

# Food, Fun and Philanthropy

## Money and love at the OCF ■ By Martha Calhoon

Every year roughly 57,000 people pass through the front gates of the Oregon Country Fair and enter a fantasy woodland city, a secret world under a thick tree canopy, a three-day celebration of music, food and community — and most will pay between \$14 and \$19 a day to do so. You don't have to be an OCF treasurer, nor one of the clairvoyants that offer their services at Golden Light booth number 194, to conclude that this event generates a lot of money — about \$1.2 million in 2005. Not bad for an event that began 38 years ago as a fundraiser for a Eugene community school.

However, in the midst of the merry-making, the Silver Man, the Dragon Parade, the giant Rasta puppets and the occasional nude fairgoer, few pause to ask where that money goes. But who does profit from this annual windfall? Everyone, according to Leslie Scott, OCF general manager. According to the 2004 tax forms, approximately \$166,000 is divided among the six year-round paid staff.

### Give It Away, Give It Away Now

A considerable portion of fair proceeds goes to the fair's two major philanthropic programs: the Jill Heimen Vision Fund and the Bill Wooten Endowment. Jill Heimen was the fair's first official attorney who helped the fair become designated as a cultural and educational nonprofit. "The Vision Fund is, in essence, a way for the fair community to fundraise for causes it cares about," Scott says. "Being a nonprofit doesn't mean you can't make a profit; it means your money is used for the public good, not private gain. It means you're not beholden to shareholders; you're beholden to the community."

Each fall at the annual meeting, the fair community chooses what kinds of nonprofits

to donate to. Usually, organizations that provide what the fair refers to as "basic needs services" benefit from the OCF's philanthropy. White Bird Clinic and Womenspace are frequent recipients, although the fund has also contributed to environmental restoration projects.

The fair encourages fair-goers and staff to donate by placing Vision Fund boxes throughout the property so volunteers and fairgoers can donate money or food vouchers. The fair matches \$2 for every dollar or voucher contributed. Last year, the fair donated \$22,000 to community organizations from the Vision Fund.

The Bill Wooten Oregon Country Fair Endowment was created to give back to the Fern Ridge community through donations to the school district, the library and other services that benefit the residents of West Lane County. Last year the endowment, which has a current principal balance of about \$350,000, donated \$12,000 to cultural and educational resources.

The board of directors has its own donation funds and contributes on a smaller scale (in the \$500 range) to other non-profits in the community such as HIV Alliance and the Whiteaker Thanksgiving.

When all is said and done, the fair donates between \$40,000 and \$50,000 annually. And this year, after 12 years of philanthropic giving, the fair surpassed the \$300,000 mark — all without corporate sponsorship.

The fair is also responsible for Culture Jam, an arts-based teen leadership camp for which they provide approximately \$8,000 in scholarships annually — an expense they don't count among their philanthropic donations. They also co-sponsored this spring's "Hip Hop Hope," (check out *EW*'s 4/06 online photo essay) where teens got to write, record and produce a CD of their original music and perform it at events throughout the community.



Leslie Scott

"When people buy a ticket to the fair, they are supporting this work because it comes directly out of event proceeds," Scott says. "When we make excess revenue, we are able to do more. It goes directly back into the community."

### It's All About the Love

Leslie Scott believes that the real value of the fair is not in numbers and financial capital, but in what she calls "social capital." "We depend on the work of literally thousands of volunteers, and it is the network of relationships and the community we build that we 'put in the bank' and count on from year to year," Scott says.

The fair couldn't function without the roughly 4,000 volunteers who oversee everything from security to childcare to site construction and recycling. The time commitment varies depending on position. For example, volunteers produce the fair's monthly *Fair Family News* newsletter and generally contribute around 100 hours of time over an 11-month period.

**'I would pay large quantities of money to be able to go and enjoy myself the way I do out there. The fair is a very important thing. It's bigger than me.'**

— Jesse Creighton, an OCF volunteer

Pre-fair positions, on the other hand, require a 50-hour minimum. But Scott says that most volunteers will give anywhere from 60 to 100 hours during spring set-up. During the fair, volunteers work 18-20 hours from noon Thursday, when the site is officially operational, to noon on Monday when tear-down begins. In return, they get free meals and the highly coveted camping pass that allow fair families and volunteers to stay overnight. Everyone who stays overnight has to pay \$10 to park, however, including entertainers, vendors, volunteers and even Leslie Scott herself.

### Stay, Play, No Pay

So is it worth it? Without question, says

volunteer Jesse Creighton, who's worked pre- and post-fair security for the last five years and recently quit his regular job as a cook because he couldn't get the time off from work to volunteer. "I'm 27 years old and I just had to move back in with my parents," he says of his commitment to participating in the OCF. "I would pay large quantities of money to be able to go and enjoy myself the way I do out there. The fair is a very important thing. It's bigger than me."

Taylor Rutledge echoes this sentiment. Rutledge, now 27, has been volunteering at the fair since she was recruited to the teen crew 11 years ago. "I think that a large part of the fair magic is that the work done by the staff is a gift of love," she says. "We love this event and our extended [fair] family enough to commit our time and energy to creating and re-creating it each year. I wouldn't want to see that change. Our compensation is that we get to live at the event for three to six days."

In fact, some of the most substantial line items in the annual OCF budget are designated to care for volunteers. The OCF has an organic

garden and full kitchen with a \$40,000 budget to feed volunteers three meals a day. In addition, the fair has a \$100,000 budget for food vouchers that volunteers can use at any vendor booth.

Jesse Creighton, who usually works about 30 hours during the fair, says he often volunteers for more. He says the little things make the commitment worthwhile.

One year, as he sat at his designated gate working security playing a 3 am game of solitaire, a golf cart showed up from the fair kitchen to offer him an array of small quiches they had made up for the volunteers. Creighton appreciated the gesture. "That was really cool."

**Gear up for Country Fair**  
Birkenstock® is a classic choice for Country Fair revelry.

**BIRKENSTOCK**  
Made in Germany • Tradition since 1774

**FOOTWISE**  
sandals shoes clogs boots

181 E Broadway • Downtown Eugene • 342-6107  
301 SW Madison Ave • Downtown Corvallis • 757-0875  
Mon-Sat 10-6 & Sun 11-5 • [www.footwise.com](http://www.footwise.com)

Highest Quality Gems & Precious Metals

**CUAUHTLI's Designs**  
Specializing In Custom Fine Jewelry  
**Cuauhtli Hernandez – Owner**  
**541-687-2176**  
By Appointment Only • Locally Owned & Operated  
Personal & Professional Workmanship  
with Emphasis on the Client

CZD inc. - P.O. Box 3152  
Eugene, OR 97403 USA  
[cuauhtli@czdesigns.net](mailto:cuauhtli@czdesigns.net)

**Lets all go Skinny Dipping**  
Enjoy National Nude Week with a Fun Filled FREE Day at  
**The Willamettans**  
A Family Nudist Resort  
**Open to the public**  
**July 15th, 10-4**  
Call (541) 933-2809 [www.willamettans.org](http://www.willamettans.org)  
Affiliated with American Association for Nude Recreation  
1-800-TRY NUDE -[www.aanr.com](http://www.aanr.com)