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CELEBRATING A LEGEND

Marilyn Johnson Retires After 40 years at Nebraska State Fair

Grand Island, NE – For 40 years, Marilyn Johnson has been involved in some way, shape or form of Nebraska State Fair. For anyone having won a trophy or purple ribbon, or any color for that matter, Johnson was a part of that win behind the scenes.

“Johnson ordered all of the ribbons, banners, trophies and plaques for us in her recent years,” said Kelly O’Brien, livestock and domestics manager. “She collected inventory, made sure they were all organized to the proper division and distributed them to the departments throughout the fair. That’s some 17,000 ribbons – no small feat.”

O’Brien said Johnson served in that role for 26 years, but in the beginning of her tenure, she tapped Cokes. “I guess I must’ve done okay at it, because I progressed to working in the food and beverage department,” Johnson, always humble, chuckled.

Johnson also worked in the State Fair cleaning department and then moved to conducting clerical work. “Next they asked me to mail out the entry books to exhibitors,” she said. “That all changed when the State Fair website was created.”

Johnson continued on with ordering supplies for departments from the entry office to the office.

“Of course we were in Lincoln at the time and some of those years were really tough,” she said. “There often wasn’t enough money for supplies so we had to make do with what we had. It really changed after we moved to Grand Island.”

Johnson, like many people in the capitol city, wasn’t a big fan of moving away to Grand Island. After making the transition, she was surprised at how responsibilities changed for her. “It was a good thing, the move,” she said. “My desire to make the Fair successful was still the same. With Grand Island, though, we had everything new; buildings weren’t in disrepair. We didn’t need a hammer and nails any longer, so that was part of the reason I moved over to the entry office.”

Johnson said she would still be working for the State Fair but her husband, Jess, retired from professional life so it was time to hang up her hat also. “At the State Fair, Jess helped me for the last 12 years,” Johnson said. “It’s been pretty special to get to work with him at our state’s largest event.”

The 2018 Nebraska State Fair runs August 24 through September 3 in Grand Island. Ticket discounts are currently available at all Pump & Pantry locations or online at **StateFair.org**. Bundle prices, entertainment information and a schedule of events can be found online.

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