



By: Angie Hatton

Fun At The Massac County Youth Fair

The line between carnival and county fair isn't as sharp as it used to be. The annual fair looks more like a 'carny', with ring tosses, topsy-turvy rides, and funnel cake. "The Massac County Youth Fair is different," said Youth Fair Board member Betsy Fellows. "This is an old-fashioned county fair; we have three-legged races and ice cream eating contests." The focus is celebrating Southern Illinois agriculture; and, more specifically, celebrating it through the youth of the region.

All the animals and projects presented at the fair come from young people between the ages of 7 and 21, and most live in the thirteen southernmost counties in Illinois. The exception is the horse show, which has the same age range, but no residency restriction. The fair is always held the third week in July. This year's fair is July 16 - 24 at the Youth Fairgrounds, 4476 Korte Road, across from Massac County High School. Admission and parking are both free.

This is the 29th year for the Youth Fair. Fellows said after the Massac County Fair disbanded 30 years ago, organizers were looking for another opportunity. "Most of the counties in Illinois have fairs, but [the competitions] are open to adults," she told me. Organizers decided that they wanted to focus on youth, and give young folks the opportunity to learn about agriculture. For that reason, the event receives funding from the state department of agriculture. Fellows said the Massac County United Way and the Metropolis Tourism Commission chip in the rest.

Children show a menagerie of animals from geese and ducks, to sheep and goats, and dogs and cats. In addition to this, the public enjoys several special events during the fair. Fellows said by far the most popular is the greased pig competition, Thursday, July 22 at 8 pm. Pig wranglers start small with the youngest competitors, who are only 2 and 3 years old. Brackets go up from there, with a separate greased pig





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for each challenger. Unlike the classic version of the game, competitors don't get to keep the pig but they do get a donated prize.

Organizers plan to keep the fair lighthearted with fun competitions. The horse show is Saturday, July 17 at 4 pm. Another show takes place later in the week, on Thursday, July 22 at 7 pm but this one is a stick horse competition and won't involve any four legged horses! Fellows said the crowd is treated to a parade. "The participants are led by a ringmaster around the ring," she explained. Some of them have real stick horses, some of them just have a stick, and some have a broom." Most of the competitors are under the age of six, but Fellows told me that older kids jump in too, for fun.

The exhibit hall is open July 22 - 24 and displays the projects completed by young people. They usually get a good variety of entries. "We have potted plants and flower arranging and you'll see potatoes and peppers. We also have fun

categories like best dressed potato,” Fellows said. Woodworking, art, poetry, research papers, science projects, and canned and baked goods are on display. At a food auction July 20 at 6:30 pm, children sell and receive profits from their work.

There’s going to plenty of fun for adults at the Massac County Youth Fair. On the first Saturday of the fair, July 17, the grown-ups like to come to the tractor and machinery show. There’s also a farm toy show, a tractor pull, and two washer pitching contests—one for adults and one for children—that same day. If that wasn’t enough for tractor lovers, Fellows told me the tractors and machinery set off on a parade through Metropolis both Saturday, July 17 at 6 pm, and the next day at 1:30 pm.

Of course, the fair wouldn’t be complete without food. A 4-H booth sells hamburgers and hot dogs, and other park food throughout most of the week-long event. Saturday, July 23 the Massac County Farm Bureau sponsors a breakfast and if you stick around that night, the Shawnee Beef Association serves up steak for beef night.

The Youth Fair is held in conjunction with a 4-H competition, but for the Youth Fair, kids don’t have to be a member of 4-H, though many are a part of Future Farmers of America. The only requirement is that kids are passionate about their farm animals. If you or your child fits the bill, there’s still time to enter your animal in the fair. Registration for dairy cattle and goats runs through July 16, and registration for beef, swine, and sheep lasts through July 20. A small entry fee for animals does apply.

Fellows hopes for plenty of attendees and increased public interest in the Youth Fair. She said the board estimates attendance for the week is between seven and ten thousand people, but it’s hard to give an exact figure as there is no admission fee. Fellows encouraged everyone to come out and support the young people who participate in the fair. She said the benefit is getting to see all the things that the kids have done and are doing. “I’m always amazed at the projects they bring in and the animals, how well they take care of them,” she told me.

To find out more about the fair, Fellows suggests getting a ‘fairbook’. They’re available at various places around Southern Illinois, including county extension offices. †

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