

## Guest Column: A festival of neon lights and country nights

July 25, 2022



The 129th Del Norte County Fair is ready, set, go for August 4 to 7.

The seven-year, Measure F quarter-cent sales tax has now sunsetted. What can we expect from this year's Fair? Lots of very good stuff.

The Fair has contracted for new rides from new vendor Brass Ring Amusement. I'm told the new array of rides includes plenty of thrills and an even larger Ferris wheel. A great selection of new food preparers including vendors who guarantee to activate your salivary glands.

Fairgoers should make a special effort to come hungry for some exquisite delicacies including fried turkey legs and bacon-wrapped frankfurters. Entertainers Austin French and Chase Bryant will perform Thursday, August 4 and Friday, August 5, respectively.

Despite record high inflation, Fair visitors can expect the cool coastal climate to be awaiting our out-of-town visitors escaping the torrid temperatures inland.

The record 30,000 attendance during the pre-Covid pandemic era is expected to eclipse any previous four-day event attendance record.

I heartily suggest you place the Fair on your calendar. Kids under 12 are free on Thursday. Friday, Seniors enter gratis; Saturday, Military IDs for free admission are offered. Adult Fair admission is \$10. Children six to 12 are \$6. Five and under are free.

Operating in the black, the Fair is the very fabric of our community. Financially, conditions are always challenging. Measure F tax left \$3.5 million in reserve after the Special Committee authorized almost \$600,000 in immediate infrastructure improvements.

It's important to remind all, the State of California owns the 88 acre parcel on which the Fairgrounds situate. Are conditions rosy between the State, the Del Norte County Fair Board of Directors and the Special Measure F Board? I'd say NO, not yet. There's a lot of space to improve that relationship.

The State owns and controls the 41st District Fair and 73 others up-and-down the Golden State. Measure F has provided several of the drastically needed improvements, including the replacement of the decrepit grandstands. New state-of-the-art spectator grandstands are under construction as this column is being published.

A \$100,000 down payment with a \$300,000 balance due on new spectator seating is in works. Interim grandstand rentals will be in place before this year's Fair with the permanent grandstands to be installed for 2023.

The Measure F Special Board has been extremely frugal in allocating funding for the State-owned property since there are zero plans to attempt another sales tax; that's good news. The Measure F Special Committee also authorized a \$22,471 initial non-refundable payment to the State, and in return received a \$190,000 grant to replace power poles which have long outlived their effectiveness.

Deferred maintenance is daunting. The remaining reserves are but a raindrop in the bucket of an estimated \$50 million in long-overdue infrastructure refurbishment.

The right thing for the State to do is improve its property. Will that happen? Unlikely! The State has lots of priorities, and has yet to demonstrate its support for Fair prosperity.

Gov. Newsom sits stubbornly on officially appointing three Board members reportedly because the very qualified candidates are not from the Governor's Democrat Party. Shameful! This exclusionary and divisive tactic did not bode well for Republican Governor Pete Wilson in the 90's and reflects poorly on Newsom, today.

Another major challenge is contending with the criminal, so-called transient population who, during unlawful trespassing and breaking and entering buildings, are wantonly destroying property. These criminal

acts take a toll on Fair finances.

And in what I can only identify as Democrat political muscle, I am of the valid opinion the State is keenly eyeing some part of the 88 acre parcel for State Senator Mike McGuire homeless utopia Homekey project which promises as many as 150 homeless projects from Marin to the Oregon border. Should that option be utilized by Governor Newsom and Sen. McGuire, it would spell unmitigated disaster on the Fair and Del Norte County. Make no mistake on that prediction.

The Fairgrounds will be a busy place in 2022. Country Market has already commenced and will run through Labor Day. Holiday Fair December 2 to 4, Drive through Christmas Lights December 9 to,24, and scores of community events will take place throughout the remainder of the year. Neon Lights and Country Nights, here we come. See you at the Fair.

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