

KIDS CAMP



A fair experience unlike any other

Though it was designed for vendors and 4-H presenters to get a break from their children and younger siblings — and vice versa — the Umatilla County Fair’s Summer Fun Kids Camp has grown into much more than a distraction.

children who are entering first through fifth grade, the camp provides a more in-depth and behind the scenes opportunity for kids to experience all the arts and crafts, animals, science experiments, music and more that the fair has to offer.

Now open to the public for 40

“The kids see things that usual

patrons of the fair don’t get to see,” fair director Angie McNalley said.

Those “things” include private shows from the fair’s entertainment acts and chances to interact with and pet the animals.

Tammy Wagner founded the camp in 2012 after presenting to the fair board about the need she saw for parents working at the fair and teenagers who were presenting animals to have a trusted place for their kids or younger siblings to spend time. The camp was an immediate hit. McNalley said they’ve had to cap it at 40 kids, though they could easily fill up to 80 spots if they had the capacity.

“It’s easier to know where your kid is then letting them run around or making sure there’s a family member or friend to watch them,” McNalley said.

Wagner said the issue is that there’s just not enough space to expand at this point. Currently,

the camp is held in a tent, though she added that most of the day is spent roaming around the grounds.

According to McNalley, the camp has already won an award from the Oregon Fair Association for its success. Wagner is hoping for more though, and said one day she’d like to see the fair dedicate a whole section to kids as some other fairs do.

The camp is for kids who work well in large groups and can function independently as the camp takes them through the animal barns and all across the fairgrounds. Middle and high school students volunteer as camp leaders and can earn community service hours in the process. Wagner said many campgoers who are now too old to participate come back to help.

This year, campers will also perform a rehearsed dance at the fair’s Les Schwab stage on Friday.

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Right: Katelynn John

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