



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Dan Dirksen adds grilled onions to a sausage at a booth at the Umatilla County Fair.

Fair food booths fueled by families

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

As Umatilla County Fair attendees roam the booths and barns, it is often families who provide the fuel for their adventure.

Children help their parents serve funnel cakes, or spouses work in tandem to take orders and fry corn-dogs. At the International Foods booth, which serves treats such as kebabs and gyros, Louie Sbaih's daughter Hanan Sbaih, 7, was pushing meat and fresh vegetables around the grill.

"Yesterday she asked me, 'Please Daddy, I'm bored, can I wait on customers?'" he said.

He said she did such a good job that some customers returned the next day to ask for her specifically to make their food. He doesn't want her taking over his business someday, though — the single father is determined to make sure his daughter does and achieves her goal of becoming a judge.

"My father's a lawyer, my brother is a lawyer, my cousins are lawyers," he said. "I went to college but didn't finish. I want my daughter to be not just a lawyer but a judge, over all of them."

Sbaih comes up from Las Vegas each summer to escape the heat by working fairs in the Pacific Northwest. This week is his first time at the Umatilla County Fair, and although it hasn't turned out to be an escape from the heat, he said he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"This is a great fair, very well put together," he said. "It's very organized, and the staff is very helpful ... If you ask me how I rate this fair, it would be an A+."

Elizabeth Peterson started working at her parents' Monster Foods booth when she was 15, and is still at it almost 20 years later. The booth serves "monstrously huge" fair foods, such as elephant ears the size of a pizza.

Peterson, who came down from Alaska to help run the Umatilla County Fair booth, said her parents raised foster children, and it was hard on their budget to take large groups of children to the fair.

"We make monster foods so that families can try a little bit of everything and still afford it," she said.

Many of the fair's vendors come from the Tri-Cities, such as Nany Scott, who serves Filipino food at the Taste of Manila booth.

She is originally from the Philippines, and said she loves cooking for other people at the fair.

"I want them to learn of our food and how good it is," she said.

While food is important at the fair, staying hydrated

is even more essential, especially after the first two days of the fair pushed the thermometer up to triple digits in the afternoon. Lemonade stands are some of the busiest in the afternoons, as red-faced fairgoers seek after a tall glass of something cold and sweet.

Michelle Hagans was serving lemonade at the Davis Amusement lemonade stand Wednesday afternoon, helped out by Bella, 10, who couldn't remember how to spell her last name.

Hagans said they hand out a lot of water to children and the elderly to make sure they're staying hydrated. As for the lemonade, they have strawberry and original, but are hoping at some point to add a watermelon option.

Some of the people handing out food at the fair aren't getting paid for it. The Lions Club booth is staffed with volunteers who donate their time so that all of the proceeds can go to Lions Club projects ranging from local scholarships to the rebuilding of Funland playground.

"Not only do we have the best hamburgers, the coldest drinks and the freshest fries, but all the money we make goes back into the community," Phil Hamm said.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Fun at the Fair Camp participants perform "Baby Shark" at the Les Schwab Stage Friday afternoon. The performance was the culmination of the camp that had run since Tuesday.

Kids take the stage at Umatilla County Fair

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

As pigs rolled around in the swine barn, and musicians drew crowds on the Main Stage, a dozen or so bales of straw provided seating for another place where the magic happened — the Les Schwab Stage at the Umatilla County Fair.

It's where Jace Otteson, 14, traded in his belt and shoes for two used Barbie dolls while under the spell of hypnotist Chris Mabrey during fair week.

"It was fun," said Otteson, who noted he was a little embarrassed about his dazed performance.

It's also where juggler Jeremiah Johnston teetered on a wobbly wooden board while tossing knives and torches into the air with ease during his act Thursday night, and where comedy cowboy Leapin' Louie broke spaghetti with the crack of a whip on Friday

afternoon.

"This is the real spaghetti western," he told the crowd.

But professional entertainers set down their props to make way for a lively group of 45 kids, who shared their performance with the fair on Friday to mark the end of the Fun at the Fair Day Camp.

All week, they'd been rehearsing a dance to the contagiously well-known song "Baby Shark" by Pinkfong. As the song began, some of the participants seemed a little shy about the dance. But by the end, everyone sporting a blue campers' shirt had joined in.

And while the performance was short, the days leading up to it were action-packed for campers. They got a closer look at 4-H show animals, and received up-close performances from Leapin' Louie and Mz. Pearl of Mz. Pearl's Variety Show. They also participated in arts and crafts projects.

"We got to see the ani-

mals," said Elaina Jewett, 7, who attended the camp with her little sister, Taylor. "And we got a bracelet."

This year, the camp was open for children ages 6 through 11, and was sponsored by Family Health Associates.

"We had a good group of different ages," said Tammy Wagner, the camp's director.

Wagner, whose husband is on the fair board, started the camp in 2012. Originally, it was meant as a place for the children of vendors and other workers at the fair to have fun while their parents were working. But it has since been opened up to all members of the community.

Registration for camp, which accepts 45 kids every year, opened in April and filled up fast, according to Wagner. She hopes to amp up activities in the kid's tent at the fair next year.

"This is kind of my thing; it's my way of contributing to the fair," Wagner said.

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