Western Oregon Expo Heritage Fair draws record crowd

By Cindy Weeldreyer
For The Sentinel

Senior Queen Chelsie Mundy reacts after hearing the announcement as queen during the WEO Heritage Fair; fairgoers plant flowers in the expanded kids area.

The stars aligned for the 86th annual Western Oregon Exposition's Heritage Fair and produced the largest attendance in nearly a decade.

Families flocked to the fairgrounds to take advantage of the free admission for children 12-years-old and younger and to enjoy the expanded offerings for kids. The weather was perfect, unlike the triple digit heat of two summers ago or the thick smoke from last summer's nearby forest fire.

WOE Board Member Dena Twite was delighted to see so many locals and out-of-towners visit the fair last weekend.

"It's really exciting that our attendance is the largest it has been in a decade," Twite said. "Our attendance on Friday was surprisingly high and, after a year of planning and hard work, we are all delighted with that."

WOE Board President Ken Schwieger, an eight-year fair board veteran, is serving for the first time as board president. He said the success of the fair is due to the year-round commitment of board members, volunteers, partner organizations and sponsors who work well together with a strong spirit of camaraderie.

Schwieger said, thanks to the efforts of Sabina Johnson and Athena Intros, the WOE Royalty Court tradition was revived this year with great success.

"My personal goal in my first year as president was to build up community involvement by increasing activities for kids," Schwieger said. "It was fun to work with members of the Boy Scouts and Royalty Court, who were our Grange Café servers. I watched all the Crowning Ceremony rehearsals and I'm amazed at their enthusiasm. They bring new life to the WOE experience."

Johnson and Intros required members of the Royalty Court to complete 20-hours of volunteer service. Both Senior Queen Chelsie Mundy and Junior Queen Hailie Intros had more than 60 volunteer hours invested when they were crowned in Friday's ceremony. They described Saturday night's Royal Ball in the Woodard Pavilion as pure joy for the nine girls and their families who participated.

The London Grange sponsored a new Kids Town area filled with a wide variety of activities and games. Schwieger said kids were having so much fun it was a challenge for parents to persuade their kids to leave. He added the new baby changing area was both appreciated and well-used.

Log House Plants returned for the 4th year to offer "make and take" planters on Friday and Saturday. Greg Lee, of Log House Plants, said kids and adults made 150 planters. The activity was free for children and for a donation from adults. Lee said the money raised from the adults' planters was donated to the 4-H Club.

Other fair offerings for children included: the Bohemia Mining Days' Alice in Wonderland-theme Kids Zone, gold panning with members of the Bohemia Mine Owners Association, the Swinging Bridge's rope bridge and Cottage Grove Bible Church's Grand Prix car races.

For a dozen years, a partnership between WOE and the Cottage Grove Bible Church provides the popular Grand Prix Car Races. Kathy Harris was among 25 church volunteers who helped the approximately 70 children, between the ages of 4 to 14, build a small wooden car on Friday and Saturday so they could participate in the racing action on Sunday afternoon.

No country fair is complete without prize-winning animals, quilts, flowers, fresh baked and canned food and vendors.

PHOTOS BY GREG LEE/FOR THE COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Barn Supervisor Launa Brink said there was a good turnout this year and all went extremely well. "We had both children and adult participants, the cages were full with a wider variety of animals, which included alpacas, goats, pigs, rabbits, cavies, poultry, ducks, pigeons and doves."

Carolin Pettit is another long-serving WOE Board member and area superintendent coordinator. She said, while exhibits were down this year in produce and preserving, there was a greater variety of entries from many new entrants, which were placed alongside entries from those who have participated for years. She also noted there was an increase in commercial vendors.

Larry Horner organized Friday's Lumberjack Show that drew 37 contestants, including five women in three events: axe throwing, log bucking with a stock chainsaw and log bucking with a modified chainsaw.

The winners were: Stock Saw, Virgil Hughes; Modified Saw, Phil Holdren & Axe

bled vintage carousel was a popular attraction for family members to be photographed with the animal of their choice. Carousel board members said they enjoyed visiting with fairgoers, some from as far away as New York, and for the generosity of those who donated cash or purchased fundraising merchandise.

"This was a terrific year for us," Schwieger said. "We are already eagerly looking forward to next year to implement more great new ideas.

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