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TEAM SAFETY AT NEBRASKA STATE FAIR *Preparing for the State's Largest Event Takes a Village*

Grand Island, NE – Most people do not imagine the action planning behind the scenes to create a state fair including safety preparations. Officials at Nebraska State Fair actually hope that's the way it stays.

State Fair Security Directors Mark and Sharon Dreher said they work with a multi-faceted group of security interests for the public good. "We have built a network of safety from first aid to fire to law enforcement," Mark said. "When guests arrive at the Fair, we want to be sure they know their safety is a top priority."

In the 19 years the Drehers have run their business Double Locked Security, they have learned a lot about the fair industry. "The State Fair is like a small city," said Mark. "With the sheer volume of people that come through the gates, we experience a multitude of different calls of service. And of course there is always the weather issue."

Safety challenges come in many forms. Weather is always on the top of the radar screen, according to Jon Rosenlund, director of emergency management for Hall County and Grand Island, whose motto is "self-sufficiency is emergency preparedness." Rosenlund said wind events are the most common threat to any outdoor event, especially in Nebraska.

“Summer is our most active season for dangerous weather,” he said. “We are always monitoring the regional weather conditions for the risk of high winds, lightning and hail. “In connection with being prepared, State Fair staffers have participated in Weather-Ready Nation training provided by the National Weather Service. Nebraska State Fair is the only state fair to date to have completed this training.

Certain safety predicaments end up at the CHI Health First Aid Tent where Susan Thompson manages a team of nurses volunteering to provide basic medical attention when needed. Scrapes, bumps and water are the common theme at First Aid, located at the Welcome Center just past the Main Gate. Thompson has cots ready in case someone needs to lie down. If medical needs are escalated, First Aid calls for a transfer from onsite ambulatory services provided by Midwest Medical.

“We have three ambulance stations established on grounds during the State Fair,” said Chad Bluschke, operations director for Midwest Medical. “Each station gives us quick access to that particular area of the grounds. Our paramedics are committed to the highest quality care.” Bluschke added that designated areas for helicopter transport are also established.

Midwest Medical and Double Locked Security work closely with other local departments such as the Grand Island Police Department, Hall County Sheriff Department, Nebraska State Patrol, FBI, Grand Island Fire Department and Emergency Management to ensure a safe atmosphere. Working closely with State Fair management is a year-round activity.

“Fair officials never stop training,” said Lori Cox, executive director for the State Fair. “As members of national organizations such as the International Association of Fairs and Expositions, we are put through scenario trainings on a regular basis from weather events, to lost children, to active shooter. We run safety protocols with all team leads leading up to the Fair and lead each day of the Fair with a security update meeting.”

Cox said radios are a vital part of their communication network on grounds. The public address system will be used if necessary to alert fairgoers to an issue. "This year if you hear the PA system, it's because we want you to pay immediate attention to the message."

Parents can register their children at the Welcome Center, through the Found Kids program. "It's a simple safety tool," said Cox. "Write your cell phone number on the child's arm in permanent marker, then paint it with a liquid bandage. Or if you forget, come to the Welcome Center and we can help you take care of it."

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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