

April 7, 2017

Dear Walworth County Agricultural Society Lifetime Member,

2016 held many changes and accomplishments for the Walworth County Fair and the fairgrounds. The Board of Directors and generous sponsors made tremendous strides to help ensure the continued solvency of the Walworth County Agricultural Society.

Last year there were many capital improvements including the completion of the 4-H 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Pavilion with the help of a generous donation from Thelma Myer and the fundraising efforts of many others through a Clover Leaf fundraiser. The new building not only provides a wonderful meeting place for 4-H members during the fair, it eliminates the expense of renting a tent each year at a tremendous expense. The Pavilion also created another revenue stream by creating a space that is rentable by other non-fair event planners such as weddings, camping groups and more.

Walworth County made a generous donation to help build 2 new horse stall barns last year. These barns add an additional 100 stalls to the facilities bringing the total capacity to nearly 300 horses. For the last several years the fair has rented 2 large tents to accommodate additional horse stalls and with the addition, 1 of those tents was not necessary. The addition also makes the fairgrounds more attractive to non-fair horse shows. With the addition of the barns, we have attracted 4 additional non-fair horse shows including the Wisconsin State Barrel Racing Finals which had been held in Madison for many years. The horse show calendar for 2017 is completely booked.

Duane "Skip" Katzman and his family made a donation to the Walworth County Fair Foundation to expand the offices of the fairgrounds. The construction is complete and if you have not had a chance to see the changes we invite you to visit for a tour. The Katzman family has been very generous to the fair through volunteering and donations for many years and we are very grateful for the office expansion donation.

Many buildings were painted, roofs repaired or replaced, dead trees removed, trees planted, gutters repaired or replaced all in 2016. A new drain was dredged behind the swine area as well. Clare Doane our Operations Manager and his crew accomplished a tremendous amount and we are very proud of his team's efforts.

In 2016, there were many other accomplishments. The Pork Chop Cookout set an all-time record, the Fur and Feather Sale set an all-time record, the Meat Animal Sale had its 2<sup>nd</sup> best year, and the carnival company had its best year in its 27 years of participating in our fair. Advance fair tickets set an all-time record, the fair concerts set an all-time revenue record and the ATM machines set an all-time record. We successfully but painstakingly transitioned into a new soft drink sponsor which increased sponsorship by \$10,000. A new food stand was sponsored by the fair so that 6 non-profits could earn income managing the stand by taking shifts each day.

We also went through the difficulty of modernizing our ticketing system to help eliminate duplicate entries and to protect the value of season passes and Lifetime Passes. Change is never easy, but staying up to date is important to all of us and the security of the fair.

One of the biggest accomplishments was the updating of the fairgrounds safety plan which came in very handy during an evacuation on the first night of the fair. The coordination between law enforcement and the fire department ahead of time showed that planning ahead has its obvious advantages.

A new 3 day festival was added last year called Elkhorn Ribfest. The event drew many of the nation's best BBQ companies and a group of amateurs to compete for trophies and cash. There was live music for all 3 days and plenty of activities for patrons including an artisan village and rides for the kids. Approximately 25,000 people attended. We are looking forward to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of this event in July.

Since the fairgrounds had been losing money for a while, it was also nice to see a modest profit earned in 2016. There were some price adjustments but most ticket prices remained the same as they had the year before. The success can be attributed to nice weather, increased attendance and new non-fair events.

Most importantly, we should all be grateful for Peggy Fraser and her staff for managing and implementing all of the changes in 2016. The office staff is the front line when it comes to communication with all of you and the 135,000 visitors. They handled over 10,000 fair entries, sold thousands of tickets, and helped hundreds of exhibitors, vendors and more. Keeping a smile and a good attitude would be a challenge to most, but Peggy is a strong leader with good values and it shows by her staffs attitudes.

This year there will be no changes to ticket prices including season passes or Lifetime Memberships.

All of the entertainment has been put under contract for 2017 but we cannot announce the names of the concert entertainers yet. One concert will be announced towards the end of April and the other cannot be announced until July 24. The delay in announcing is not our desire but the requirements of our agreements of the entertainers.

This year Bull Riding, Truck and Tractor Pulls, Monster Trucks and of course Demolition Derby will be back. There will be more free entertainment in Kiddie Land with Pig, Dachshund Hound and Goat Races, a Wildlife Show and a display of Ligers (mix of tiger and lion) which weigh upwards of 900 pounds. The

schools will be showcasing their STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) program with various interactive displays, a peak at a new sport called Parkour, Arm Wrestling and much much more.

The capital improvements and price adjustments in 2016 made for an interesting year at the fairgrounds, but in the end proved to be good decisions by the board. We are grateful for your patience and understanding and hope that your goal is the continued success of the fair for many years to come.

The fair has been trying to find perfection for 168 years and it hasn't accomplished that goal yet. 2016 was a tremendous year but we still have a way to go to meet that goal. Will 2017 be a year of perfection? We hope so, but if not, rest assured the board will keep striving to be better.

Thank you for your continued support and especially your prayers for our wonderful and beloved fair.

Respectfully,

Lawrence Gaffey  
General Manager  
Walworth County Fairgrounds

P.S. Reminder that if you did not have a chance to exchange your Lifetime Pass for a new one last year, you still must do so before the beginning of this year's fair if you wish to gain entry to the fair this year. Please contact the office at (262) 723-3228 if you have any questions.