



Contributed photo

Celebrating 151 years of fun

By KYLE EVANS
Staff writer

Through their 151 years of providing generational memories, the Monroe County Fair has had many changes, developing new paths forward, to stay current with the times.

Each new year brings new opportunities, and the Monroe County Agricultural Society continues setting the bar higher and higher, with each passing year. One thing remains certain, and that is that the Monroe County Fair stands as the King of events within the county.

The Monroe County Agricultural Society came about, at the suggestion of Robert E. Gillett, the founder of Tomah. The first fair was held in 1858 in Sparta.

The organization was succeeded by the Sparta Driving and Agricultural Association and then by the Sparta Fair Association. Interest in the fair waned, but was revived several times, over a 70-year period. There were some years no fairs were held at all. The last of the Sparta fairs was held in the 1930s.

Meanwhile, in Tomah, an organization called the Eastern Monroe County Agricultural Society was established, in 1869. The group held its first fair in 1873, and annual fairs have been held here since that year. In 1921, the Tomah fair was advertised as the Monroe County Fair, rather than the Eastern Monroe County Fair.

There is no denying that in Monroe County, the Monroe County Fair takes centerstage, towering over other events that take place in the surrounding areas. The Monroe County Fair has served as the hub for 4-H exhibitors, livestock

WHEN & WHERE
Monroe County Fair
Wed., July 24
– Sun. July 28
Recreation Park
1625 Butts Ave.,
Tomah, WI
monroecountyfairwi.com
(608) 372-2081

shows, community family fun, grandstand events, talent shows, carnival rides and games, and much more, for many years.

This year's celebration marks the 151st anniversary of the event, which has created generations of family and community memories. The Fair has expanded greatly since the start, and now offers food vendors, exhibits, shows, a full carnival, many free events and entertainment.

Event Schedule

The 2024 Monroe County Fair kicks off Wednesday, July 24, with no gate fee, and a 1 p.m. llama show and a swine show at 3 p.m.

There are many other free pieces of entertainment at the fair, including the AgVenture pavilion, which is a petting zoo, with educational information that opens every day at 10 a.m. There are shows going on near the carnival, all weekend long, that are free. As well, all the judging shows are free, plus, there is an antique tractor show, which is also free to take in.

Oscar the Robot will be walking around introducing himself to people. Also strolling the grounds will be Trash Can Circus (clean family fun). The "Kid Buck\$" game show will have three performances every day. John Cassidy magic and balloons also has three performances daily.

For Thursday, there's a



beef show at 9 a.m., a rabbit show at 10 a.m., and a sheep show at 3 p.m. Monroe County Fair Bar Bingo is from noon to 3 p.m. Eight Second Ride will take the stage in the beer garden, starting at 8:30 p.m. on Thursday evening.

Friday's events include a dairy show starting at 9 a.m., a poultry show starting at 10 a.m., and a goat show starting at 5 p.m. The grandstand show is the CC Bull Riding Championship Rodeo, starting at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$15 for age 13 & up, ages 6-12 are \$9. Flashback will play their classic rock lineup, starting at 8 p.m., in the beer garden, Friday night.

Saturday is a busy day at the fair, with the Draft Horse Hitch Show behind the fair office, starting at 11 a.m. At 1 p.m. starts the All-Abilities Classic in the lower barn. The junior livestock auction begins at 5 p.m.

Saturday night's entertainment lineup includes Larry the Cable Guy comedy show starting at 7:30 p.m. in the Grandstands. Dan Lepien will close out the night in the beer garden starting at 9 p.m.

Sunday is also a busy day

at the fair, with a dog agility judging event, annual car show, Ag Olympics, draft horse halter show, antique tractor pull, chicken Q, and a kids pedal pull.

Gate Fees, Rides and Wristbands

The gate admission fee, starting on Thursday, is \$5 for ages 13 and over, \$2 for those ages 6 to 12, and free for 5 and under. There are no gate fees on Wednesday and Sunday.

Season passes are available at the fair office through Wednesday, July 24. For ages 13 and up, a season pass is \$12, while for exhibitors and kids ages 6-12 it is \$10.

Wristbands for the carnival are available for \$25. Wristband times are Wednesday from 6:30 p.m. to close. From Thursday to Saturday, wristbands can be used between noon and 4 p.m., as well as 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday wristband time is noon to 4:30 p.m.

Rides open from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Wednesday. From Thursday through Saturday, the rides are open 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Sunday from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Wednesday, July 24, 2024 NO GATE FEE**
- 1:00 p.m. Llama Show, in Upper Barn
 - 3:00 p.m. Swine Show, in Lower Barn
 - 5:00 p.m. Dog Obedience, in White Exhibit Hall
 - 5:00 p.m. Business After 5, in the tent on the Midway
- Thursday, July 25, 2024**
- 9:00 a.m. Beef Show, in Upper Barn
 - 10:00 a.m. Rabbit Show, in Lower Barn
 - 12:00 p.m. Bar Bingo, in the Beer Garden
 - 3:00 p.m. Sheep Show, in Lower Barn
 - 8:30 p.m. **LIVE MUSIC**
8 Second Ride, country; in the Beer Garden,
Sponsored by Casey's Spirit Shop
- Friday, July 26, 2024**
- 9:00 a.m. Dairy Show, in Upper Barn
 - 10:00 a.m. Poultry Show, in Lower Barn
 - 5:00 p.m. Goat Show, in Lower Barn
 - 6:30 p.m. **CC BUCKING BULLS Championship Rodeo**,
in the Grandstands, Sponsored by HC Minerals;
Admission: 13 & Up - \$15; ages 6 to 12 - \$9
 - 8:00 p.m. **LIVE MUSIC**
Flashback, classic rock; in the Beer Garden,
Sponsored by Casey's Spirit Shop
- Saturday, July 27, 2024**
- 9:00 a.m. Round Robin, in Upper Barn
 - 10:30 a.m. Seasoned Professional Showmanship **NEW!**
in Upper Barn
 - 11:00 a.m. Draft Horse Hitch Show, behind Fair Office,
Sponsored by Bank First;
 - 1:00 p.m. All-Abilities Classic, in Lower Barn
 - 5:00 p.m. Jr. Livestock Auction, Sponsored by Sleepy Hollow
 - 7:00 p.m. **LARRY THE CABLE GUY**
in the Grandstands, doors open at 5:30 p.m.
Sponsored by State Farm - Jeff Holthaus,
GTECH Seamless Gutters, and La Crosse Beverage
Tickets can be purchased online
 - 9:00 p.m. **LIVE MUSIC**
Dan Lepien; in the Beer Garden,
Sponsored by Casey's Spirit Shop
- Sunday, July 28, 2024 NO GATE FEE**
- 9:00 a.m. Dog Agility, in Northwest corner of Grounds
 - 9:00 a.m. Annual Car Show, Gate #3 off Butts Ave.
Sponsored by Bank First
 - 10:00 a.m. Draft Horse Halter Show, near horse barn
 - 10:30 a.m. AG Olympics, in the Dairy Barn
 - 11:00 a.m. Antique/Farm Tractor Pull, Grandstands
 - 11:00 a.m. Chicken Q, at the tent by the Midway
 - 1:00 p.m. Kids Pedal Pull, located near the AgVenture Pavillion
 - 1:00 p.m. Bean Bag Tournament, held in Beer Garden
Call Fair Office for Entry Information



Many furry and feathered friends have been highlights at the Monroe County Fair over the years, helping make incredible memories and even teaching important lessons in kindness, gentleness, animal care, and agriculture. Contributed photo.

The Link Between Fair and Agriculture

Many learning opportunities provided

By JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ MORAN
Contributing Writer

For the last 35 years, Jackie Menn has volunteered her time to the Monroe County Fair, the last 23 of those years sharing her knowledge and love for animals with fair goers.

Menn began her involvement with fairs as a teen who joined 4-H to learn how to train her newly acquired puppy. She discovered that, “the link between fair and agriculture is, and always has been, a very important link. It provides a unique platform to teach about agriculture, too.”

Since her days as a 4-H dairy, dog, rabbit and poultry exhibitor herself, Jackie has always been an avid fair enthusiast, even serving as the Ozaukee County Fairest of the Fair.

While visiting this year’s Monroe County Fair, be sure to stop by to enjoy the special AgVenture Pavilion and its Animal Learning Center.

There, you can learn something about agriculture, play at the custom farm-themed playground, take a shot at earning a prize with the Earn and Learn Scavenger Hunt, enjoy the Farm to Fork Display, and more. For those who love animals and agriculture, and want to get more involved, there are ways to volunteer and donate, as well.

Jackie first helped provide animals, when asked by former ag society member, Michelle Rutlin to provide animals for a new attraction at the Monroe County Fair, in 2001. That first year, Jackie only provided a Jersey calf, rabbits, and a goat. Back then, the animal learning center was housed in a tent, with a setup that was difficult to manage. Then, in 2014, the AgVenture Pavilion, the current permanent structure, was built, largely thanks to financial support from then local grocer Burnstad’s Market, to better facilitate one of the fair’s important links, and the root of the grocery business: agriculture and agricultural learning.

This year at the Animal Learning Center, fair goers can look forward to viewing a Jersey calf, a variety



Jackie Menn is happy to be a part of just one of the many agricultural education links fairgoers will find at the fair. She and her 17 pound Flemish Giant rabbit, Thor, and their other furry and feathered friends, look forward to seeing you there. Find them at the Monroe County Fair AgVenture Pavilion from July 24-28, 2024. Contributed photo.

of rabbits, kittens, perhaps some puppies, a pony, goats, sheep, and hopefully some baby chicks, if the timing is just right. Now under the coordinating efforts of the Monroe County Junior Fairboard, Bonita Hanley and other volunteers are currently working tirelessly to make this the best year yet. Jackie Menn is happy to be a part of just one of the many agricultural education links fairgoers will find at the fair. She and her 17-pound Flemish Giant rabbit, Thor, and their other furry and feathered friends, look forward to seeing you there!

Learn & Earn Scavenger Hunt: A Fun Opportunity to “Learn & Earn”

Another program that volunteers enjoy putting together is the “Learn & Earn Scavenger Hunt.” The idea is to facilitate a way for people to learn about animals and agriculture, and then win a small prize. The Junior Fair Board stated that the Learn & Earn Scavenger Hunt is, “split into grade levels: Pre-K, Kindergarten, & 1st, 2nd & 3rd, 4th & 5th, and adult (or anyone over 5th grade). Anyone and everyone can participate.”

Jackie explained, “You pick up

a Learn & Earn Scavenger Hunt sheet in the AgVenture Pavilion. You might see questions about dairy cows, cats, beef cattle, hogs, sheep, goats, llamas, dogs, cats, rabbits, or poultry. To find the answer, you go to each particular animal’s area to learn more. You can find the answer from the “Farm Facts” posted throughout, or a helpful volunteer. The Monroe County Fair organizers would like to see more participation by fair goers in this exciting and free educational event. If you or your organization would like to donate an agricultural prize to help encourage more learning

Some do’s and don’ts while near any animals at the fair

While it is fun and exciting to be up close to these furry and feathered friends, here are some basic **DO’s** and **DON’T’s** while visiting the Animal Learning Center:

- DO** Ask a handler if you can pet the animals
- DO** Be calm and quiet around the animals
- DO** Remember animals can bite
- DO** Have fun and enjoy the experience
- DO** Take pictures without a flash
- DO** Ask questions

- DON’T** Touch animals without permission from a volunteer or the animal’s owner
- DON’T** Feed the animals
- DON’T** Yell, scream, or make loud noises
- DON’T** Poke animals
- DON’T** Stick fingers in the pens

and participation, please reach out to the fair office. Contact information below.

Getting in on the Behind the Scenes Fun That Makes the Fair Possible

Whether attending the fair, choosing to volunteer, or both, generations have made lasting memories with friends and family each July at the Monroe County Fair, and you can, too. Jackie Menn recounts that, “setting up, unloading animals... it’s

‘LINK’

cont. on pg. 7

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FREE THINGS AT THE FAIR

- Midway Shows (family stage)
- Free Parking
- Free gate Wed. and Sun.
- Car Show (free to attend)
- Antique Tractor Show
- Strolling Acts
- Nightly Bands
- Midway Shows

See more info at monroecountyfairwi.com

AN EVENING WITH

LARRY

THE CABLE GUY



Git-R-Done!

SATURDAY
JULY 27

MONROE
COUNTY FAIR



TICKETS ON SALE NOW
AT MONROECOUNTYFAIRWI.COM

LARRYTHECABLEGUY.COM

All About: Larry The Cable Guy

Larry to perform at the fair on Saturday

Larry the Cable Guy will be the headlining show at the Monroe County Fair this year, starting at 7 p.m. on Saturday night in the Grandstands.

Larry the Cable Guy is a multiplatinum recording artist, Grammy nominee, Billboard award winner and one of the top comedians in the country. He has his own line of merchandise and continues to sell out theatres and arenas across the United States. Larry has created The Git-R-Done Foundation, which was named after Larry's signature catchphrase, and has donated more than 7 million dollars to various charities.

Larry's road to stardom included the Blue Collar Comedy Tour, which grossed more than 15 million dollars. The ensemble cast of comedians included Jeff Foxworthy and Bill Engvall. The tour's success led to Blue Collar Comedy Tour, The Movie, which premiered on Comedy Central in November of 2003 and at the time, was the highest rated movie in the channel's history. The DVD has sold more than 4 million units. The sequel Blue Collar Comedy Tour Rides Again, has sold more than 3 million units. In March of 2006, the Blue Collar boys reunited to shoot Blue Collar Comedy Tour, One For The Road in Washington, DC at the Warner Theater. The movie had its world premiere on Comedy Central June 4, 2006, again receiving some of the highest ratings. The soundtrack was nominated for a 2006 Grammy award.

Larry has won Billboard's 2005 Comedy Artist of the year and Comedy Album of the year and he received the Billboard Top Comedy Tour Award in 2006. He is a bestselling author and his book Git-R-Done, (2005) debuted at #26 on the New York Times bestseller list. Larry was named to Forbes Celebrity 100 list in 2006, 2007, 2011 and 2012.

Larry the Cable Guy

Where: Monroe County Fair

When: Saturday, July 27, 7 p.m., doors open at 5:30 p.m.

Buy tickets online at monroecountyfairwi.com



Scan QR code to buy tickets

Larry's first comedy album release Lord, I Apologize has reached gold status, selling more than 500,000 copies. The CD was #1 on the Billboard Comedy Charts for fifteen weeks in a row. Larry's DVD special Git-R-Done, has sold more than 1 million copies and has been certified platinum. Larry also starred in Blue Collar TV a sketch comedy series for The WB network which premiered on July 29, 2004. 5.4 million people watched the show and it was the second most watched show on television in that time period.

Larry's comedy CD Morning Constitutions was released in 2007 and debuted at #1 on the Billboard Comedy Charts. His previous release, The Right To Bare Arms (Jack Records/Warner Bros. Records) debuted at #1 on the Soundscan Comedy Chart, #1 on the Country Chart, and #7 on the Top 200 Chart. This marked the first time in the history of Soundscan that a comedy album has charted at #1 on the Country Chart. It has been certified gold (500,000 units) by the RIAA. The Right To Bare Arms also received a Grammy nomination. His first Christmas CD, A Very Larry Christmas has also been certified platinum (1,000,000 units).

Larry is the voice of the beloved Mater in the Golden Globe winning animated feature film Cars (2006) and Cars 2 (2011) from Disney/Pixar. Both movies opened number one at the box office and combined have grossed more than 1 billion dollars worldwide. Larry has also starred in Tooth Fairy 2 (2012), Witless Protection (2008), Delta Farce (2007) and his first feature Larry the Cable Guy: Health Inspector (2006). When Health Inspector was released on DVD in August, 2006 it sold more

than 1 million copies in the first week of release.

Larry co-starred in the Tyler Perry movie A Madea Christmas. He also hosted Only in America with Larry the Cable Guy on History for three seasons. The show premiered in 2011 and was a huge ratings success. In each episode, Larry visited various sites across the country revealing bits of real history while immersing himself in new and different lifestyles, jobs and hobbies that celebrate the American experience. Larry was also the star of the CMT animated show Bounty Hunters, which reunited him with Jeff Foxworthy and Bill Engvall.

In early 2012 Them Idiots Whirled Tour starring Larry, Jeff Foxworthy and Bill Engvall aired on CMT. The show was released on DVD and CD by Warner Bros/Jack Records, debuting at number one on the Billboard Comedy Charts. On July 4, 2009 at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, NE, Larry performed in front of more than 50,000 and taped his hour special Tailgate Party for Comedy Central. The show was a thank you to his fans and Nebraska for their longtime support of him. Tickets were sold for only \$4.00 and the show sold out in one weekend. The special aired on January 31, 2010 and the DVD was released on February 2, 2010. The comedy CD of the same name debuted at number 1 on the Billboard Comedy Charts.

On March 15, 2009, The Comedy Central Roast of Larry The Cable Guy aired and the show, which Larry executive produced, is one of the highest rated roasts in Comedy Central history, attracting 4.1 million viewers. Larry has also hosted and executive produced three Christmas specials for both VH1 and CMT. The variety style shows were all huge ratings successes for those networks.

The Git-R-Done Foundation is a non-profit organization established in 2009 by Larry and his wife, Cara, as a focal point for the family's philanthropy. Emphasizing on children's and veteran's causes, The Git-R-Done Foundation has donated to great organizations such as The Arnold Palmer Hospital, Operation Homefront and Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital.

Tickets for the Saturday night show are available at monroecountyfairwi.com.

Hunger Haven: Fair food for the greater good



Every year, half the proceeds for the Hunger Haven food stand at the Monroe County fair go to the same youth mission trip. Here are some of the youth during this year's mission in Pennsylvania. Youth helped out at this apartment structure by washing, scrapping, and re-painting. Contributed photo.

By JAYME BAHL
Staff Writer

the proceeds goes to another mission that we choose."

Hunger Haven offers a variety of tasty treats to beat the hot fair sun, such as classic fair foods, like hamburgers, hot dogs, and fries. "We are probably one of the only vendors that have French fries that is there," Eagen said. "And they say we have the best burgers around."

If you are looking for something sweet, do not fret because the Hunger Haven food stand will still have you covered. "We are kind of famous for our 'church lady' pies and root beer floats," Eagen said.

Not only does the food stand offer delicious food, but seating as well. "We are probably the only food stand that actually has seating," Eagen said. "And when it rains, we have a roof over their heads while they are eating." Eagen added, "All of the people that serve at Hunger Haven are volunteers. We could not do without them."

Do you know where to get the best burger at the Monroe County fair? Neither did I, until I learned from Annette Eagen. Hint: it is the Hunger Haven Food Stand.

In all fairness, Eagen may be a little biased. She is one of many volunteers from Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, located at 310 West Elizabeth Street, in Tomah, who will help run this locally sourced, all-American, fan favorite food stand, at the county fairgrounds. For at least 40 years, Hunger Haven has been conveniently located on Recreation Park. The stand is only active twice a year, during the Monroe County fair and National Tractor Pull.

When the Herald spoke to Eagen, she was in Pennsylvania and participating in a mission, which is what the food stand helps to fund. "Always, half of our proceeds go to our Gloria Dei Youth Missions, which makes this trip possible," Eagen said. "The other half of

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Paul Dwyer	(608) 792-1743



Phone: (608) 792-1743



2024 Monroe County Fair

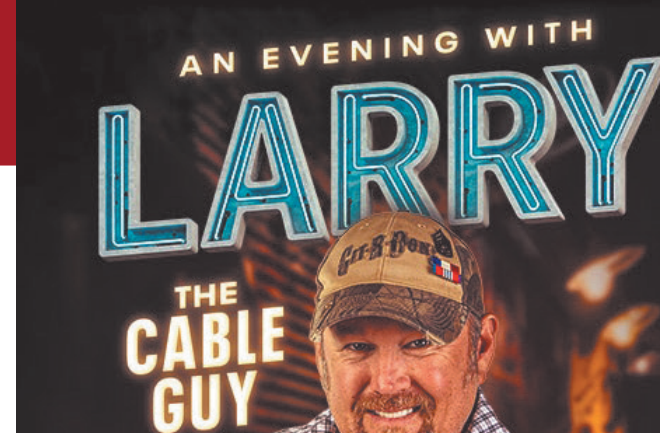


Grandstand Events



CC Bucking Bulls Championship Rodeo

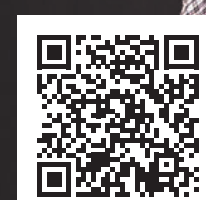
Sponsored by: HC Minerals
Friday July 26 6:30p.m- 9:30p.m
Admission:
Ages 13 & up – \$15.00
Ages 6-12: \$9.00



Git-R-Done!

SATURDAY
JULY 27

MONROE COUNTY FAIR



Scan QR code
to buy tickets

Sponsored by State Farm Insurance- Jeff Holthaus,
GTech Seamless, and La Crosse Beverage.

Free Family Midway Shows/Acts

John Cassidy Magic & Balloons
3 Daily Performances

Kid's Buck\$ Game Show
3 Daily Performances

Oscar the Robot
Catch him strolling the fair all
weekend

Trash Can Circus
Strolling on the grounds



Antique/Farm Tractor Pull

Sunday, July 28 11a.m- 3:30p.m
Admission price: 13 & Up – \$5.00 • 12 & Under- Free

Beer Garden Bands



Eight Second Ride

Modern Country
"Wisconsin's Hottest Country Dance Band!"
Thursday July 25 8:30p.m-11p.m
Sponsored by Casey's Spirit Shop

Flashback

Classic Rock
"A classic rock band ready to provide
SPARK to the Monroe County Fair!"
Friday July 26 8p.m.-11p.m.
Sponsored by Casey's Spirit Shop



Dan Lepien

Traditional Country Music
"Drawing comparisons to traditional country
legends such as George Strait and Daryle
Singletary, Dan Lepien delivers with Pure
country music and is set to draw national
attention." - Ellary Prentice, Sauk Rapids
Journalist
Saturday, July 27 9p.m.-12a.m
Sponsored by Casey's Spirit Shop



Carnival Pricing Carnival Ride Times:

Wednesday: 5:00pm-10:00pm
Thursday – Saturday: 11:30am – 10:00pm
Sunday: 11:30am – 4:00pm
Carnival Wristbands:
\$25.00 each session
Wednesday 6pm-10pm
Thursday – Saturday 12-4pm & 6-10pm
Sunday 12-4pm

Gate Admission Fee

\$5 ages 13 & up
\$2 ages 6-12
Free ages 5 & under
\$12 Season pass ages 13 & up
\$10 season pass ages 6-12
Season passes will only be available at the
fair office until Wednesday July 24, 2024

Every Day at the Fair

Ag Venture Pavilion opens
daily at 10a.m

Learn & Earn Scavenger Hunt
Antique Tractor Show opens
daily at 10a.m

Variety of Commercial and Food
Vendors on the Grounds
Exhibits on display all week in the
White Exhibit Hall

Other Events Throughout the Weekend

Wednesday July 24

Dog Obedience- White Exhibit Hall 5p.m
Business After 5- Tent on Midway 5p.m Sponsored by
Tomah & Sparta Area Chambers of Commerce

Thursday July 25

Bar Bingo- Beer Garden 12p.m

Saturday July 27

Round Robin 9a.m- Upper barn
Draft Horse Hitch- Behind fair office 11a.m-
Sponsored by Bank First

Sunday July 28

Car Show- 9a.m- Parking lot by white exhibit building-
\$10 entry fee for cars- First 50 cars receive dash plaques
Chicken Q- Tent on Midway 11a.m
Kid's Pedal Pull- Playground 1p.m
Bean Bag Tournament-
Beer Garden 1p.m \$20/team

Exhibit Judging

Wednesday July 24

Llama Show 12p.m-2p.m- Upper Barn
Swine Show 3p.m-8p.m- Lower Barn

Thursday July 25

Beef Show 9a.m-1p.m- Upper barn
Rabbit Show 10a.m- 2p.m- Lower barn
Sheep Show 3pm-8pm- Lower barn

Friday July 26

Dairy Show 9am-5pm- Upper barn
Poultry Show 10a.m-2p.m- Lower barn
Goat Show 5p.m-7p.m- Lower barn

Saturday July 27

Season Pro Showmanship 10:30a.m-11:30a.m
All Abilities Classic 1p.m-2p.m- Lower Barn
Jr. Livestock Auction 5p.m-7p.m- Sponsored by Sleepy Hollow

Sunday July 28

Dog Agility 9am-10am
Draft Horse Halter Show 10a.m- 12p.m Sponsored by Bank First
Ag Olympics 10:30a.m



Family farm holds strong bond through Monroe County Fair

Ornes family talks fairs, competitions, and farm

By **BENNY MAILMAN**
Editor

The *Monroe County Herald* returned to the Ornes family farm on Monday, July 8th, to talk with Vanessa and her father Matt on their upcoming return to both the Monroe County Fair and Wisconsin State Fair.

The Monroe County Fair, being held in Tomah, starts on July 24 and goes through July 28. The Wisconsin State Fair is in West Allis, near Milwaukee, and runs from August 1 through August 11.

If the Ornes name sounds familiar to *Herald* readers, it may be because they are also the family with the colorful Easter Sheep that we reported on for the last couple of years.

While Vanessa and Matt relayed that they are busy year-round with their farm and various shows, Vanessa said that those shows are basically warm-up events, where their show animals are exercised, fed well, trained, and developing a rapport with their handlers.

“Our target show is the county fair,” Vanessa said. “We try to develop them to where they are reaching their peak shape and performance at the fair in July.”

Matt and Vanessa said that the way they attend other shows throughout the United States is preparation for the county and state fairs. To them, the practice is not that dissimilar from world-class athletes competing around the world in preparation for a spot in the Olympics. The analogy is especially fitting, with the Summer Olympics starting on July 26, in France, during the Monroe County Fair, and ending on August 11, which is the last day of the Wisconsin State Fair.

The Ornes family reported that they will be taking two pigs, two steers, twelve sheep, and a goat.

That goat - named Bellamy - has had a fortunate path to get to the fair. Bellamy, as mentioned in a previous story in the *Monroe County Herald* this past April, was spared an early end and a trip to the freezer due to its incredibly hilarious demeanor and friendly disposition. Bellamy’s personality helped it create a strong rapport with Vanessa early in its life. That bond was on display during this interview as Ornes would yell out Bellamy’s name only to met with an immediate response of a cartoonish bleat.

Decades at the Fair

When asked about the number of years that they had been going to the Monroe County Fair, Vanessa quickly answered, “From birth. I am 18 now, so 18 years.”

Matt Ornes quickly confirmed the validity behind his daughter’s answer, before stating, “(It’s been) 45 years for me. I started showing dairy and rabbits at age eight. It was what we had on the farm, so that is what we showed.”

Matt said that for rabbits, he started out showing Flemish Giants, but



Here we see Matt Ornes with Southpaw, a ram that enjoys his king-like status on the Ornes Farm. Vanessa stands to his right, with 6-month-old Bronx, with Bellamy establishing a rapport with the reporter. *Herald* photo by Benny Mailman.

then switched over to Red Satins. He showed Red Satins because they served a dual purpose for their pelts and meat.

“The first year they put roaster and fryer rabbits in the auction, I made the auction,” Matt recalled. “I was offered a price of \$150, for that one rabbit. That was in 1998. He stayed as a pet, and he lived for five years.”

Vanessa jumped into the rabbit conversation, saying, “I showed Holland Lops. I wanted a Mini Rex really bad, but I was always told no.” “They are too temperamental,” was her father’s reply.

The Nerves of Competition

The *Herald* pressed Matt and Vanessa on the competition of showmanship and the nervousness of when the judge is walking around, calculating who will be the champion showman. Both Matt and Vanessa agreed that showmanship is a whole other level, one that is a direct testament to one’s skills of handling their animal in a show. It provides a window into the dedication an individual has for their craft.

Vanessa responded right away, recalling a show from two years ago.

“It was my first year in Senior Showmanship, and I was going against kids much older than I was ... I was so nervous I felt like I might start crying at any moment. But I made it to the final two! I was even more nervous at that point.”

Vanessa ended up winning the competition, which was the final straw on holding back the tears.

“She probably beat the best kid in the county that year,” the father said glowingly of his daughter.

“The other kid had won everything else in showmanship, but she (Vanessa) beat her there.”

When asked how they measure success, Vanessa and Matt brought up last year’s run. “Last year was probably our best quality year,” Matt said. “We got all blue ribbons, except one ... it was 11 out of 12.”

The name of the non-blue-ribbon getter was Panda, and the analogy drawn was that on the ride home, Panda was like an NFL kicker who lost a hard-fought game, due to a missed field goal. Matt and Vanessa explained that basically, Panda just got old before his time and his body just could not support the muscle he was gaining, as a young sheep.

State Fair

The Wisconsin State Fair starts just a couple of days after the Monroe County Fair and the Ornes family has their eyes on it. When questioned by the *Herald* on how they can show at the State Fair, does it have to be earned or can anyone enter, Vanessa said, “It varies by state. We are lucky to be in a state where you just sign up and you can go. But you can only take so many animals.”

Matt iterated that you must be 12-years old to show at the State Fair. Vanessa then remarked that Minnesota is tougher. “In Minnesota you have to earn going to the state fair. It is based on how your animal places among the other animals in your county. Only the top ones can go.”

DNA Testing at State Level

The Orneses are already signed up for the Wisconsin State Fair. For state competition, the sheep must undergo DNA testing.

“At state they take DNA samples, of one sheep per class,” Matt said. “Last year it was the third-place sheep in each class that had to be tested.”

When asked what the judges are looking for with a DNA test, Vanessa replied, “It is to make sure that the tag on the sheep matches the DNA. Someone could take a tag and put it on a better sheep, which is illegal.”

The DNA testing is to ensure that everyone showing in Wisconsin abides by the rules and regulations set forth by the state. Every sheep that the Ornes family has shown has their DNA on file with the State of

Wisconsin. The Orneses said that if someone were to get caught cheating in this manner, it would be dealt with discretely, without publicly shaming someone.

The Ambience of the Fair

For the younger Ornes, fair week has come to mean more than merely showing animals.

“Getting a week off from work and just being around people that have the same interest as me. I can walk up to anyone and just ask them how they are doing, and we have great conversations on what we all love to do because of our common interests.”

Ornes continued, “Outside of the fair, there are more barriers between people, but at the fair, those barriers are gone.”

Vanessa has been showing under the Sparta FFA, that way she can show until the age of 21. In the future, she sees herself helping out the youth who want to follow in her footsteps.

“I do not know that I will become an actual leader, but I will help kids learn how to show if they want. I plan on having my own sheep, so I can help them out that way as well.”

A couple of years ago Vanessa also helped out at the All Abilities Classic, at the Monroe County Fair.

“Those kids are there because they have family members that are showing animals and they want to show as well. I think it is a great way to get them out in the ring and have some fun.”

Participants in the All Abilities Classic are allowed to show a variety of animals.

“They can show llamas, cows, rabbits ... anything they want,” said Vanessa.

This year, the All Abilities Classic is on Saturday, July 27th, from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Something New for Seasoned Professionals

There is a new addition to the Monroe County Fair this year, as far as the showmanship goes.

NEW! Seasoned Professional Showman

Where: Monroe County Fair
When: Saturday, July 27, 10:30 a.m., in the upper barn

Who: Anyone over 21 years old can be nominated
Cost: \$10



Scan QR code to nominate a showman

“This year, the Ag Society gave the ‘OK’ to have an adult showmanship competition,” Matt said

“And they are making it a fundraiser,” Vanessa added. “So, you pay \$10 to get a parent, or an adult over 21, to show an animal of your choice. So, I nominated him (Matt) to show a sheep.”

Vanessa chuckled after she made the statement. “It will be very entertaining.”

Vanessa and Matt informed the *Herald* that the competition will take place on Saturday, right after the round-robin, which is an event where the top showman in all age categories, compete for grand champion showman.

“The round-robin is all-around showman,” Vanessa started to explain. “The top winners from senior showman, intermediate, and juniors show all animals: sheep, llamas, pig, goats, dairy, and beef. Whoever has the top scores, when added up from each animal, wins. So, you gotta know your stuff if you make it that far.”

Vanessa said that after she had won the top showman for sheep two years ago, she immediately embarked on a series of quick tutorials on how to show the other animals.

“When I went in the ring, it was four animals that we had to know how to show; now it is six animals, the ones we said before.”

Vanessa and Matt chatted about what animals are the hardest to show and which ones are the easiest.

“Pigs are the easiest, and cows are second easiest,” Vanessa and Matt agreed.

“Goat is probably the hardest, at least for me,” Vanessa said.

The *Herald* interview ended by going over the newly added fun feature of the Seasoned Professional Showman.

“This is the first time doing it,” Matt said. “It is more for a fundraiser, but also entertainment. It gives the kids a chance to critique us and get back at us for hounding them on their techniques. It is a role reversal.”

“Yes!” Vanessa chimed in, upon hearing her father’s response. “My steer is at another farm, and that guy only likes steers, no other animals. I signed him up to show a goat.”

Vanessa laughed again, apparently embracing the excitement of the new event. Matt said that Vanessa had also signed up her older sister to show a sheep.

“I can’t wait,” Vanessa said.

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LINK

continued from page 2

always organized chaos! But once the displays, exhibits, and animals are all set up and in place, it becomes the most fun and social event of the summer."

Jackie and her family have been a part of The Monroe County Fair for many years. Her husband, Harvey, showed at the Monroe County Fair growing up, and each of their children have shown animal and non-animal exhibits at the fair. Some of those children now have children who themselves will be showing animals this year. Jackie shared that the experience gives young people a chance to share something they are passionate and expert on, with the greater community. It fosters teaching, learning, communication skills, including speaking in public.

Jackie went on to explain that, "if a child you know would like to get more involved in working with animals and other life skills, hobbies, and facets of farm life, including tending plants and gardening, arts and crafts, photography, sewing, cooking, adventure projects, small pets, and

more, look into 4-H and FFA. They are such a big part of the fair. Contact Jason Hornickel, 4-H Educator at the Monroe County Extension Office, or your local high school agriculture teacher, to learn more and sign up."

A Call for Volunteers With Animal Handling Experience

Bonita Hanley, Junior Fair Board member said, "the Junior Fair Board is still looking for volunteers to help work at AgVenture Pavilion and Learn N Earn. We are looking for four volunteers per shift with one of those volunteers being an adult to work 4-hour long shifts." For more information, please contact the Fair Office at (608) 372-2081 or email us at mcjuniorfairboard@gmail.com.

Folks are encouraged to look at the Junior Fair Board's Farm to Fork Display in the Gold Building at any time. In addition, there are exciting animal shows to attend throughout the weekend.

For more information call the Monroe County Fair Office at (608) 372-2081 or call 4-H Educator Jason Hornickel at (608) 269-8722. To learn more about the fair, including the entire Monroe County Fair events line up, on the Web: <https://www.monroecountyfairwi.com/>.



Say, CHEESE! This Jersey calf practices her smile for the upcoming Monroe County Fair, as part of the Animal Learning Center. Contributed photo.

2024 MOCO FAIR

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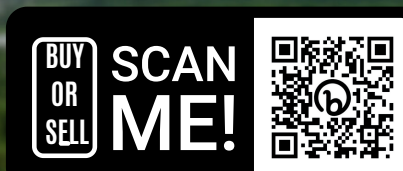
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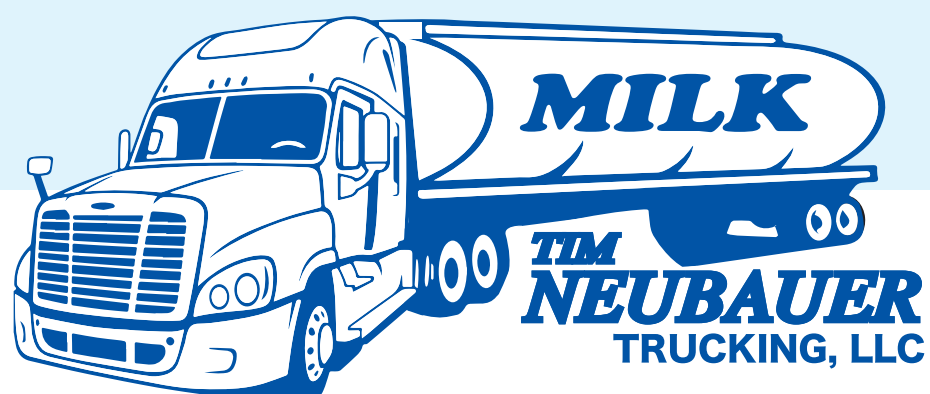
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Four Generations of Fair

Wells family continues tradition

By KYLE EVANS
Herald Staff

Simon & Rosie Wells' first date was at the Monroe County Fair. They recently celebrated their 60th anniversary.

On the Western side of Monroe County, the Wells family is known for agriculture far, and wide from Sparta to Cashton. Simon & RoseAnn (Rosie) Wells are the oldest generation, with their children, grandchildren, and now, great-grandchildren also participating in the fair year after year.

"I've been coming to the fairs for 80 years," said 82-year-old Simon.

Simon's mother passed away when Simon was just a baby. Lee R. Wells, Simon's uncle, took Simon to the fair every year. Simon began his association with the fair as an exhibitor and FFA member. He later became a 4-H leader, beef superintendent, Monroe County Ag Society Director and still acts in his current role as secretary for the Ag Society. He was beef superintendent for approximately 50 years and just resigned last year. In 2015, Simon was presented with an award for being inducted into the District 3 Hall of Fame from the Wisconsin Fairs Association.

"I stuck with being involved in the fair for several reasons, the main reason is for the kids because the kids get the biggest benefit out of the fair. Two things I like to see at the fair is fun and education," said Simon.

Simon recalled his younger days as going to all the fairs in the area,



Left to right the four generations at the Monroe County Fair in 2023: Audra, Jayce, Kori, and Ellie Blank, Simon and RoseAnn Wells, and Annette Trescher. Contributed photo.

Vernon County Fair, La Crosse Interstate Fair, Jackson County Fair, Elroy Fair, Juneau County Fair, and more. Simon explained that he would take a truck load of cattle to each of

the fairs to advertise that they had cattle for sale. Simon added, "In a lot of ways, the Monroe County Fair is the best in the area as we still have good dairy show, good livestock

(Beef, Sheep, and Hogs) shows and auctions and even the carcass show where people can view the meat." He added, "The carcass show is done at the awards ceremony at the Leon

Community Center after the fair."

Regarding the dairy show, Simon said, "Paul Dwyer (Dwyer Milk Transport) takes the milk from the cows at the fair over to Nordic Creamery in Westby and they make cheese curds with it and bring them back for sale before the fair is over."

Simon's wife, Rosie, enters the fair every year in the senior division for crafts.

"I enjoy it very much, and I'm thankful to see how many different categories there are to enter now," said Rosie.

The Wells own a 400-acre farm near Leon, and their family helps out as much as they can.

"All my kids are still involved in agriculture in one way shape or form," said Simon.

Mark and James (J.) Wells run Foss Fine Meats in Sparta and help on the Wells Family Farm on Kusota Rd. near Leon, and Annette Trescher has a family farm in Cashton.

The next generation all have participated in the fair as well and all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren help at the Wells family Farm. Mark's children; Collin, Cole, Ryan, and Todd, and J.'s children; Brady, Nathan, Audrey, and Isaac all help out on the farm.

"They all go take care of their animals – goats, sheep, beef and more," said Rosie.

Annette's children Kori Blank and Derek Trescher are still involved. Kori is the agriculture teacher and FFA advisor for the Cashton High School and helps on the Trescher farm. Derek also works on the family farm in Cashton. Kori has two girls and a boy; Jayce, Audra, and Ellie, and Derek has two boys; Spencer and Logan. Some of the great-grandchildren are a little too young to participate as exhibitors, but if there is one thing guaranteed, Simon said, "the whole family will be at the fair."



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