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Ohio's Pickaway County Fair relies on local entertainment to draw crowds

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By Linda McNatt

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Bob Black, less than two weeks after the 2014 Pickaway County Fair concluded, was still running, still in a hurry to get things done.

Black, president of the Pickaway County Agricultural Society, was on his way to meet officials from a neighboring fair in Ohio to see if they could help provide pointers about raising the necessary funds to build a new combination animal show-ring and office building that estimates say will cost about \$3.5 million dollars.

The building that Black and others want to see replaced was constructed in the late 1930s and early 40s. It's ramshackle and practically unsafe now, he said, and the Pickaway County Board of Commissioners is reluctant to provide the money to build a new one. In fact, the commissioners have offered only \$2,500 toward the construction costs, about the same amount of money the commissioners provide to the fair each year.

Still, Black said he's confident the job will get done, through grants, fund raisers, public support or other means - the show must go on.

The Pickaway County Fair, in a small, rural burg on the Scioto River, about 20 miles from Columbus, Ohio and 100 miles from Cincinnati, has survived since 1943, when it first started as a part of the famous Pumpkin Festival in Circleville, Ohio. The fair headquarters are located on 65 acres of land in Circleville, Ohio, where the water towers are shaped like pumpkins and painted bright orange.

The Pumpkin Festival is still held in October every year. The fair is now a separate part of the festivities held in the mostly agricultural area, and agriculture and country living is all about what gets residents in the surrounding communities excited.

"On Friday night, at the pickup truck pull, we couldn't have gotten another vehicle on the grounds," said Black, his voice still hinting at the excitement of an almost more-than-capacity crowd.

The eight-day fair was held from June 21 through June 28.

The cost for admission to the Pickaway County Fair is \$5 with ride wristbands from noon to 5 p.m. for \$10. Ride wristbands that can be used until midnight cost \$15. Senior citizens, over 60 years old, were admitted to the fair

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for \$2, and there were lots of special pricing opportunities, especially for seniors, said Black.

Royalty was selected on Sunday evening when the fair King and Queen were chosen. Bowen Boldoser and Sydney Black were chosen as the 2014 junior fair king and queen. First attendants were Caleb Welch and Kendra Gabriel. Boldoser, 16, is the son of Russ and Julie Boldoser of Kingston, Ohio. He is an eight-year member of the Pickaway Clover Mixers 4H Club.

Black, 16, is the daughter of Bill and Lynn Black of Ashville, Ohio. She is a nine-year member of Walnut Creek Barn Busters 4H Club, a three-year member of Teays Valley Future Farmers of America and a two-year member of the Pickaway County Junior Fair Board.



Welch is the 17-year-old son of Timothy and Kimberly Welch of Ashville, Ohio. He is an eight-year member of Walnut Wonder Workers 4H Club and has served for three years on the Junior Fair Board. Gabriel is the 17-year-old daughter of Troy and Vonda Gabriel of Stoutsville, Ohio. She is a 10-year member of 4H and a three-year member of Teays Valley Future Farmers of America.

For most of the youngsters in schools surrounding Pickaway, the Future Farmers of America and the 4H clubs are the highlight of their educational years, said Black.

"Seven Hundred or eight hundred kids in the local schools are members of the agriculture clubs and took part in the fair," he said. "There are three high schools in the county and 950 kids came to participate from those three schools. They had cooking exhibits, sewing, things like that. Ours is the first fair in the state every year, and the kids flock to it."

Although steer numbers in Pickaway have been down recently, the ag shows at the fair were still amazing, according to Black. Fifty dairy beef feeders were in the shows, he said, 300 hogs, 50 sheep, 100 goats and about 400 animals were sold in the shows put on by the high school students. Black said he didn't have the amount of money they made as yet, but it is always impressive.

Waiting for the numbers in this primarily agricultural fair is one of the hardest parts, said Black. Fair officials are estimating that about 25,000 to 30,000 people attended the Pickaway County Fair during the full week, he said. He and his staff are still trying to get the numbers together, he said, and they're still waiting for profit summaries to come rolling in. He said they are estimating they had a record crowd this year but won't know for sure for a couple of weeks.

The fair has no name entertainment. It's something that the crowds have shown they're simply not interested in, he said, so that effort was abandoned several years ago. For entertainment, the fair depends on the regionally-popular Circleville Pumpkin Show Band and local entertainment.

Harness racing kicked off the fair on Saturday, leading into the week of county fair events. There was also a demolition derby, tractor pulls, including a junior tractor pull, and arts and crafts shows.

There was rain the first three or four days of the fair, and that may have dampened attendance somewhat, said Black. The area got 3 inches of rain during the first three days of the event, and it started raining on Tuesday night, when the rodeo — another popular event — was only about half over.

"It was hot in the day time, but it cooled off at night, so that worked out all right," said Black.

Triple Treat Shows, based in Cincinnati, Ohio provided the midway, just as the company has for the last several years. It's always a clean, safe environment, said Black, but he was dissatisfied with the number of rides that were brought to the fair.

"They brought about five kiddie rides and four big rides, and I would have liked to have seen more," he said. "I hope that's something we can work on for next year."

Black said the fair was advertised through radio, television, a couple of billboards and in one local newspaper that has a circulation of only about 7,000 subscriptions.

"How do you know what works and what don't work when you're talking about advertising?" he asked.

He said he hasn't yet gotten the figures back for the advertising budget. For now, the only figure he's waiting for is the final cost of the multi-purpose building he wants for the fair. He hopes it will be ready for next year.

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Matt Cappella

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