



Illinois
Association
of
Agricultural
Fairs

December 2020

TentTalk

Making Lemonade Out of COVID Lemons

By Charlyn Fargo

Covid-19 wasn't kind to fairs or to the vendors that fill the grounds.

When we started learning about the virus in March, everyone put on their worry hat. Should we hold a fair? Should we not? It was a tough decision.

Illinois wasn't alone – fairs throughout the Midwest had to make hard decisions.

And in Illinois, we went from a few early June fairs that decided to cancel, to the Illinois and DuQuoin state fairs closing their gates, with most county fairs following their lead. Even the IAAF board had to make the difficult decision to cancel the annual IAAF convention in January.

All of us missed something about the fairs this year. Our hope is that they'll be even more special to fair-goers next summer, and that the money that was lost can be made up.

Vendors took a hard hit with the news that there were no fairs to bring their entertainment, shows, carnivals or fair food.

"What I missed most was the people," said Bobby Braun with Braun Entertainment, a longtime supporter of Illinois fairs. "We've made a lot of good friends over the years at fairs – we call them family now."

All the fairs he had contracts with in 2020 canceled. Some have booked for 2021; others he's hoping they will.

"I remember the day things changed – Friday, March 13 -- we were ready to leave for Florida to do a big concert venue down there for three and a half weeks. They called and said, 'Don't leave. We're cancel-



Rob Thompson who fair-goers know as Magic Rob has the rapt attention of these four fair queens during an annual IAAF Convention at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield. That is not happening this year and fair vendors have taken a substantial hit as have Illinois County Fairs this season, but everyone is determined to bounce back in 2021 with bigger and better events to thrill the multitudes who come each year.

ing the event until October.' That's when I had to turn to the guys and lay them off."

He feels fortunate he got a payroll loan in April and was able to bring back eight employees he had laid off. He's kept four on full time.

"It took me awhile to realize it wasn't my fault," said Braun. "Once I did that, I could accept things better."

Covid forced Braun to get creative. Eventually, he made lemonade out of the Covid lemons.

"We've been doing restaurant tents and weddings, outdoor birthday parties and baby showers," he said.

"We've even done a couple of Covid test sites – a big one at the Dupage County fairgrounds. And we're talking about doing a vaccine tent that is supposed to be large enough to hold 16-20 cars at a time."

He's cautiously optimistic things will return to normal bookings by spring.

"We have a street-fest the end of May that we do that's two and a half blocks long. I feel like if that happens – and people attend -- it will set the tone for the summer. And as of now, they're planning to put the event on."

(Continued on Page 7)

The President's Pen



As we move into the holiday season, the Tyrrell family wishes you all a joyous and happy season.

Harvest is winding down here on the north prairie. Yields were not exceptional but adequate. A wet spring and a dry August made all the difference.

As you all know, the IAAF Convention has been canceled for January 2021. Let's make the 2022 IAAF convention bigger and better than ever. Hope to see all of you at the 2022 Convention

On the funding side, our advocate Bridget Dougherty along with the Department of Ag did excellent work urging the release of the funds the fair industry was entitled too.

Bridget has perused all other avenues of funding and was able to confirm that the fair industry qualifies for "Business Interruption Grants." Deputy Director of Grants Management at DCEO, David Parr provided this information. Thanks to Director Parr. We provided this contact information to all fairs in emails that we were able to reach.

As the fair industry transitions through these difficult times, please



Ken Tyrrell

take the time to contribute to our advocacy fund. Send your contribution to IAAF c/o Charlyn Fargo, 71 West Fairview Lane, Springfield, IL 62711. This fund is vital to

keeping our voice heard in Springfield.

In closing, this office has had difficulty reaching a number of fairs with timely distribution of important information. Please list updated email addresses on your website and Facebook pages.

Happy Holidays,

Kenneth D. Tyrrell
President

TentTalk Combines Two Issues

What a year this has been – canceled fairs and now we are sad to say, canceled 2021 IAAF annual convention, all due to Covid restrictions that continue for Illinois.

Restrictions due to Covid make it nearly impossible to hold the size of group that we have had attend the convention every year. We know this has been a hard time for our associate members as well

We appreciate the continued support of the IAAF as we go through these unprecedented times together.

We are looking ahead to the 2022 IAAF annual convention, and plan to make it bigger and better than

ever. Dates for the 2022 convention are January 14-16 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

You will notice this issue of Tent Talk is later than usual, combining the October and December issues because of the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We sincerely hope you have all been staying safe, wearing your masks and keeping the fair spirit going. We will get through this, and celebrate with bigger and better fairs next summer.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Charlyn

Dates to Remember

- **F & E Reports:** Declaration of Intent due to IDOA by December 31, 2020
- **Track Improvement** application due to IDOA by December 31, 2020
- **Fair Books and Entry Fee Certificate** due to IDOA 10 days before fair's start
- **Rehabilitation Reports** due to IDOA by June 30, 2021
- **Illinois State Fair, August 12-22, 2021**
- **County Fair Day, IL State Fair** August 14, 2020

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www.IllinoisCountyFairs.org

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Springfield, IL 62711

Zone Meetings Looked Different this Year

By Jill Hardesty,
IAAF State Vice-President

Zone meetings looked a little different this year but meetings were held at various locations throughout the state. A few had to be canceled because of Covid restrictions, but southern zone and central zone were able to hold meetings.

Here is a summary of topics discussed at the meetings:

The first Central Zone meeting was held on Sunday, 10/25 at the Georgetown Community Building at 2pm. There were 9 people in attendance from 5 fairs.

IAAF State Vice-President, Jill Hardesty opened the meeting by thanking all who attended. She mentioned how this meeting came about due to space limitations due to Covid-19. The Central Zone split into 2 meetings, 1 in Vermillion County at Georgetown and 1 that will be held in Morgan County in Jacksonville on 11/22/2020 at the Morgan County fairgrounds in Jacksonville.

Guest, Mike Foster from the IL Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of County Fairs was in attendance. He spoke about the Declaration of Intent that will be due 12/31/2020 and the 2020 Rehab paid out. There is a new CFO in Springfield and he believes in processing things quicker. Bridget Dougherty, our Legislative Liaison was quite helpful with that also.

There is level funding for 2021 fairs – should we be allowed to have a fair in 2021.

There has been a county, DeWitt County, that will hold their own 4-H fair in possibly 2022. There is still some more paperwork to sign and get thru the state, but tentatively it's set for 2022 that there will be a funded DeWitt County fair.

Because of that, in fiscal year 2022, more funding will be asked for from the Dept. of Ag.

Mr. Foster advised that all IL fairs, put a clause in their vendor contracts, stating that: "due to Covid-19 you will not be responsi-

ble for any cancellation of a fair, and neither the fair or vendor will owe any monies to the other party." Situations will have to be worked out by each fair and vendor.

Vice-President Hardesty told all in attendance that the State Convention has been cancelled for January, 2021, along with the state queen pageant. Queen Kelsie will continue to reign until the 2022 state convention. She also spoke about the Advocacy fund and how our legislative liaison, Bridget Dougherty has been doing a fantastic job for IL County Fairs in Springfield. She was hired by the IAAF board in January 2020 and has been a very active part of the IAAF and our "face and voice in Springfield". If your fair has not made a donation to the Advocacy fund yet, please do so. It's imperative that we keep that voice in Springfield.

Another change Bridget is helping with an age change to the Administrative Rules thru the JACAR process in Springfield. This change would be changing the age from 19 to 21, to participate in Junior classes at fairs. We hope to have the changes made by June 1st, 2021.

HB7883 is on the horizon, the Agricultural Fairs Rescue Act. It was filed on July 30th with 16 members signing onto the U.S. House bill and has been assigned to the House Ag Committee in Washington, DC. This legislation would provide \$500 million nationwide in Ag grants, administered by the U.S. Dept of Agriculture. With the election coming shortly, it'll probably be next year before anything gets done on the floor.

Similar meetings were held at the Union and Marion County



Queen Kelsi will Reign in 2021

Queen Kelsi Kessler, seated, and her court: left to right, fourth runner up, Miss Marion Co. Grace Beavin; third runner up, Miss Lake Co. Samantha Pokorny; second runner up, Miss Effingham Co. Shayna Phillips; first runner up, Miss Macoupin Co. Maya Marcacci; also pictured are 2019 Queen Alexi Bladel, far right, and Illinois State Fair Manager Kevin Gordon.

Fair Officials Were Hopeful Early in Spring/Summer that County Fairs Would Happen

(Editor's Note: While this story is out dated, it serves as a testament to the efforts, hopes and desires of local fair boards and the IAAF that the state's long tradition of county fairs would be able to continue. Sadly, COVID-19 proved to be a greater threat than was initially believed and one by one fair boards and the state fair made the responsible decisions to cancel the 2020 Fair Season and shift gears to look toward the 2021 season.)

By **REBECCA ANZEL**
Capitol News Illinois
ranzel@capitolnewsillinois.com

SPRINGFIELD — The social distancing guidelines that led Illinois county fairs to cancel off-season events on their grounds through the end of April is one part of a financial impact double-whammy, a trade official said.

Many local fairs use revenue from off-season events and activities to "pay the bills," said Ken Tyrrell, president of the state's Association of Agricultural Fairs.

Guidelines from Gov. JB Pritzker's office regulating the number of people allowed to congregate shrank over the past few weeks from 1,000 to 50 to, finally, 10. County fairs canceled expositions, contests and other events back when that number was 250.

The other problem, Tyrrell said, is a delay in reimbursements from the comptroller's office for costs incurred last year. Under statute, the state is responsible for paying county fairs 66.67 percent of what organizers spent on agricultural premiums. That includes activities related to horticulture, poultry, livestock, horse races and rodeos.

Tyrrell said fair organizers "have never received that" — in recent years, they were reimbursed 25 percent of eligible costs.

"That's beginning to hurt a lot of fairs in the state of Illinois. We're told it's been at the comptroller's office since December," he said. "Possibly if the state would pay their bills, it would really help fairs."

A spokesperson from Comptroller

Susana Mendoza's office did not return a request for comment by time of publication.

County fairs in Illinois begin hosting their main events in June. If the novel coronavirus pandemic continues into the summer, forcing fairs to begin cancelling, Tyrrell said "it would be devastating."

If a fair is canceled, expected revenue needed to pay laborers to maintain the grounds is lost, for example. Marla Calico, president of the International Association of Fairs & Expositions, added they additionally would lose vendor deposits and presale ticket money.

"Many downstate fairs struggle getting along as it is. They don't have money put away or deep pockets. All of them struggle," Tyrrell said. "Any time you lose revenue, it's going to affect the fair."

According to IAFE data, most county fairs across the country are scheduled for July, but events largely begin in June, extend strongly into August and wind down in September.

Member county fairs told Calico "they are taking a wait-and-see attitude," choosing not to close unless forced to do so by public health authorities because "many times, they are the single largest economic driver in the community."

She said county fair cancellations would cause "an entire ripple effect."

"It's not just the funds that not-for-profit organizations may gain and do good within the community when they give out scholarships to young people," Calico said. "It's the small businesses all around them — the gas station benefits, the hotels benefit, the cafes and restaurants benefit."

According to a study commissioned by the IAFE, fairs in the U.S. are estimated to generate \$4.67 billion in economic activity annually. A survey of the association's members found that number is already down \$66 million due to 320 fairs forced to shut down 10,578 events thus far this year.

Events at the Illinois State Fairgrounds have been canceled through April, While Kevin Gordon, Illinois



McKenzie Hamer, a member of the Newark FFA, spent some time with a crossbred sheep at the FFA Petting Zoo during the Sandwich Fair, Sept. 4, 2019, in Sandwich. The fair board's vice president, Ken Tyrrell, is also president of the state's Association of Agricultural Fairs. He's concerned about the revenue fair boards already are losing because of events and activities at fairgrounds that have been canceled because of coronavirus concerns. He said he's optimistic the outbreak will subside in time for the summer's county fairs to go on as scheduled.

(Photo by Shea Lazansky of Shaw Media)

State Fair manager, said in a written statement that will have a financial impact, "our priority, first and foremost, is the health and safety of those individuals holding, and attending these events, along with our department support staff.

He added the Coliseum's renovation and reopening means more events than typical over the past few years had been scheduled and subsequently called off.

"Our staff is working diligently to reschedule any shows that have been canceled by this temporary closure," Gordon said in the statement. "Once we get through this uncertainty that we are all facing, we are anticipating another great spring and summer of events on the Illinois State Fair-

grounds."

Tyrrell is the vice president of the Sandwich Fair's board in northern Illinois' DeKalb County, one of the largest in the state in terms of fair entrants. He said county organizers of summer events have not yet discussed fair cancellations, and also are taking "a wait-and-see attitude."

"I'm being optimistic, and I'm thinking this will take care of itself by the first of June," he said. "The main concern right now is that we've lost revenue from cancelling off-season events and lost revenue, and the state of Illinois not paying us what we're entitled to."

"Fairs have been around since before the founding of the country, so it's something I believe is really a part

of America," Tyrrell continued. "As I said, I think we need to calm down and I have all the faith in the world we'll have a fair season this year."

Fairgrounds across the country that cleared their spring calendar are being repurposed to assist in the COVID-19 effort, Calico added. Grounds in Ohio, Missouri and Washington are operating drive-through testing facilities and one in West Virginia is using its indoor facilities to house community partners to package meals for school children.

"The Illinois State Fairgrounds and

many other locations throughout the state have been identified as possible future community based drive-thru testing sites," a spokesperson for the Illinois Management Agency said in an email. "However, further evaluation is needed before any decisions can be made."

"Our members are going to step up to the plate — that's what they do," Calico said. "Each and every single one of us is a citizen of this world and must do what we must do to protect our family and neighbors."

IDOL Finalizes New Rules for Amusement Safety

New rules aimed at better safety and efficiency for the amusement ride industry and its customers were finalized this month by the Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL). The rules, which have been in the works since 2018, guide how the IDOL will enforce the Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Act.

"My staff and I have worked to update these rules in consultation with our Amusement Ride and Safety Board to reflect changes in law and best practices," said Illinois Department of Labor Director Michael Kleinik. "It is imperative when families go to amusement parks and other sites featuring rides and attractions, that they feel safe doing so. We believe these rule changes will help bring that peace of mind concerning safety."

One significant change is the creation of new rules allowing IDOL to regulate and inspect aerial adventure courses, which have become more popular in recent years. The new aerial adventure course rules, which will be posted at <https://www2.illinois.gov/idol/Rides/Pages/ARAS-Act.aspx>, apply to all such attractions that require personal safety equipment.

Other changes include:

- Elimination of the need for a four-year degree to be an amusement ride inspector, instead allowing for experi-

ence to count towards qualification.

- Increase of the inspection fees to \$130 for large inflatable amusement attractions – 1,500 square feet or larger.

- Rule change to reflect a recently enacted law that increases the penalty the department may assess an amusement ride operator for not conducting a criminal background check on its employees.

- Codification of the proper name of the division with the Illinois Department of Labor – the Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Division.

- Codification of the practice to allow for electronic fund transfers to pay permit fees.

More information on IDOL's Amusement Ride and Safety Division is available at: <https://www2.illinois.gov/idol/Rides/Pages/default.aspx>

Address Changes

The IAAF office is continuously in the process of updating the TentTalk mailing list. If you are responsible for your fair directors' listings, please forward any new address changes.

Please send all updates to: IAAFOffice@illinoiscountyfairs.org or to IAAF Office, 24510 E 1000 N Rd., Fairbury, IL 61739.

Fairs Eligible for State BI Grant Program

Hello IAAF Members!

2020 has certainly been a challenging year. Since the last Tent Talk news item we contributed, the Illinois General Assembly has only met once, for four days in May for a Special Session.

The House and Senate met in separate buildings with masks and social distancing required. They met to pass legislation pertaining to the pandemic and to pass the State of Illinois Fiscal Year 2021 budget. Luckily, funding for agricultural fairs remained level for Fiscal Year 2021.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all regular agricultural fairs, including the Illinois State Fair and the DuQuoin Fair, were cancelled. We participated in multiple Zoom discussions regarding how to address this issue as fair after fair cancelled. It is extremely unfortunate and heartbreaking for all.

We have been in constant contact with the Illinois Department of Agriculture as the devastating effects of the pandemic unfolded. The Department, in a series of memos beginning in March, urged fairs to submit a Lost Revenue Report to them.

On the President's behalf, we drafted a memo to all members asking them to please forward these reports as soon as possible. It is the hope of the Department that some of the losses will be reimbursable in the future under the CARES Act or subsequent federal law passed by Congress. We will continue to work with the Department to achieve the best solution.

During late April and into May, IAAF members began expressing concern about receiving their 2019 premium reimbursements. It appeared that there was a delay in payment, and given the impact of Covid-19 on the state budget, there was concern that the reimbursements would be reduced.

We worked closely with the Department of Agriculture and were successful in ensuring that the premium reimbursements were made in a timely manner and in full.

We continue to work cooperatively with the Illinois Department of Agriculture on a second change to the



Bridget Dougherty

administrative rules through the JCAR process. This change would increase the age at which people could participate in Junior Classes at fairs from 19 to 21 years old. The Department is supportive and they are in the process of advancing the initiative.

In addition, the Association has provided information to member fairs about applications to the Business Interruption Grant (BIG) Program through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. We have confirmed that agricultural fairs are eligible regardless of their legal structure and urge all to apply.

The Veto Session of the General Assembly has been cancelled entirely due to coronavirus safety concerns. While there are budgetary and other matters to be considered, Governor Pritzker did not veto any bills this year, so there were no vetoes to be considered in the Veto Session.

The current General Assembly – the 101st- is expected to reconvene in a lame duck session in the days prior to the 102nd General Assembly being sworn in on January 13, 2021. We will provide the Legislative Calendar to you when it becomes available.

In the meantime, I hope and pray that every single one of you stay healthy and have a joyous and safe holiday.

Nominate Your Booster as a Friend

Does your fair have a dedicated volunteer or a community person who is a true county fair booster?

The "Friends of Illinois County Fairs" awards program will honor a group of recipients at the 112th Annual IAAF convention to be held next January. Your fair may nominate an individual to be recognized at the 2022 IAAF Convention. A nominee must be a supporter in some manner of Illinois County Fairs. They need not be an officer, a board member or a superintendent of a fair. However, they must be dedicated to the support, promotion, and innovative operation of a fair or fairs. This is a way to recognize the unsung stars of county fairs.

All Illinois fairs should consider nominating a candidate. The nomination form will be included in the summer IAAF packet mailed to each fair near the end of May. The forms may also be found on line at www.illinois-countyfairs.org.

The committee uses the information to determine eligibility and for press releases. All entries must be submitted by September 1st. A fair may submit more than one worthy candidate for consideration.

Only one person or entity from any fair may receive the award in 2022. Any unselected candidates will be reconsidered in 2023 without reapplying. The IAAF "Friend of County Fair Award" program is sponsored by Jeff Blomness of North American Midway Entertainment.

Note: Please do not confuse this award with the "Illinois County Fair Person" award presented by the Illinois Department of Agriculture at the State Fair's County Fair Day. They are two different awards. Information for "The Illinois County Fair Person" award will come from the Bureau of County Fairs. All fairs should also consider nominating worthy individuals for this award.

—Vendors and Fairs are Looking to 2021

(Continued from Page 1)

He's anxious to get back to fairs. "I miss the food from the Mexican vendor at DuPage, and McKinny's corn dogs, oh, and the baked potato stand the Boy Scouts run at the Boone County Fair, and that great steak sandwich at the Kendall County Fair."

Magician Rob Thompson agrees 2020 will be a year of friendships that were lost to Covid.

"My magic is diversified because of Covid, but the friends I've made? No replacing those. When you don't have something, you really miss it."

He was able to perform at one fair last summer in Wisconsin and has been doing virtual shows with fair boards and others.

The fairs he booked at the 2020 conventions have for the most part simply moved his contract to 2021.

He'd like to simply make 2020 disappear – "That would be my best magic trick," he says. "Everyone is ready to welcome the New Year and start fresh."

As to the fair food he missed?

"The pork chop sandwiches at the Sandwich Fair. I'll be the first in line."

Note: You can reach Bobby Braun at bobby@braunevents.com; you can reach Rob Thompson at MagicRob@gmail.com.

Here are some fair recipes to keep you going until the season hits:

Funnel Cakes

- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup 2% milk
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 3 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Oil for deep frying
- Confectioner's sugar

In a large bowl, beat eggs. Add milk, water and vanilla until well blended. In another bowl, whisk flour, sugar, baking powder and salt; beat into egg mixture until smooth. In a deep cast-iron or electric skillet, heat oil to 375 degrees.

Cover the bottom of a funnel spout with your finger; ladle 1/2 cup batter into the funnel. Holding the funnel several inches about the oil, release your finger and move the funnel in a spiral motion until all the batter is released, scraping with a rubber spatula if needed. Fry until golden brown, 2 minutes on each side. Drain on paper towels. Dust with confectioner's sugar; serve warm.

Spice-Rubbed Grilled Pork Chops on a Stick

- 6 wooden skewers
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp packed brown sugar
- 12 tsp onion salt
- 1/4 tsp garlic powder
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground cumin

- 1/4 tsp dry mustard
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1/4 tsp freshly cracked black pepper

6 boneless pork top loin chops, cut 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 inch thick

1 T soy sauce or teriyaki sauce

To prevent skewers from burning, soak them in water for 30 minutes before inserting into chops. For rub, in a small bowl, combine all the spices. Brush chops on both sides with soy or teriyaki sauce. Sprinkle rub over chops and run in. Insert a skewer into the short side of each chop.

Grill chops over charcoal or on a gas grill. Place chops on grill rack over pan and cover. Grill chops 30 to 35 minutes or until chops reach 145-160 degrees. Remove from grill and let stand 3 minutes before serving.



Few things are more emblematic of the fair season than a Ferris wheel towering above the Midway calling everyone to come and enjoy all of the sights and sounds of Illinois County Fairs.

IN MEMORIAM

Juanita Etherton

Sept. 18, 1923 - Nov. 14, 2020

LELROY—Juanita Etherton, 97, of LeRoy passed away November 14, 2020, at Carle BroMenn Medical Center, Normal, IL.

Juanita was born September 18, 1923 near Carbondale, IL, and was the oldest of nine children born to Elta and Alma Travelstead Lipe. She married Glenn Etherton on January 22, 1946, in Carbondale, IL. He passed away on June 17, 1996.

Mrs. Etherton is survived by her children: Eugene (Joyce) Etherton of Le Roy, Lori (Dave) Neisler of Gridley, Charlotte (Ken) Tyrrell of Sandwich and Doug (Sue) Etherton

of Le Roy. There are eight grandchildren, fifteen great-grandchildren, and two great- great- grandchildren.

Raymond J. Brinkman

March 5, 1943 - July 24, 2020

MELVIN — Raymond J.

Brinkman, 77, passed away Friday, July 24, 2020, at his farm in Melvin.

Ray was born March 5, 1943, in Fairbury, a son of Clarence and Geneva Walters Brinkman. He married Gloria J. Scherer on April 18, 1964, in Thawville. He is survived by his wife of fifty-six years Gloria Brinkman of Melvin, two children Todd Brinkman of Melvin and Tami (Eric) Geurts of Stanford, two

grandchildren.

Ray was a lifelong farmer and member of St. Peter's Free Lutheran Church. He was an active member of the Ford County Fair Association and a superintendent of the ITPA Tractor Pull for fifty years.

Ray was also a member of the Melvin Fire Department and participated in the Sibley Burr Oaks Tractor Drive. He was very patriotic, a proud American, and always stayed true to his John Deere tractors and Ford trucks. He enjoyed rolling dice with his buddies, camping, boating, and NASCAR.

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