



Illinois
Association
of
Agricultural
Fairs

October 2021

TentTalk



Gov. JB Pritzker was on hand at County Fair Day during the Illinois State Fair to honor Jack Ratcliffe for being selected as the 2021 County Fair Person of the Year. At left are Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton and Illinois Director of Agriculture Jerry Costello.

Jack Ratcliffe Is Fair Person of the Year

To know Jack Ratcliffe of Belvidere is to know his priorities – Family, Farming and the Boone County Fair.

At the 2021 County Fair Day, Gov. JB Pritzker recognized Jack as the 2021 County Fair Person of the Year for his tireless contributions to the fair industry.

Jack got his start early. His mother and father were in charge of the concessions at the Boone County Fair and Jack helped. He also volunteered to park cars. Later, he was in charge of finding and signing up entertainment for the Boone County Fair. In 1973, he was appointed to represent his local Grange as a member of the Boone County Fair Board. Shortly after that he was

elected to serve as vice president of the Fair Board, a position he has held for 31 years. He also has served as officer of the Northern Zone and now represents the Northern Zone on the board of the Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs.

Besides his leadership abilities, Jack is often the first one to volunteer. You will find Jack everywhere on the grounds, no matter the season, finding things that need to be addressed at the fairgrounds. During preparation and planning of the fair, he can be found at the infield or measuring areas for his ground entertainment events. The night before receiving the County Fair Person of the Year award (which was a total

surprise), Jack was pulling 200 tractors until 10:30 at night.

“I had no idea I was going to get this award,” said Jack. “I love everything about the fair. When I was a youngster, I showed poultry and dairy calves at the fair. My dad was president of the Boone County Fair until 1976. It’s all I know.”

He and his wife, Laurel, have three sons. When he wasn’t volunteering at the fair, he raised feeder hogs and was a field man for Jolly Green Giant overseeing farmers who raised produce on contract. He also sold seed corn and beans to farmers.

“My favorite thing is visiting with people,” said Jack. “I’m so thrilled with this award. It means a lot.”



The President's Pen

Here on the north prairie, the Sandwich Fair has come and gone. With that event, fall is not far behind.

I was able to attend 17 Illinois fairs this season and one in Georgia. The industry has moved past the disappointment of 2020. Every fair I attended showed great enthusiasm. I saw improvements to the grounds nearly everywhere I visited.

Restroom improvements at the Ford County Fair, new and expanded dairy wash rack at the Boone County Fair were a couple of the improvements that I noted. Signage has improved at many of the grounds I visited.

The joy I observed by patrons and volunteers alike was infectious. Fairs had been missed. I am reminded of that when I think back to those loyal patrons when I watched the large crowd who stood in a steady rain for well over an hour waiting to see the

demo derby at the Iroquois County Fair.

In closing, Zone meetings will soon be upon us. I hope many of our members will attend and support these meetings. Central Zone-October 31, Northern Zone-November 7, Southern Zone-November 14. Planning continues for our annual convention in Springfield. Save the dates – Jan. 14-16, 2022. We are looking forward to a great program. And finally, my hat goes off to Queen Kelsi. She is a wonderful representative for our industry.

Kenneth D. Synell
President

Dates to Remember

- **Talent Entries Due**
October 1, 2021

Zone Meetings:

- **Central Zone**, Oct. 31, 2021
Springfield
- **Northern Zone**, Nov. 7, 2021
Ottawa
- **Southern Zone**, Nov. 14, 2021
Marion County Fairgrounds
- **IAFE Convention, San Antonio**
Nov. 28 to Dec. 1, 2021
- **IAAF Convention, Springfield, IL**
Crowne Plaza January 14-16, 2022

Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs

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IAAF Office
71 West Fairview Lane
Springfield, IL 62711



Marla Calico with Freddy Miller of Miller Spectacular Shows

Time for Annual Convention is Nearing

It's nearly convention time! After Covid concerns canceled last year's convention, we are so excited to present this year's "Back in Business" theme and annual convention. It will be held Jan. 14-16, 2022 at the Crowne Plaza.

Our keynote speaker is Marla Calico with the International Association of Fairs & Expositions. Marla has been a steady voice during the Covid pandemic and helped fairs and associates navigate tough times in the industry. She will share with us lessons from the past and a guide for the future.

"Back in business! Whew! Wasn't it great?" says Marla. "On so many levels it was fabulous to get most of the county and state fairs across the United States open again, doing business almost normally in 2021 after the pandemic shuttered life as we knew it in 2020. Since January I have visited 31 fairs of all sizes in a dozen states and each one has been such a joy to my soul!"

What is evident, however, is that there will be both short and long-term impacts to our county and state fairs because of the pandemic and the unforeseen consequences of it on every aspect of our daily lives.

When she joins us for the breakfast session on January 15 at the IAAF Convention, she will share with you some insights into the challenges that we must rise up to meet for the future, but also the opportunities before us that may not happen again for a generation or more. As one of her friends puts it, "R U READY 4 THE FUTURE?"

Marla Calico is the President and CEO of the IAFE, headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. The Association represents and facilitates the evolving interests of its 1100 members which are agricultural fairs, exhibitions and show from around the globe and over 700 associated businesses ranging from insurance to ribbons, tickets to cattle panels, stage production to all types of entertainment and more.

Her role as the President and CEO came after 9-1/2 years on the staff of the Association. When she joined the IAFE's professional staff in 2006, her primary projects include the launch the IAFE's Institute of Fair Management (a training program which provides an introduction to the core areas of fair management to fair staff, board members and volunteers), and to deliver the Association's

award-winning "Consumer Protection Program: Risk Management for E.coli 0157:H7" to the fair industry globally.

Prior to joining the IAFE's staff, Marla had a long career in the fair sector, working for nearly 30 years at the Ozark Empire Fair (Springfield, Missouri), the latter decade of which she was the General Manager. During that time, she also served as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the IAFE.

Marla is a frequent speaker for fair industry gatherings, presenting motivational keynote addresses as well as seminars on a wide range of topics of key importance to fairs today. In 2012, Marla was inducted into the IAFE's "Hall of Fame", the highest honor awarded by the Association.

Besides our Saturday morning breakfast, the 2022 convention will host the Talent Contest on Saturday afternoon and evening, Showcase with two stages Friday evening and our Trade Show with our vendors Friday and Saturday. A highlight is the selection of Miss Illinois County Fair queen. Elections of officers for the IAAF will be held Sunday morning.

Come renew friendships, learn how to make your fair the best it can be and book your events for the 2022

Great Times at McDonough-Douglas Fair



State Government Update September 2021

by **Bridget Dougherty**
IAAF Legislative Consultant

Hello IAAF Members and Fair Leaders!

Congratulations on a very successful 2021 fair season following the difficulties of 2020. This is a brief update on state government affairs and new state grant programs available to fairs.

New State Grant Programs Available to Fairs:

There are two new state grant programs available to fairs. Both were announced by Governor Pritzker and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) during the month of August.

The first is called the Back to Business Grant Program and is similar to last year's Business Interruption Grant (BIG) Program. Like the BIG Program, the Back to Business Program is intended to provide funding for revenues lost during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Program has a total funding amount of \$250 million and grants will range from \$5,000. to \$150,000.

We sent a series of informational emails to fairs last month urging you to apply. We have confirmed that fairs, regardless of the type of legal organization, are eligible. Only those fairs that received funding through the BIG Program are ineligible; all other fairs are eligible even if you applied and were unsuccessful last time. Applications are still open. The application and webinars are available at DCEO's website, which is www2.illinois.gov/dceo.

The second program is a smaller one called The Tourism Attractions and Festivals Grant Program. The purpose is to attract visitors and spur attendance at upcoming events at your fairgrounds in the future, even if they are not regular fair events. We also sent informational email on this program in August. Total program funding is \$10 million. This grant opportunity is open for about a year or until the funding runs out, according to DCEO. Information

about this grant and the application are also available at www2.illinois.gov/dceo. We hope that you will apply for these new grant opportunities.

Regulatory Changes:

We continue to work cooperatively with the Illinois Department of Agriculture on changes to the Department's administrative rules governing fair operations. At the moment we are working on a change to the rules that would remove the requirement that rehabilitation reports be notarized. This change is agreed with the Department and will go through the regular Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) process. We will inform you when it is finalized.

Illinois General Assembly:

The legislature met in Special Session throughout the summer to address two items that were not finalized during the regular spring session:

Drawing new maps for Illinois' state House and Senate districts following the release of the official census data in August, and to address a comprehensive energy reform bill that was finalized in mid-September.

Of note is that Illinois' statewide primary election, which usually takes place in March will occur in June starting in 2022. You are also likely to see an increase in your utility bill as a result of the passage of the energy legislation. The General Assembly returns to Springfield in late October for the Veto Session.

Good luck with your grant applications and looking forward to see-

Talent Contest Changes for 2022

by **Dave Engelbrecht**,
Talent Show Director

The Talent Contest will have some changes at the annual convention held in January 2022.

We are encouraging all people wanting to watch the Talent Contest register and pay in advance. The fee for guests will still be \$20.00. Participants are automatically registered with payment from their counties.

Our registration desk has struggled to accommodate the mass influx of people wanting to watch the contest and get everyone the information they need on time.

Any registration for the Talent Contest will be moved to the entrance of the contest room. Every attempt will be made to have the registered participants and guest badges prepackaged by county or individual.

Also we will have two stages in the room and we will have one stage set up with a piano for accompaniment and the piano will remain stationary for the entire show. This will

keep the contests moving smoothly.

As always I will need several volunteers to assist at the registration tables especially with a new location. Enjoy your County fair Talent

Address Changes

The IAAF office is in the process of updating the TentTalk mailing list.

If you have received this issue and no longer wish to receive future issues, please let us know. If you are responsible for your fair directors' listings, please forward any new address changes, and new board members or current directors who do not currently receive the issues of TentTalk.

Therefore, please forward any names that should be, or should have been, removed over the past several years.

Please send all updates to: IAAFOffice@illinoiscountyfairs.org or to IAAF Office, 71 West Fairview Lane, Springfield, IL 62711.

Jeanette Watkins Is 'Go To' Person

Greetings from the Illinois Department of Agriculture!

As we wrap up the 2021 County Fair season, I think we all can breathe a collective sigh of relief as we were able to safely hold 96 county fairs. I find it interesting that when we started the June fairs there was a good deal of apprehension, not knowing what to expect coming off a year where the pandemic canceled our county and state fairs.

As we went deeper into late June and early July fairs, the apprehension began to dissipate and by the time we got to the mid-July fairs, we were on a roll.

Thank you for hosting me at your fairs, which were well attended, and it certainly seemed everyone was having a great time.

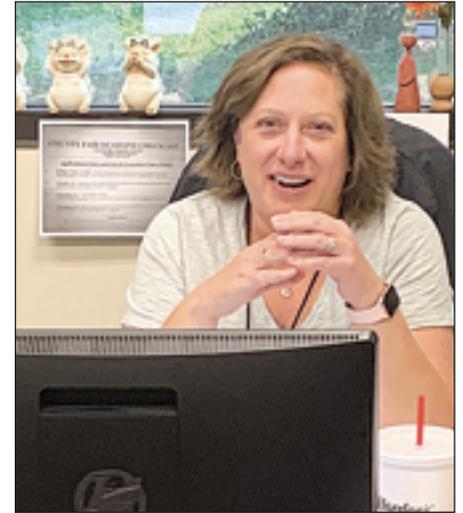
Both the Springfield and Du Quoin State Fairs were largely successful with the highlight of the Springfield State Fair being County

Fair Day on the Directors lawn. There were well over 700 people in attendance, in what turned out to be a beautiful day.

We passed out 29 certificates and pins recognizing Years of Service and we named Jack Ratcliffe of Boone County our County Fair Person of the Year. Congratulations to those who received their certificates and pins and to Jack!

We had two incredible days of horseracing at Du Quoin, the first since 2018, beginning with a beautiful Friday evening for twilight racing and concluding a great day of racing on Saturday afternoon. The spectator attendance was very impressive for both days.

I would also like to introduce you to Jeannette Watkins. Jeannette will be your "go to" person for County Fairs. Jeannette joined the Illinois Department of Agriculture during the peak time for County Fairs and



Jeanette Watkins

the State Fairs and has been working on Rehab reports since. Please help me welcome Jeanette.

Thank you to all of you who make Illinois County Fairs such a special place to be.

IAAF Recognizes Volunteers for Service

Congratulations to the volunteers who received years of service awards at the recent Illinois County Fair Day.

Volunteers are the backbone of every county fair. To these award winners, we say a big thank-you for your service.

20-year Recipients and County

Ruth Blasingame of Boone
Roger Miller of Boone
Jerome Sievers Jr. of Calhoun
Laurie Glenn of Marshall-Putnam
Kyle Schumacher of Marshall-Putnam
Clint Smith of Massac
Vicky Taylor of Massac
Dorothy Schilling of Monroe
Shane Stechmesser of Monroe
Greg Wagner of Winnegabo
Doris Diekemper of Clinton
Brad Noble of Whiteside
Todd Mickley of Whiteside

30-year Recipients and County

Steve Paulson of Boone
Kevin Walter of Boone
John Stelbrink of Calhoun
Brenda Goins of Massac
Scott Dunham of Pike Griggsville
Mike Yates of Union
Steve Silva of Vermillion
Linda Frederking of Washington, Okawville
Dallas Meyer of Ford
Nancy Rex of Dekalb, Sandwich
Steve Van Vleck of Winnebago
Denny Isaak of Clinton
Natalie Puntney of Lawrence
Diane Boyer of Edgar

40-year Recipients and County

John Henninger of Boone
Ralph Zipprich of Calhoun
David Pille of Jersey
David Bremer of Massac
Larry Durham of Massac
Rozann Wilkins of Massac
Ron Mueller of Monroe

Don Schrader of Monroe
Mike Meisenheimer of Union

50-year Recipients and County

Don Pearson of Vermillion
George Pollock of Schuyler
Carson Klitz of Schuyler

60-year Recipients and County

Lynn Freeman of Pike, Griggsville

Gov. JB Pritzker Tells View of County Fairs

Gov. JB Pritzker recently spoke about his view of County Fairs.

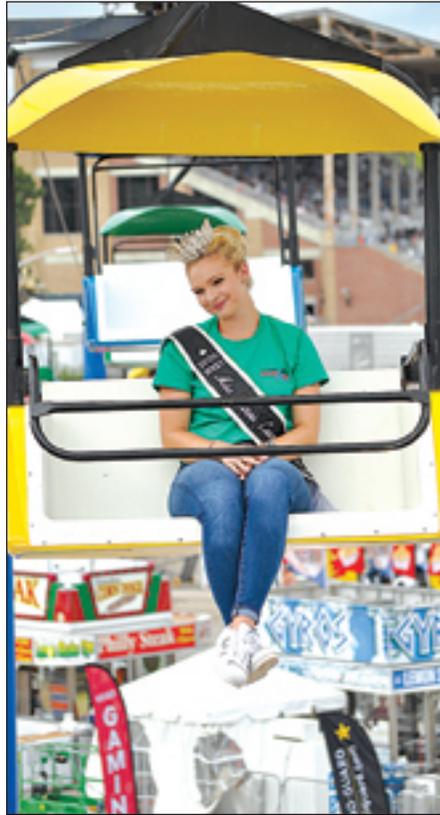
He said, "County Fairs are rooted in our communities. They reflect the unique character that makes up Illinois.

"They embody our One Illinois, all of us pulling together to get through a crisis. Thank you for pulling together, for standing up to neighboring communities."

Queen Kelsi Kessler Has Been Active



IAAF Queen Kelsi Kessler with Butter Cow at State Fair.



Queen Kelsi took a turn enjoying the skylift ride.



Queen Kelsi made rock climbing look easy!



IAAF Queen Kelsi portrait with the cutest little farmer.



Queen Kelsi sampled some of Illinois' best ice cream.



Testing and judging entries are part of Queen Kelsi's duties.

It's a tough job, but Steve Todd with Studio 101 was up for the task of photographing Queen Kelsi.

2021 Zone Meetings Are Coming Soon

Here is the schedule for the 2021 Zone meetings. Will you be attending?

The annual fall Zone meetings are here! Please attend your respective IAAF Zone meetings this fall.

There are multipole reasons that you should attend, but your attendance will make you a better fair board member. They are on the dates and at the places listed below:

IN MEMORIAM

Joe Frank Hunt, Jr., 69, of Olney, Illinois, died on September 1, 2021 at his Borah Lake House.

Joe was born on August 31, 1952 in Olney, IL to Joe Frank Hunt, Sr. and Sally Ann (Dale). He married Melinda Sue Adams on July 30, 1972, and she survives.

Joe was a man of integrity and full of life. He was a lifetime member of the Olney Elks (youngest District Deputy in IL), 32nd Degree Master Mason, a Shriner, a Jester, member of the Ainad Motor Patrol, 31 year volunteer for the Richland County Fair Board, and MS Advocate, as well as being a part of

many other associations and organizations. Joe enjoyed riding his Trike on benefit rides and Shrine rides.

He also enjoyed playing golf and being around friends. Joe was a man of service who devoted his life to volunteering, helping others, and servicing his customers. He loved spending time surrounded by friends and family at his property on Borah Lake.

Joe is survived by his wife, Mel Hunt of Olney; son, Joe F. Hunt III of Olney; son, Clifford "CP" Hunt and wife Courtney of Olney and several grandchildren.

Central Zone - October 31st at Poe's On the Hill, Springfield

Northern Zone - November 7th at Pitstick Pavillion, Ottawa

Southern Zone - November 14th at the Marion County Fairgrounds in Salem

Everyone learns something at these events and we welcome you to attend! Come and see your queens, some vendors on site and some awesome entertainment available to book for your fair. There will be plenty of friends to see, and a lot of things to discuss and learn.

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