

# A MAD DASH

Some parts of the fair are coming together within weeks of big event

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
East Oregonian

**T**he 2020 Umatilla County Fair should have been a complete flop.

The event was largely canceled due to the pandemic. But knowing how essential it was to allow kids an opportunity to sell their animals, the livestock auction was held virtually, with kids watching and receiving feedback from judges over livestream.

“It pays for their continued education,” said Angie McNalley, the fair manager. “So we were going to do it one way or the other.”

The livestock sale ended up being the second most successful in the fair’s history, raising just over \$585,000, about \$30,000 less than the 2019 fair. But not because there were more animals. There were fewer.

What happened?

If you ask McNalley, people and organizations from all over made sizable donations because they wanted to support the community’s youths. Some people even made add-on donations to make up for other shows the kids wouldn’t be able to attend that year.

“We had people coming out of the woodworks to donate,” she said, “even though they were going through their own hardships.”

Now the fair is looking to rebound from the pandemic year and is revving up for 2021. A new carnival company and new artists headlining evening concerts are sure to attract thousands of eager fairgoers who have anticipated the event since last year’s cancellation.

But with months where it was unclear whether large events could happen in Umatilla County, it’s been a



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group, File

scramble to pull it together, McNalley said.

Nearly all entertainers contracted to perform in 2020 were carried over to this year. But as the state remained in lockdown until recently, with capacity limits and masking and distancing restrictions, some of the fair’s main-stage acts were wary of returning to the event. As of July 8, the fair was still trying to lock in an act for Wednesday night.

“It’s just been very last minute for what was unforeseen and out of our control,” said McNalley.

Fair tickets, which are typically sold in May, didn’t go on sale until mid-July. Sponsorships also couldn’t be recruited until the event was a lock.

Vendors have been slow to come, and some regular vendors folded entirely because of the eventless pandemic. Some vendors run by students also will be absent because of pandemic restrictions that remain in place in some districts.

“It’s like you squeeze the end of a toothpaste tube and now all the stuff at the end is what we’re dealing

with,” said McNalley, “Stuff we normally do over the past year, it’s all happening like right now.”

But luckily, community members have been eager to get involved, as sponsors and volunteers have recently reached out en masse.

And there will be new attractions coming this year. A new carnival company will be setting up for the first time at the fair, giving it a brand new look. A huge lineup of Latino musicians will perform at Friday night’s Latino Night, which has become one of the fair’s main and most profitable events, McNalley said.

Some things won’t be changing from last year. The livestock auction will be held virtually to accommodate those who don’t wish to attend in person. And now that pandemic restrictions are lifted, McNalley said she’s excited to see people come out to the fair.

“We’re just hoping that people who want to work will find us,” McNalley said, “and that we can recruit so that people will have a great fair experience like they used to.”

## SAVE ON YOUR AUTO LOAN

AS  
LOW  
AS

**1.49%**  
APR\*

FOR 48  
MONTHS

Ask about a  
pre-approved  
loan check!

**first community**  
credit union

HERMISTON | PENDLETON | MILTON-FREEWATER  
541.471.8600 | MYFIRSTCCU.ORG

\*The ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE of 1.49% for 48 months applies to automobiles with a model year five years past the current model year or newer with less than 100,000 miles; monthly payments are estimated at \$21.48 per \$1,000 financed with no down payment. The APR, repayment period and loan-to-value limits are based on creditworthiness, loan amount and collateral. Rates may change without notice. Some restrictions may apply. Insured by NCUA.

**WHEATLAND**  
INSURANCE CENTER, INC.

Serving Eastern Oregon since 1983.

455 E. Main St., Hermiston • 541-567-8834 • [www.wheatlandins.com](http://www.wheatlandins.com)

# We Speak Insurance!