parking lot flowing. Our volunteers are ingrained in the community and understand the importance of volunteering." Morgan, who has volunteered at

the fairgrounds agreed: "You share your love for your home this way."

The county fair will take place Aug. 16 through 19; and horse racing runs from May 1 through mid-July. Around those dates many other events occur.

The Home Builders Association, which traditionally put on a home show each year, has opted out. So this year, fairground management developed a committee to take over that event and "put an extra twist on it." Thus a Recreational and Home Show will take place April 1 and 2. "The home improvement aspect will remain," Anderson said, "but the recreational themes added in are broad - and range from fly fishing and camping gear to ATVs and motor homes."

The Grants Pass Growers Winter Market happens on Saturdays, from December through mid-March; and a monthly flea market in the pavilion runs in tandem with the market. "Our last event was so big, you couldn't even find a parking space," Anderson said. Then, at the end of April, the Spring Fling annual garden show will take place.

The annual Gun and Knife Show took place last weekend; and twice weekly, Sunday and Wednesday, the Friends of the Josephine County Fairgrounds host bingo in the Arts and Crafts

Building. Fairground buildings are rented out for weddings, concerts, veteran's events, trade shows, conventions, banquets, meetings, raffles and more. Check out the calendar on the fairgrounds' website to see all the events - and take note of the new electronic reader board on Redwood Highway that helps publicize these and other community activities. (Vendors buy ads on this board.)

The fairgrounds also make it possible for many people to indulge their love of horses. Numerous equestrian events take place and the fairground is home to four high school equestrian teams. Horses are also boarded at the fairground stable; and the facilities also support the county's 4-H programs.

"Without that fairground, lots of kids wouldn't have a place to ride," said longtime Illinois Valley High School equestrian coach Desiree Eddy. "We have kids who don't have their own horses, so this gives them the opportunity to care for an animal on a lease and gain that experience, which is really a good thing to happen before people go out and buy horses. These horse programs are really great for the youth and we could use a lot more community support. A lot of kids benefit."

Halona Jackson makes an impact in first meet

BOISE, Idaho - The Northwest Christian University (NCU) women's track & field team launched the 2017 indoor schedule this weekend, competing at the Jacksons Invitational, hosted by Boise State University.

The weekend included the debuts of multiple new NCU athletes, including freshman Halona Jackson who established new indoor standards in both the 60m and 200m events. Jackson ran

an 8.04 in the 60m and followed that up with a 27.02 in the 200m.

Jackson's 14th-place finish in the 60m was the Beacon's highest on the weekend, along with senior Madeleine Nelson who re-established her own school mark in the triple jump with a leap of 10.19m.

60m: Halona Jackson (8.04), Karrin Shriner (8.13), Ruth Meeker (8.32), and Danielle Willyard (8.44).

200m: Halona Jackson (27.02), Karrin Shriner (27.80), Abigail Spencer (27.84), Danielle Willyard (28.19), and Ruth Meeker (28.34).

4x400m Relay: Halona Jackson, Ruth Meeker, Karrin Shriner, and Kelly Willyard (4:13.23).

Jackson and her NCU teammates will be back in action Feb. 12, traveling to Seattle to compete in the University of Washington Indoor Open.



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

IVHS band members play the national anthem Feb. 3.

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