

Guest Editorial: Fair board provides insight into ‘painful’ decision

May 29, 2020



As you probably know, there will not be a 2020 Del Norte County Fair. It was an incredibly emotional, painful decision.

The 41st District Agricultural Association Board of Directors — better known as the Del Norte Fair Board — unanimously made the call last week. Our Fair joins the dozens, maybe hundreds, of others on the West Coast and across the nation shutting down this year, victims of the Coronavirus crisis.

In late May, Humboldt County pulled the plug on its 2020 Fair. The Douglas County Fair was canceled, as were the Fairs in Coos, Siskiyou, Amador, Klamath, Ventura, Sonoma, and Redwood Empire in Ukiah. The Curry County Fair was wiped out in April. Many Fairs in California made the decision even earlier.

It is a cascade of cancelations.

There are a multitude of reasons why our Fair board made this difficult decision. These include:

Under current rules, the State of California has banned all mass gatherings.

Vendors – both those in the area and outside of Del Norte County – have indicated they will not be coming in 2020. With no county fair circuit to follow, they are waiting for next year.

It is the same story for many entertainment acts, who are taking the summer off because of limited opportunities and potential virus exposure.

Sponsors have been almost non-existent this year, as local businesses try to stay alive in a time of limited commerce.

Fair participants need to know if they should invest time and money into something that may not happen. This includes exhibitors in the various categories (such as gardening, canning, art work, etc.), as well as participants in events such as the demolition derby and local musical acts.

Even if the state suddenly allowed fairs to go forward, the social distancing and other rules would, the board believes, produce a sub-par Fair experience. For example, if the six-foot restriction between individuals was enforced in the grandstand arena, it would allow for approximately 500 spectators, 75 percent less than capacity.

Another major reason for the decision is economics. One of the Fair Board's missions, along with the voter-created Del Norte Recreation and Parks District Board, is to assure the long-range future of the Fair and Fairgrounds. If a miracle were to happen and the Fairgrounds was given permission to go forward at this late date, a lack of attendance caused by fear and a lack of events could be devastating to the economic health of the Fair.

There is one more reason for the cancelation, the most important reason of all ... it is the right thing to do. The health and safety of our community must take priority.

The Fair board is determined to help the Junior Livestock Auction to continue. Organizers of this event are looking at different ways this can happen. Members of the board are working with leaders of Grange and 4-H to make sure the auction/sale continues. The Fairgrounds will provide more information as it becomes available.

During this difficult time, our Fair crew will be busy. Some long-overdue fairgrounds maintenance is being scheduled, along with some capital improvements that will benefit both residents and visitors.

The coronavirus crisis will not last forever. There will be a time, in the not-too-distant future, where our fairgrounds will be filled again with laughter, with excitement, with events and activities. It will be filled with the sights and sounds of Del Norte County at its best.

• Submitted by John Pritchett, Del Norte Fair Board President, and Kim Floyd, Del Norte County Fair Chief Executive Officer