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GETTIN' FUNKY AT THE FAIR

Progress and pastimes at the Lane County Fair BY RICK LEVIN

Chocolate-covered bacon and deep-fried Twinkies. Frisbee fetching dogs and Australia's smallest marsupial. Texas Hold 'Em and kids on pedal-powered tractors. Jugglers, jokers, clowns and carnies, curly fries and funhouse mirrors. Flying pigs and racing motorbikes ... no, sorry, make that flying motorbikes and racing pigs.

This is the Lane County Fair.

And then, like every county fair everywhere, there will such staples of nostalgia as past-their-prime mega-groups hitting the circuit; this year it will be Foreigner playing "Cold as Ice" for the umpteenth time, while screaming people are catapulted sky high on a giant mechanical slingshot; 4-H cows munching hay and laying pies; lanky teenagers wolfing down elephant ears while Sponge Bob Square Pants, or whoever he is, chats up the little ones.

Listen, if all of the above doesn't strike you as genuinely *funky* — as in David Lynch-meets-Barnum & Bailey funky — what does? The motto for the 2009 Lane County Fair is, "It's all good." It could just as well be: "Something old, something new and a kangaroo."

According to marketing manager Rachel Biven, the fair's brand-new management team made a concerted effort both to modernize and funk-ify the fair without losing any of the event's age-old rural appeal. With the new team in place, Biven said, the fair has been energized and revamped to fit our changing times.

"With new blood breeds new life," she explained of this year's changes and additions. "It's really important to keep up with the times. Fairs around the country are in a place where they're competing for the attention of super tech-savvy kids. That's what's driving a lot of things that we're doing while trying to honor our traditional county [fair]. We had to do some serious moving around to make this work.

"I don't think people will be disappointed at all," Biven added.

First, she said, an effort was made to include more local vendors and entertainers than in years past. These will include, for instance, nighttime pyrotechnics by Eugene outfit the Apocalypica Fire Factory and a

West Stage dedicated to the live music of local bands as well as the inaugural Green Village, a first-time exhibit featuring all local providers and participants that Biven touted as an "educational, fun and entertaining way to look at sustainability."

Also, there was an attempt made this year to provide more free entertainment. "We recognize that this is the year that people are staying closer to home," Biven said, acknowledging the impact of our downbeat economy. "The concept this year is that we packed it full, lots of free entertainment. We want people to be busy every second."

Among this year's new, free features is the Boost Mobile FreestyleMX.com tour, featuring world-class stunt riders flying back and forth over a 300-foot-long "footprint" or ramp. Biven said such motocross action is "one of those things that everybody can enjoy," city and country

dweller, kid and grandparent alike. After all, she added, "They're going to be flying 40 feet in the air — you can't miss them."

Add to this an appearance by J.D. Platt & the K9 Kings — a troupe of agility dogs including the third-place finisher on the CBS program *Greatest American Dog* — more rides, more food vendors and, in general, a selection of "off-the-wall things," and it's not surprising when Biven says that she is "super excited" about this year's fair. "We're really trying to step out there," she said.

It's a welcome step, to be sure, and changing things up without screwing them up is fine. When it comes to county fairs, however, funky is as funky does. For some people, no amount of fancy fire breathing or exotic outback rodents will outdo the pleasantly odd appeal of chickens walking or the surreal time warp of *Hee Haw*'s Roy Clark pickin' his six

string. The much-ballyhooed and hugely successful Oregon Country Fair may win hands-down for sheer kaleidoscopic hippie spectacle, but — in this age of light-speed infotainment and endless on-demand diversions — there is something to be said for the atavistic, anarchic appeal of traditional county fairs, with their demo booths and step-right-up barkers, their wafting deep-fried smells and proud displays of amateur husbandry.

Biven said it's the collision of past and present that makes the fair worth experiencing anew. "To me," she said, "the appeal of the fair is, I love the juxtaposition of traditional agriculture with fair carnival chaos. It's almost like Las Vegas in a box — noise, lights, food, rides going, sweet and savory food. And walk three more feet and see sweet little baby pigs, and then see a zooming flying motorcycle."

In other words, funky is where you find it.

MAKE IT SNAPPY

Do you feel like Ansel Adams or Annie Liebovitz when you pick up a camera? Here's your chance for fame and (a little) fortune at the Lane County Fair Photography Contest. The best photos will be prominently on exhibit in the main hall of the fairgrounds.

If you missed the July 31 deadline for entries, you can begin preparing for next year by checking out www.atthefair.com Click on exhibits, then scroll down below the livestock rules to find out specifics about the photo contest.

Eugene Weekly's graphic designer and main photographer Todd Cooper is judging the photojournalism entries this year, one of 18 categories in four sections: junior, intermediate, adult and professional. Cash and gift certificates will go to the winners in the nonprofessional sections.

More than two dozen businesses and individuals are contributing cash awards up to \$200, gift certificates and digital equipment to this year's photo contest.

For those age 17 or under, a Youth Photography Contest will be going on the first three days of the Fair. Young photographers are asked to shoot the Fair itself and submit photos by 5 pm Friday, Aug. 21, to the Fair office at 796 W. 13th Ave. Find the rules on the Fair website, or call Justin C. Williams at 343-3195 for more information. — *Ted Taylor*



TODD COOPER

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY IS ONE OF THE CATEGORIES BEING JUDGED AT THE COUNTY FAIR. THIS PHOTO WAS SHOT IN JODHPUR, INDIA.