HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

OSCEOLA COUNTY FAIR

The County Fair is finally here. Months of planning, late night committee meetings and countless hours of volunteer time moving, cleaning and building make it happen. Bright lights and carnival rides are all around the fairgrounds at Osceola Heritage Park. Cows, pigs and chickens have been led to their appropriate stalls at the KVLS Livestock Pavilion. You can smell sausage, peppers and onions and popcorn and cotton candy.

To many, the fair is food and fun, amusement rides and livestock shows. This county fair is also about building character, teaching responsibility, sharing community pride, educating visitors, supporting youth, and working together for a common goal.

This year’s theme is "Thundering in with Fun and Happiness after the Storms." The fair is a celebration of new days and sunny skies as we continue to dig out of the destruction from the summer. The annual event has been a tradition for 61 years. Generations of Kissimmee Valley Livestock Show and Fair (KVLS) members insure the future of this home-town event. It reminds us that life goes on and some familiar things will still be here. We can get back to normal and enjoy life in spite of the turmoil and destruction that has affected us all.

The fair is YOUR county fair. Grandmothers enter hand made quilts. Hobbyists display canned goods and woodworking. School children learn about agriculture. Our senior citizens reminisce about days gone by. Local businesses promote their products and let you know they are in town whenever you need their services. Commercial vendors sell their many items from belts and jewelry to bracelets and t-shirts to flutes and music tapes.

Proud parents herd (oops, I mean accompany) their children to one of the many 4-H shows. Nervous youth get ready to parade their own animals into the arena to show off their talents at grooming the animals and themselves. Judges select items for their quality and appearance. Citizens share their skills and demonstrate country craft techniques.

The fair is about people; people eating, learning, performing, playing, laughing and having fun. We need that now more than ever.

It is about the proud artist showing off their entry to a friend. It is about the beaming child that just came off the stage after the talent show. It is about the FFA member that raised a fancy feathered hen from a chick several months ago.

Families juggle school and home schedules so youth can participate in the many activities at the fair. They often arrive before sunrise to feed their steer or hog before school. The schedule is just as hectic all year with club meetings, special workshops, practice, exhibit building and all the other activities 4-H has to offer.

Throughout the week, youth compete for trophies and ribbons. But 4-H and FFA is not really about all the awards. It is about the kids; helping them gain a sense of accomplishment and pride. You can see their confidence and poise build from year to year. It is about parents guiding the youth and bonding over common experiences.

These youth programs that are featured at the annual fair also help develop life skills such as record keeping, leadership and citizenship. Record books and skill tests called skill-a-thons provide participants an opportunity to demonstrate lessons learned throughout the project.

Teams of adults and youth have been working for nearly a year to prepare for the 10 day event that ends Sunday, February 20. Pens have been built. Stalls have been cleaned. Displays have been made. 4-H club leaders, FFA advisors and parents spend many hours mentoring youth to help them have a quality entry for the fair competition. Families have endured baskets of biscuits and muffins while youth test family recipes on willing victims, I mean judges.
Depending on the day, you might see a livestock show or a fashion show. There will be a pie eating contest and old-fashioned cake walks. Share a conversation with a friend on a bench or bale of hay while watching the wildest outdoor western show. Enjoy special entertainment on several stages around the property.

Every year, the fair opens its doors to the community to allow our citizens a chance to show and tell. A premium book is produced that provides information on how to enter items for display. It details the awards or premiums that participants may earn from ribbons and trophies to cash prizes. For more information on the fair, call KVLS at 321-697-3050.

Come visit the fair and meet your neighbors. We have been through a lot together. Now let’s have some fun.

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