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Child's Play Keeping kids involved, Country Fair style. BY DAVE CONSTANTIN

The Oregon Country Fair has been promoting community activism since its inception 35 years ago. From the beginning, the Fair's coordinators have been looking for new and innovative ways to involve kids in the community-building effort. Keeping with that tradition, this year's Fair will host a repeat of some favorite youth-centered activities from the past, along with some exciting new additions to the roster.

A new **Youth Arts** component will have its own section where kids will be able to play oversized tic-tac-toe, draw on the Chalkwalk and even create their own spirit mask in an area dubbed "Altered Space." Artist Andy Strickland is in the process of preparing a "stelaeted qubatohedron," which is really complicated name for a large play structure composed of 240 recycled bicycle tire inner tubes.

One of the programs once again receiving the Fair's support is **Culture Jam**, a

weeklong, art-centered sleep-away camp for anybody ages 14-18. The purpose of Culture Jam is to introduce teens to everything from art and nature appreciation to issues of cultural diversity and community activism. The emphasis is on helping kids find their creative voice and to encourage their role in shaping the world. "This has

been in the cooking for about six years," says Robin Bernardi, who works year-round at the OCF's Eugene office. "We'll be doing our fourth one-week event this August. This is an awesome program! About 45 youth and 25 staff come every year, and we get the lion's share of our financial support from Country Fair." Past

experiences have included dance and yoga classes, social activism, even archaeology and media awareness.

Culture Jam stresses the importance to kids of bringing what they learn back with them, to find ways to improve their own communities. The model for the program was adopted from an organization called Power of Hope, a youth group operating in Washington state and British Columbia since 1996. This year's Culture Jam is unique in that Power of Hope founders Charlie Murphy and Peggy Taylor will be leading the activities. The seven-day outing will take place on the OCF site near Veneta Aug. 13-19. Find out more at www.oregoncountryfair.org by clicking on the "Culture Jam" link. To register for this event call the city of Eugene at 682-5361. ●



(Above) Kids at the Fair.

Culture Jam (Left)

Vision Quest

The OCF looks to the horizon.

BY DAVE CONSTANTIN

From the outside, it's tempting to view the Oregon Country Fairgoer as the aging '70s hipster still living in his parents' basement. Fiftysome years old, he emerges occasionally wearing an old, faded tie-dye from college and a week-old beard, asking who's down for a party. Of course, as anyone involved in OCF's year-round activities can tell you, this image couldn't be further from the truth. At any rate (and to conclude the analogy), the Fair's leadership has been feeling the itch of "middle age" approaching and decided it was time to move out of the basement and start thinking about the future.

Out of this soul searching, Vision Quest was born. The project was conceived as a catalyst to thinking about OCF's role in future decades. The first in a series of gatherings was held in May for around 100



OCF participants representing a diverse sampling from the community.

"The idea of Vision Quest is not so much what happens to our three-day festival, but what happens to the whole organization in the future," explains Dee Dee Wilner, co-chair of the steering committee responsible for overseeing the nuts and bolts of the project. "We want to make sure we include as many people as possible from the surrounding community ... to distill what we find and figure out what issues are highest priority for most people," she says.

At this year's Fair, Vision Quest leaders will present an open survey to encourage more active outside participation in the growth process. Participants will examine the results of that survey at the next Vision Quest meeting, scheduled for September, and discuss ways to start implementing new goals for the future.

"We're not the organization we were 35 years ago," says Wilner about the OCF. "Up until now, we haven't had the mechanism in place to look more than two or three years ahead."

Questions and comments about Vision Quest can be e-mailed to vqcommittee@yahoo.com