



Steele County Free Fair

A TIMELESS TRADITION

THE 2026 EDITION

August 18-23, 2026



A Special Supplement of the Steele County Times

SCFF on a Stick

New app makes navigating the fair a snap

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

If it's on a stick, you'll probably find it at most fairs and festivals – including, as it turns out, an app. Enter Steele County Free Fair on a Stick, the latest convenience in a digital age for people who still enjoy old-fashioned things.

"This is basically a one-stop-shop for anything you need on

the fairgrounds," said Zach Rinehart, assistant manager of the SCFF, who was working on the project when contacted a few weeks ago.

"We're getting all the information for the fair uploaded into that interface," with a hope of launching it to the public ahead of the Aug. 18 opening day.

"It'll be a mobile app for your phone that you can download," Rinehart said, using an Android

or Apple device. "You just have to search SCFF on a Stick and it'll pop up; it'll have our logo on it," so there's no mistaking it for a different app.

The app is free for fairgoers, but the fair itself will incur an annual cost.

"It's certainly a value to the fairgoer, and we want to make their experience as enjoyable as possible and as easy as possible," he said.

It can guide users anywhere they need to go on the fairgrounds, provide show schedules, find new vendors or food allergen menus and more.

"We asked a lot of our vendors, if you're able to accommodate certain allergies, let us know, and we'll put that on the list, just as a guideline," Rinehart said. "We can't obviously guarantee that it's 100% the case for every vendor, but it will be what they've informed us about."

The local fair is partnering with a company out of the Twin Cities that created a similar app for the Minnesota State Fair.

The "overall nuts and bolts of getting everything uploaded and the maps designed for it, I'm doing a lot of the heavy lifting on that side of it," Rinehart said.

Compared to other apps, he

said, "I think this is unique because it'll give you turn-by-turn directions to where you want to go on the fairgrounds. So if you're not sure where the brand-new food is, or that must-have item, or your favorite corn dog stand, you punch in the stand name, and it'll show a line on the map from wherever you're standing on the grounds to wherever the destination is. You can follow the line all the way to the stand."

Interested in that 2 p.m. dog show on the north end of the fairgrounds?

"You can look at the schedule and put that on your 'favorites' list," Rinehart said. "You can have your list of favorite foods and your favorite vendors and your favorite shows, so you can keep track and mark if off when you complete it. You have this nice little checklist in the app for what you want to do at the grounds."

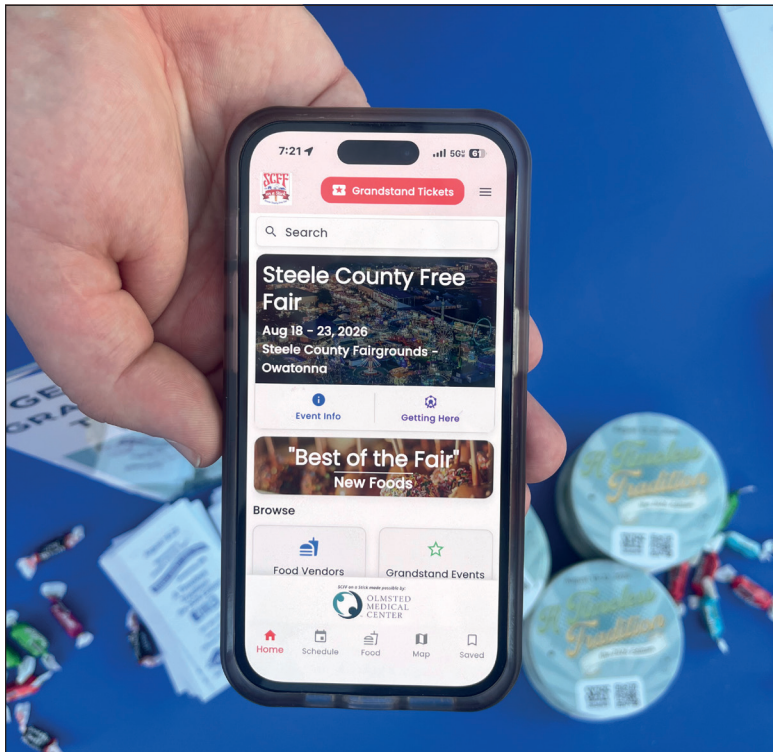
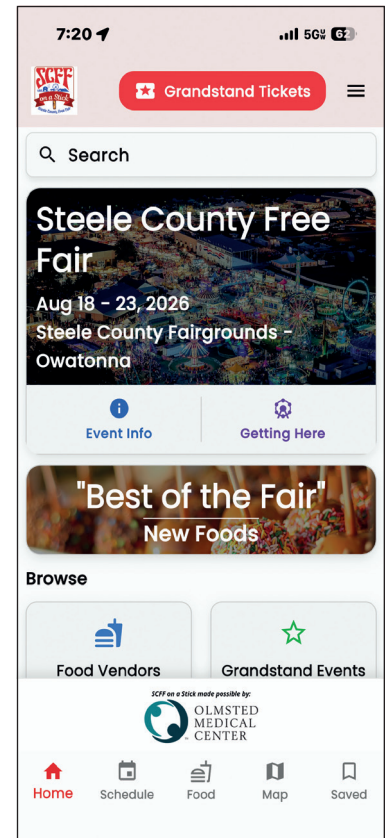
Updates and changes to information will be made on the app in real time, so the next time the fairgoer opens it, the new info will be available.

"That'll be super-helpful if we have a last-minute change on something," Rinehart said.

There will be push notifications, as well, if the user allows.

"We're not going to spam people's phones or anything," he said, "but just relevant information. Like if there's weather coming in or there's a delay in the grandstand, we can let them know that, too."

"This is a way that we can



connect with many of the fairgoers all at one time," he said.

That being said, the information booth stations are not going away.

"We definitely understand and see the value of having those, and having that face-to-face interaction is probably the best thing that you can possibly have," Rinehart said.

"It takes all kinds to make the world go 'round, and we have all kinds of fairgoers, and we appreciate all of them," he said. "We want to make sure that we're able to provide that service to all of them."



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TRIFECTA FOR FAITH

Faithfest to offer 3 Christian singers

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

After last year's success with the debut of Christian music at the Steele County Free Fair, organizers are even more excited than ever.

Not only will the Christian vibe continue into the second year, but this year's event has expanded to Faithfest with three different singers joining together. Anchored by nationally renowned Christian singer Jeremy Camp, Faithfest will also offer Jon Reddick and Thunderstorm Artis at the grandstand Aug. 19.

"It's music that can really touch you dealing with everyday life," said Helen Mrozek, one of the organizers of Faithfest. "We just want people to draw closer to Jesus by sharing Christ with others. He is the answer to all."

Mrozek is especially excited to have landed Jeremy Camp, widely considered one of the top Christian artists in the country.

He ranks among the most commercially successful and chart-dominant solo artists in contemporary Christian music history, notable named Billboard's No. 2 Christian Artist of the 2000s decade.

Between 2002 and 2024, Camp has released 13 albums, five of them RIAA-certified as Gold. He has sold over 7 million albums, over 4 billion streams and with 46 No. 1 singles across all formats. His music has earned him numerous awards and nominations across the Christian and secular music industries, including five GMA Dove Awards, Grammy nomination, three American Music Award nominations, and four ASCAP Songwriter of the Year Awards.

Outside of music, in 2020 Camp had an international theatrical movie release called "I Still Believe" which hit No. 1 in the box office opening weekend. The film depicted his life story of love and loss of his first wife after a battle with cancer. Camp has always written songs

about his experiences and continues to write from the deep places of his heart.

"He is such a blessing," Mrozek said of Camp. "He can be really inspiring. He has been through a lot of heartache. It has real meaning that people can relate to. A lot of people can make music, but this is anointed music with Christ at the center of everything."

Added Steve Stoykovich, another organizer, "It's a testimony of his faith. We all need encouragement. Jeremy rebounded by trusting in God. Everyone can be inspired by those following and seeing the Lord."

Faithfest is organized by Owatonna Area Christian Radio of which both Mrozek and Stoykovich serve as directors. Looking back over the past few years, Mrozek said they never thought they would be able to bring in a big-name concert like Jeremy Camp and last year's Big Daddy Weave.

"It's mind blowing to us, but I guess we



Nashville-based Christian singer Jon Reddick rounds out the trifecta of faith planned at the fair.

shouldn't be surprised," Mrozek says. "It's faith building to see that God can do so much through willing hearts," she said, adding they have been blessed to have many people step up with sponsorships to support this year's concert.

Stoykovich expects this year's faith concert to be larger than last year because "of the testimonies of what people shared after last year's concert."

And Stoykovich isn't afraid to share his faith with others. "I want people to know they are loved and important, and they are on this earth for a purpose," he said.

For Stoykovich, Christian music is encouraging. "It's spoonfuls of nutrition that are encouraging to



Nationally renowned Christian singer Jeremy Camp will headline this year's Faithfest at the Steele County Free Fair.

keep your spirits on fire and alive in your own heart," he said.

Having a focus on faith at the fair is what Naomi Jirele, lay pastor at Owatonna Christian Church, calls a "revitalization of faith." She said there is a whole different environment created when people have faith in God. "This is a resurgence with faith and God."

Jirele encourages anyone who has never attended a Christian concert. See FAITHFEST on 28 ►



Thunderstorm Artis will be joining Jeremy Camp and Jon Reddick for Faithfest on Aug. 19 at the fair.

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'It's a wild ride'

Rinehart settles into new role with fair

BY RICK BUSSLER

One might consider Zachary Rinehart the new kid on the block—well, sort of.

He's new in his role as assistant manager of the Steele County Free Fair, but definitely not new to county fairs. In fact, at only 33 years old, he's marking his 25th year of involvement with fairs.

"I started when I was 8 years old with my mother taking me to help with a burger joint on the fairgrounds," said Rinehart, who grew up in Faribault County and attended the fair in Blue Earth during his childhood years. "I did everything—prep work, cleaning, grilling and frying," he recalled of working with the stand his mother ran for the Kiester Civic & Commerce.

By the time he was 16, Rinehart approached officials at his home fair inquiring if he could get a job working at the fair. He became the first employee of the fair's grounds crew.

Three years later, while at college in Mankato, Rinehart learned about an opening on the Faribault County Fair Board after the passing of one of his neighbors. He soon became a member of the fair

while still in college.

"I brought the average age down on the fair board a lot," Rinehart said, noting he became the youngest voting fair board member in the state.

After moving permanently to Mankato, Rinehart joined the Blue Earth County Fair in Garden City as a 27-year-old with 12 years of fair experience. "Is this guy for real?" many wondered.

But that now presents a huge dilemma for Rinehart. The Blue Earth fair is the same week as his home fair in Faribault County. Just for the record, Blue Earth wins out.

Last October Rinehart was hired as assistant manager of the Steele County Free Fair working directly under long-time manager, Scott Kozelka. Besides his full-time gig with SCFF, Rinehart still remains active on the Blue Earth Fair Board. He also serves as a director for Minnesota Federation of County Fairs.

"It's a wild ride," Rinehart says of his fair involvement over the past quarter century.

While he may be new on staff at SCFF, the fair is not new to him as he's been coming for many years. When he was younger, he often came to Owatonna for racing at the fair. "It's



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Zachary Rinehart is the new assistant manager of the Steele County Free Fair. At only 33 years old, he's already been involved with fairs for a quarter of century.

crazy fantastic," Rinehart said of the Steele fair. "It's a mini-state fair. That's how I saw it as a kid."

In his new role on staff, Rinehart has been busy learning as much as he can about the business side of things. With his younger age, he's tech savvy, bringing a whole new element to the fair. Much of his time has been devoted to developing "SCFF on a Stick," a new mobile app that will alert fairgoers about everything they want to know about the fair.

"I grew up with technology," he said. "I'm a millennial. I can help where I have a background."

He has also focused on going paperless and implementing online forms for different aspects of running the fair. "It has been an overall success with the transition," Rinehart said, adding he's patient

with older vendors who have difficulties making the change.

Rinehart likes what fairs like Steele offer.

"It highlights the best of society," he said. "When you come to the fair, you don't think of all the terrible things going on in the world. You can create positive memories."

Asked what he believes makes the Steele fair the best in Minnesota, Rinehart said it comes down to community support. "There are over 200 volunteers at this fair. That's a little special not only in Minnesota but also nationally," he said.

He is intrigued by how the entire community and county shut down for the week of the fair. "We create the environment of where people want to be by giving people what they

See **RINEHART** on 10 ►



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Deml has done his fair share

Marking 45 years as SCFF Board member

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

Forty-five years? “That’s what they tell me,” said Dan Deml, smiling and shaking his head.

Even for a wildly popular event that sees literally hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers every year, his contribution stands out.

Deml has spent 45 years as a member of the Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors, the last 13 as president.

“It’s very unusual,” he admitted, “because I was appointed to the fair board when I was 30 years old; most people don’t start until they’re in their 40s or 50s, you know? I’m probably the youngest guy ever on the fair board.”

Deml was appointed to finish out an unexpired term, and ran for election from then on – successfully, obviously.

For the first three-plus decades, he was livestock director; Deml was also named treasurer of the board in 1998, holding that role until he was elected president in 2013.

“That’s how I hung around so long,” he said.

Deep roots

Deml joined 4-H when he was 10, a boy growing up on a crop and livestock farm south of Owatonna.

At 12, he showed his first animal at the county

fair; his focus became all things dairy.

Deml went from exhibiting 4-H dairy to open class dairy. He became president of the local Holstein Association, which hosted a district show in Owatonna.

“I worked with the fair board, helping put on the show,” which likely put him on their radar.

When the existing livestock director of the board resigned, Deml was asked to take over. Now instead of just dairy duties, he was overseeing swine, sheep, equine and more.

That was 1981.

“It was very fortunate,” he said. “I had some really, really good superintendents. Basically, as a livestock director, I was kind of hands-off, because the superintendents know more about their shows than I do. If they had a problem, they could come to me.”

He still exhibited in the dairy shows, but said he was careful not to use his position as a fair board member to influence any part of the event.

New position

In 1998, former treasurer Dick Reinhardt retired from Federated, and wanted to be a snowbird. He stayed on as a board member, but a new treasurer was needed.

“You know that old saying, ‘be careful what you wish for?’ That was me,” Deml laughed.

“Dick used this huge old book, a ledger, and I said, ‘we ought to put this on a computer.’ About a week later, Jim Harland, the fair board president at the time, called me and says, ‘Dan, would you be the treasurer?’”

The board purchased QuickBooks and Deml got to work.

“Eventually, it was kind of fun,” he said. “It was kind of a challenge, but it was really fun, yeah.”

It was also when he became much more involved in the workings of the fair itself.

“As livestock director, it didn’t change much from year to year,” Deml said. The superintendents were more than capable of many of the responsibilities, including hiring judges for the competition, “so there wasn’t a lot to do in the off-season.”

Originally, he set up shop in the fair office, stopping in two days a week that first winter to pay the bills, go to the bank and other responsibilities.

But Deml still farmed, and when spring approached, he told Fair Manager Elmer Reseland something had to change.

The easiest solution, it was decided, was for Deml to do the bookwork at home, on his own computer.

His wife Vicki would pick up the banking business at the fair office every

day when she took their children to school.

“She’d throw the envelope with the bills and checks and deposits on my desk and say, ‘well, there’s your homework.’ And I did that for a couple of years,” Deml said.

That daily errand also turned into a job for Vicki Deml, who spent the next 23 years as secretary at the fair office.

Perfect timing

Corky Ebeling was a busy man. In 2013, he was president of the fair board, a Steele County commissioner and interim director of the Owatonna Parks and Rec Department.

“He needed to lighten the load a little bit,” Deml said, “and asked if I would consider taking over as president” of the fair board.

“About that time, just by sheer coincidence, our son was getting married and we were in the process of selling the dairy herd and moving to town,” he said. “Suddenly I had time in my schedule to be president, which I probably wouldn’t have had before.”

Farming, especially with livestock, comes with a “very inflexible schedule,” Deml said. “Being president probably filled a void that I would have typically had.”

He gave up the positions of both treasurer and livestock director, too.

Decades of change

Not only have Deml’s



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Dan Deml sits on a bench in Fair Square, the hub of the Steele County Free Fair. The spot features plenty of seating and shade trees, and is surrounded by vendors, live entertainment, restrooms, the Beer Garden, the Great Outdoors Center, the fair offices and anything else a fairgoer could need. Deml has been on the board of the largest county fair in Minnesota for 45 years.

roles changed significantly; the fair has, too.

“I don’t think anybody – me or anybody else – would have ever imagined what it was going to look like in 2026,” he said.

Despite being very dependent on the weather, “when we’d have a perfect year of weather and everything went well, we’d kind of scratch our heads and think, ‘how are we ever going to improve on that?’”

“But it seems like we’ve put together an operation that tends to grow itself sometimes,” Deml said.

Under Reseland’s tenure from 1995-2011, “we experienced dramatic growth,” he continued. “I remember very clearly, very clearly, when we topped a million dollars gross income when I was treasurer. And Elmer was also a guy who was looking for something new every year – and other fairs started doing what we were doing.”

There was “just incredible growth because of good management,” Deml said, including Jim Gleason and current manager Scott Kozelka.

“Scott has just dramatically increased the amount of sponsorships that we’ve experienced; he loves doing it, and he’s good at it,” Deml said.

“When people have a vested interest in something – there’s a community support for the Steele County Fair that you just never see in other fairs,” he said. “People are proud to be a part of this fair.”

And, after 45 years, so is Deml.

“There’s a satisfaction when you see people enjoying it and having fun that you just really can’t understand or explain,” he said. “Then you kind of pinch yourself that you can be part of something for the community that they enjoy so much.”





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Cori Kennedy entertains as opening act in grandstand

BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN
STAFF WRITER

Cori Kennedy returns to the Steele County fairgrounds Aug. 21, opening for Randy Houser at the grandstand.

Kennedy, a West Concord native, has been rising in the country music world since she was a contestant on NBC's The

Voice (Season 28) where she joined Team Reba McEntire and advanced through Battles and Knockouts.

She appeared in Owatonna earlier this year at the Spring into Summer event at the fairgrounds.

Kennedy said in an interview last week that she has had a busy time since her appearance on

the Voice.

She moved to Nashville, hired an agent and put together a band. She also quietly married her finance, Eric.

The process of putting together a band was also a unique experience.

She began looking for members and started fielding applications; even doing some of the initial candidate interviews online.

Her band members, she said, come from California, Colorado, Arizona and Seattle.

Most of her summer appearances have been in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa, she said, but as fall approaches she is planning to expand her performances nationally and perhaps internationally.

None of her band members are from Minnesota, she said, and she has been enjoying showing them around her home territory.

One of the biggest challenges about her new life, she said, is all the planning and business aspects of being a performer. She said she sometimes feels like an event coordinator. "I'm really fortunate in having

a really awesome management team," she said.

A career as a musician was not among her goals when she was growing up in West Concord, attending Kasson-Mantorville schools. She was active in 4-H in Dodge County, showing sheep, but by the time she reached middle school, sports became her focus. She also played percussion in the KMHS band, but after concentrating on sports in high school, she attended Minnesota State University-Mankato to play softball. Kennedy was a member of the team that won an NCAA softball championship.

After college she worked in broadcasting, worked for a year at 911 in Steele County then settled into a retail job selling furniture in Rochester. She loved her job selling furniture, she said, and while thinking about trying out for the Voice she actually wondered if she should do it because she would miss not being at work.

"If I hadn't been on the Voice, I would probably still be selling furniture," she said.



STAFF PHOTO BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN

Cori Kennedy entertained visitors at Spring into Summer at the Steele County Fairgrounds in May. She returns for a grandstand performance, August 21, as the opening act for Randy Houser.

Kennedy said she is really excited about her upcoming fair performance and especially being on the same program with Randy Houser. She has never met him, but said she has been a fan of Houser since high school.

Her performance at the fair will also be something special, she said, since this

will be the first live performance husband Eric has attended in person.

Despite growing up close to Steele County, she has never been to the local fair.

"Randy Houser with special guest Cori Kennedy" begins at 7 p.m. in the grandstand. Tickets are available through the fair website.

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Rinehart settles into new role with fair

◀ RINEHART from 6 want and what they need," Rinehart said.

Over the next month Rinehart is excited to meet all the people

involved with the fair as well as fairgoers.

And Rinehart doesn't hide the fact that he has his eye on something larger. He would like to be-

come fair manager some day after Kozelka retires.

But for now, he's content with where he's at.

"I have lots to learn from Scott. He's a great

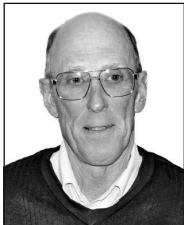
mentor and leader," Rinehart said.

He leans on the old saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."

In the fair world, Rinehart said, "It takes an even bigger village to run a fair."

A MESSAGE FROM THE FAIR PRESIDENT

Incredibly blessed with fair sponsorships



A Fair Shot
DAN DEML

On behalf of the Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors, manager Scott Kozelka and staff, welcome to “A Timeless Tradition the 2026 Edition!”

For many of us who have been around the fair for many years we take very seriously our responsibility to put on the kind of fair that Steele County and our many guests beyond the county have come to expect. This year is no exception.

Several new entertainers are featured on the Wenger Stage, two new acts in the north end, new musical entertainers in the grandstand as well bands in the beer garden. Five new food vendors will join the fair with 15 new

foods for the first time.

We never want to forget all of the favorites that you look forward to: Goldstar Amusements, commercial and 4-H exhibits along with livestock shows that many of us grew up with. These all create memories that last a lifetime and keep us coming back to the fair.

When the board, staff and volunteers can look over the crowds and see the joy the Steele County Free Fair brings to our guests, it makes the volunteer time spent well worth all of the work. We feel incredibly blessed with the support we have from over 200 sponsors. Without your generosity we would not be able to bring free entertainment in addition to free admission to the fair. We are constantly asked, “How do you do this?” The sponsorships and community support make it possible!

I look forward to seeing you Aug. 18-23.

Dan Deml is the current president of the Steele County Free Fair. He has served at the fair for 45 years.

Bingo at the Steele County Free Fair remains one of the best bargains on the grounds, and the proceeds make a local impact.

But if having a cold beer and listening to music is more your style, the SCFF has a deal for you.

It’s called Jindo Music Bingo, and it makes its debut this year in Ye Olde Beer Garden.

“Basically, the way it works is, there’s a little QR code on all the tables in the beer garden,” said Zach Rinehart, assistant fair manager. “People can scan the code with their phone and it’ll pull up the music bingo for that day.”

Instead of squares with numbers, the card will have squares with song titles.

Little snippets of music are played in the beer garden, “and if that song is on your Jindo sheet, you’ll tap your screen on that song title,” he said. “You keep marking off the songs titles that have been played and hopefully get a Jindo.”

A straight line across, up and down or diagonally “will win you a little prize,” Rinehart said.

When a player hits the required pattern, they tap a “Call Jindo” button on

Let’s play Jindo

New game combines music, bingo at SCFF

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

their device; the system auto-verifies the win instantly.

“You can go in, sit down and have a beverage while you play, or you can just be standing inside the beer garden too,” Rinehart said. “The music clip will be played over the speakers each round, and you’ll be able to jump in or jump out as the rounds move on.”

There is no cost to play. “It was one of the featured items at the state convention in January that we go to for all the county fairs, so we picked up that idea there,” Rinehart said. “It was one of the showcases, so we actually got to play it a little bit while we were at the convention, to test it out, and it was a lot of fun.”

Added benefits include no app to download, no paper clutter and zero waste. There are multiple curated playlists across

See **NEW GAME** on 39 ►

Play Jindo

Classic Rock

Bad Moon Rising	Notorious	Bang A Gong (Get It On)	Born to Be Wild	Blinded By The Light
Black Betty	Hurts So Good	I Just Want To Celebrate	My Sharona	Cold As Ice
Don't Fear The Reaper	American Woman	Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love	Runnin' With The Devil	Panama
On The Dark Side	Running On Empty	Abracadabra	Don't Treat Me Bad	Magic Man
Carry On Wayward Son	Life's Been Good	Smoke On The Water	Hold On Loosely	Born In The U.S.A.

Playlists

LIVESTOCK, EQUINE HALL OF FAMERS

Programs to include 6 new inductees

BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN
STAFF WRITER

The 2026 Steele County Free Fair officially opens at 5 p.m. on Aug. 18, but that does not mean there will be no activity on the fairgrounds earlier in the afternoon.

Two programs that afternoon will induct the newest members into the Livestock and Equine Halls of Fame. This year's inductees to the Livestock Hall of Fame include Tim Larson, Pete Anderson and Mina Holmes and Marianne McRostie. Roger and Erin Pittman will be inducted into the Equine Hall of Fame.

Larson is an agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Medford High School. His career has spanned more

than four decades, and he re-established the agriculture and FFA program at Medford after a four-year lapse. He is committed to agriculture awareness and has developed innovative ag awareness programs for the Medford schools including an agriculture-based Book Barns distributed to every elementary school in Steele County.

Active in the FFA, he has mentored students in the Supervised Agricultural Education projects, was an original organizer of the FFA Goat Show at the Minnesota State Fair and instrumental in advancing the State Fair FFA Poultry and Rabbit Shows.

He is also a 4-H Poultry judge throughout southern Minnesota and a livestock

judge at county fairs in both Minnesota and Iowa.

Larson has also been recognized with honorary Minnesota and American degrees from the FFA and is an inductee into the Minnesota FFA Alumni Hall of Fame.

An Owatonna native, Anderson was active in Owatonna FFA and Steele County 4-H activities with a focus on livestock. He was a member of the 1979 Steele County 4-H Livestock Team that won National Western honors.

His interest in livestock carried into his professional career.

He earned his master's and Ph.D. degrees from the Michigan State University where he also coached the Livestock Judging Team.

During his career he has been a beef cattle specialist at the University of Minnesota where he conducted educational meetings in nearly every county in the state and also authored more than 50 Extension publications.

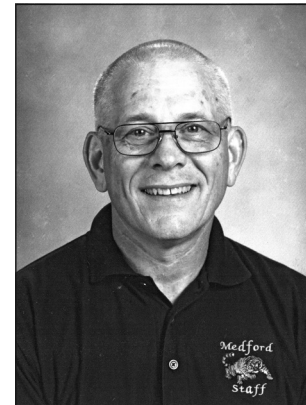
He was also the creator and developer of the VetLife Benchmark Performance Program that collected data from over 70% of the cattle fed in the United States and provided critical production, carcass and financial information.

He has given more than 200 presentations in the U.S., Mexico, Canada and Australia, authored book chapters and has a beef food safety patent.

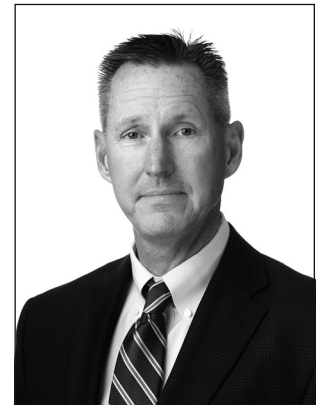
He currently leads the nutritional consulting team at Midwest PMS LLC, providing science-based consulting and high-quality feed products for the beef industry.

The fair is also dipping into the history of butter-making in Steele County with the induction of Holmes and McRostie.

From the 1880s to the 1950s Minnesota led the nation in the production of quality butter and Steele County played a large role. Holmes and McRostie were Meriden township residents, both raising purebred Jersey herds that excelled in butterfat levels.



Tim Larson will be inducted into the Livestock Hall of Fame at the Steele County Free Fair, August 18.



Pete Anderson will be inducted into the Livestock Hall of Fame at the Steele County Free Fair, August 18.

Both also perfected their skills and found butter markets well beyond Minnesota. They were among the first to use automated cream separators to market their product to the next level. They exhibited butter at state and national levels and included wins at the World's Fair in St. Louis, the International Livestock Exhibition in Chicago, Pan-American Exposition in New York and the World Cotton Centennial in New Orleans.

Their success led to Steele County proclaiming itself as the "Butter Capital of the World."

Roger and Erin Pittman of Claremont are well-known in the area as the owners of the Pittman Percheron Eight Horse Hitch along with their family, Marc and Traci Pittman, Emma and Stephen Basness and their five grandchildren, William, Benjamin, Hadley,

Maci and Myla.

They attend seven shows annually, showing their hitch across Minnesota and into Iowa. They are members of the "Six Horse Hitch Classic Series" and compete with hitches from across the U.S. and Canada. They have also raised and exhibited Clydesdales while actively participating in numerous farm events.

They are also dedicated supporters of 4-H, FFA and promoters of the draft horse breeds across Minnesota and Iowa. They pride themselves on sharing their love of draft horses and raising the next generation to love and care for these gentle animals.

The Equine Hall of Fame program will begin at 1 p.m. Tuesday, in the Cattle Show Arena. The Livestock Hall of Fame induction will follow at 2:30 p.m. in the show arena.



The Pittman family of the Claremont area have been named to the Equine Hall of Fame for Steele County.

World champion buttermakers

Holmes and McRostie to be inducted into Hall of Fame

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Two women who played a significant role in making Steele County “The Butter Capital of the World” at the turn of the 20th century are being recognized for their contributions to agriculture.

Mina Holmes and Marianne McRostie will be inducted posthumously into the Steele County Free Fair Livestock Hall of Fame Aug. 18. They will be joined by two other people, Pete Anderson and Paul Larson, for special recognition.

Most people may not recognize Holmes or McRostie because they died in the 1930s. But that’s where a prominent author focusing on Steele County’s history comes into play. Ron Eustice, who grew up in Steele County and has been involved in agriculture for his entire life, has done extensive research on the two women and nominated them for this year’s honor.

“Imagine shipping butter halfway across the country to be exhibited at international exhibitions before there was refrigeration, airplanes or even paved highways,” See **HALL OF FAME** on 40 ►



Marianne McRostie



Mina Holmes

“These two pioneer women put Minnesota butter on the map.”

Ron Eustice
Local Author



Mina Holmes is shown operating her “dog-powered” cream separator she developed in the early 1900s. The unit is now on display at the Steele County Village of Yesteryear in Owatonna.

Support in the stands

Price is 'Vendor Mayor' at SCFF

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

The Steele County Free Fair has a reputation: A wide variety of entertainment, large new livestock buildings, a safe midway with an array of rides, a museum and outdoor center, vast exhibits of 4-H and other projects, a new saloon and improved beer garden.

But the vendors – from local and international foods to the stands that sell sundresses and belt buckles – are everywhere.

They're like a community, so it only makes sense that they need a mayor.

Enter Brad Price, who has held title of Vendor Mayor for more than 20 years.

It all started with a kebob vendor from Texas named Oran Neck, who started bringing "Mickey's Grill" to the SCFF in the early 1990s.

"He came up every year, and he was a really knowledgeable person about the concession business," said Price, who owns several Godfather's Pizzas, including the one in Owatonna.

"He took that knowledge, and we created kind of a concessionaires council," Price said. "It was his idea to start that piece,

with maybe a handful of vendors at the time."

Price has been selling slices at the local fair since 1986.

Eventually, the group decided it needed a mayor – and Neck was the obvious choice, "because he would go around at night and talk to all the vendors, and he would just collaborate with them," Price said. "So Oran was the first mayor."

The group grew every year, something Price attributes directly to the fair itself.

"What's nice about the Steele County Fair is that it's run by so many professionals," he said, citing SCFF Manager Scott Kozelka and the entire board of directors.

"What they do is, they recognize that the concessions – not just the concessionaires, but all the vendors out there – are part of the fair. They really are part of what makes the fair the fair. Until you get to the state fair, you don't see a lot of indoor vendors; they do a great job with that, that whole part."

He's referring to the wall-to-wall booths that fill the Four Seasons Centre every year, from politicians to pottery.

The fair board was in favor of the vendor council, Price said.

"My job is to support the fair in every way possible."

Brad Price

Fair Vendor Mayor

"The council kind of started setting the hours for opening and closing (food stands), and times in and times out, and restrictions like when you could have your car in there, when you couldn't have your car in there..." Price said. "It really just kind of grew into a group of people that were doing everything they could to make the fair better."

Their work gained respect for all sides.

As Neck grew older, Price was the next obvious choice to serve as mayor of the group.

"I'm the same type of person," he said. "I spend my days out and about, talking to concessionaires, find out what's going right, what's going wrong, what we can do to help them."

In addition to the counsel he gives, Price believes another factor is even more important – an initiative he started very quietly.

"I would go around and get money from every vendor, and we go out and

buy the grand champion at the 4-H auction every Saturday," he said. "And that's still my job: To go out and fundraise and get the money collected."

Price emphasizes it's a group effort.

"Most of the concessionaires (contribute)," he said. "Some of the newer ones don't understand it, but once they see it, they get it."

"This is my speech; every year I say this, and I truly mean it: If we didn't have 4-H, we wouldn't have a fair," Price said, "because we are agricultural-based. If we didn't have that sector of our fair ... we wouldn't have what I call a traditional fair."

The foundation provided by 4-H has also grown through the decades, he said.

"It's not just about kids on the farm anymore," Price said. "Today, 4-H is so important" for many other reasons.

"For a small community like Owatonna, it's a place for kids to go after



Brad Price of Godfather's Pizza has gained the title of vendor mayor for the Steele County Free Fair. He is shown with his wife at the groundbreaking of the Steele Saloon in 2024.

school; it's a mentoring organization for young people – it teaches them a lot of skills," he continued. "We need it in our community, so that's why we feel as vendors that it's very important to support the fair – because that's what this is all about."

Every vendor who donates to the grand champion auction receives a plaque recognizing their support, presented by Price.

"My job is to support the fair in every way possible," he said, "and I think every vendor out there will tell you the

same thing. They want to support that fair, and they want it to be better and better and better."

Price again touted the fair's leadership, calling it "the best of the best management; I just can't say enough about how well that fair is run."

He said he believes the new vendors are "inspired" by the council and the work it does, including the support for 4-H.

"I think they see a collaboration of a lot of vendors doing the right thing," Price said. "I think they see that, and they want to be a part of it."



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Crews from ABC Seamless in Owatonna have been working throughout the summer to put new siding on Mothers Rest building located on the west end of the fairgrounds. Funding for the project came through a grant from Owatonna Foundation.

Mothers Rest one of the oldest on the fairgrounds

Building gets an exterior makeover with new siding

BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN
STAFF WRITER

Visitors to the Steele County Free Fair this year may not realize that the Mothers Rest building, which is sporting new siding, is one of the oldest structures on the grounds. Its original purpose was to simply provide what its name says, a place for mothers to leave their children to be cared for while they visited the fair.

The building was constructed in 1921 by the United Commercial Travelers of America, Owatonna Council 85, an insurance company, and donated to the fair board in August of that year, according to Nancy Vaillencourt, local historian and superintendent of the fair museum.

The building was officially handed over to the fair with “appropriate ceremonies” and open for inspection by the public.

Mothers attending the fair could drop their children off for one hour, Vaillencourt said, and be assured they would be cared for.

According to a copy of the initial rules of the new building, the Women’s General Committee, consisting of “Mesdames G.J. Anderson, Gordon

Robertson and George Thompson,” was in charge of the operation of the building during fair week. The General Committee of the Owatonna Council, which was an advisory group to the women’s committee and provided a “paid employee” to keep the basement clean while the committee was responsible for keeping the rest of the building clean.

There were other committees for various aspects of the building including the Babies Room, General Reception Room and Porch, the Sand Pile Children (the information gave no information about who the Sand Pile Children were) and the “Comfort Station” in the basement.

The handling of the babies and the mothers “must of necessity be left to the good sense and judgment of the ladies on each committee,” the rules said.

Among those rules were that “so a reasonable number of mothers may have the use of the privileges of the baby cots, and no one would monopolize them to the exclusion of others,” it was deemed advisable to set a time limit on the use of the cots.

Vaillencourt said that at some point a time limit of one hour was set for

children to stay at the facility. She added that one of the baby cribs is on display in the fair museum.

The rules also said that the mothers with the young babies came first and they should have the right of way over all others.

Then came the “old ladies who need a place to rest,” the young matrons with their young children and the young matrons without children. Young, unmarried women and girls using the building were expected to assist the committee in seeing that “the mothers with babies and the old ladies have preference over everyone else.”

Vaillencourt said that there was no charge to those leaving their children for care at the Mothers Rest.

She said she did not know exactly when the childcare aspect of the building ended but she believes it was sometime in the 1940s.

The building has continued to be in use in the years since and is now used primarily as the meeting space for the Steele County Fair Board.

The old siding on the building was replaced this summer with funding from a grant from the Owatonna Foundation.

Chevys and Fords come to SCFF Auto Museum

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

The Steele County Free Fair (SCFF) will have some new wheels on site when a trove of Chevrolet and Ford products line up the auto museum showroom.

However, this year the exhibit will feature a more specific period in U.S. manufacturing.

“On one side will be Chevrolets from 1955, 1956 and 1957 and on the other side will be Fords from the same years,” said auto museum staff member Terry Hansen.

According to Hansen, most of the vehicles will be from the Steele County area and he expects the vehicles to draw plenty of interest from fairgoers.

“They’re probably some of the most common cars as far as collector cars go from that era. Chevrolet Tri-Fives are super popular. There are Tri-Five clubs out there and I actually have one of my own, but it won’t be in the show this year because I’ve had it at the fair in years past,” said Hansen.

The exhibit, Hansen said, will be split with seven Chevrolets on one side of the room and seven Fords on the other.

Last year’s numbers included over 13,000 visitors, which wasn’t a record number according to Hansen, but still “one of the better years” for the museum.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

This year’s Auto Museum will feature Chevrolets and Fords from the mid-to-late 1950s.

Weather typically plays a key role in attendance.

There will be no shortage of opportunity to see the history of both the Chevrolet and Ford vehicles on site at the fair, as Hansen described the showcase as having plenty of customization and creativity between each car in the exhibit.

The auto museum’s showcase room will be open from 11 a.m.-9 p.m. during the week of the fair with two exceptions: Aug. 12 it will be open from 5-9 p.m. with the last day’s hours running from 11 a.m.-8 p.m.



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STEM to feature robotics at fair

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

You don't have to look very hard to see STEM in action, even – especially – at a county fair.

Bringing science, technology, engineering and math to the public can seem a little like getting kids to eat their vegetables: It might be easier to do if it's "disguised" as something else first.

It's part of the reason Nathele and Brian Beadle are bringing their robotics teams back to the Steele County Free Fair.

They are the coaches of the Owatonna High School and Owatonna Middle School teams, respectively.

STEM Day will be from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Aug. 18, before the official start of the SCFF.

Nathele Beadle knows there will be plenty of kids on the grounds during the day, getting their Midway wristbands ahead of the rides opening or taking care of their 4-H animals.

There will be plenty of demonstrations, said Zach Rinehart, assistant manager of the SCFF, along with "some interactive building play stations and some immersive technology experiences as well, with a lot of student-led demonstration outreach."

Most of the activities will be free, Beadle said, though some that require additional materials will

have a small fee.

"We're going to have some small robot-building kits there, and we can help people build the robot to take home with them," she said.

The hands-on stations and activities will be under the grandstands, explaining what robotics is all about.

Inside the stands, "we'll be on the deck in front of the seating," Beadle said, demonstrating what the teams do at competition – though not actually competing.

"The (aluminum concourse) we're going to be driving on is not quite big enough for a realistic competition," she said, "but we will be driving the robots, shooting balls out of them – and people can come in and actually drive those robots."

Members of both the middle and high school teams will have their robots there, "and we're actually having some neighboring towns bring their robots in," Beadle said.

"Robotics is all about working together and helping each other, so we like to highlight that," she said. "We have a coalition of teams, and most of the coalition will be there," including Byron, Rochester, Northfield, Kenyon Wanamingo "and one or two others that decide to come."

In robotics competitions, the "game" is a unique, newly designed challenge introduced

every year. Competitors build specialized robots from scratch to manipulate objects, score points and outmaneuver opponent under time limits and other restrictions.

"This year's game really highlights fun things," Beadle said. "You get to shoot a bunch of balls at once – so people get excited about that."

There will be "tiny little robots that are called XRPs, and (the public) will be able to drive those on a course, make little decorations to put on top of them, drive them around – then take the decoration home," she said of other options. The tiny robots are not to take home.

"Of course we're trolling for members," Beadle laughed, "but not only for team members. We want to bring awareness. There are a lot of people in town that still don't know about robotics, even though we're at Downtown Thursdays, and we go and do presentations and a lot of other things.

"They just don't know that we're there, and that it's something they can do, so we're trying to get the word out," she said.

There will be an opportunity to sign up for the middle and high school teams, as well as Community Education teams – and students don't have to attend Owatonna schools to participate in the community ed program.

"Some neighboring



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Balls are flying in the air at a Downtown Thursday celebration this summer in Owatonna as the OHS Robotics team demonstrates its robotics equipment. The show will be offered at the first day of the fair on Aug. 18.



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Cade Shinabarger, senior at OHS, shares his knowledge of "R3D3," a robot that launches balls. He is a member of the OHS Robotics team and will be involved in STEM Day at the fair on Aug. 18.

towns have lost their robotics program, so this would be a way that any students not from Owatonna that are still interested in joining can do that," Beadle said of the community program.

Exposing the public to robotics and bringing STEM opportunities to the fair makes sense, Rinehart said.

"The fair is run by the county agricultural society, and one of the things that we are seeing in agriculture is technology," he said. "So with that technology, we're getting more into robotics and drones ... Not every job

in agriculture is rooted in just tractors or livestock."

Working in robotics doesn't require a college degree right off the bat, Rinehart said, pointing out competitions that take place even in elementary schools.

"This is a nice foundation," he said. "If someone wants to become an engineer, doing electronics work for John Deere or Case IH or anyone like that, this is a good avenue to start to learn how machines work."

Still, Beadle knows what she's up against at the state's largest county fair:

"We are out of there, once the rides launch," she said.

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SCFF foods will feature something for everyone

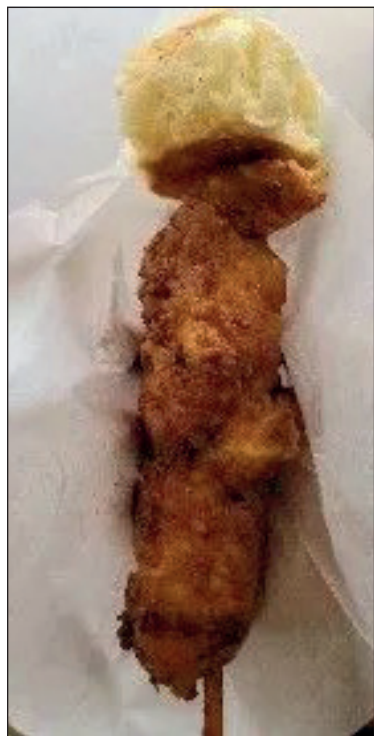
BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

With more than 75 food vendors at the Steele County Free Fair, you'd have to almost *try* to not find something delicious or exotic – or both – to eat.

While many fan favorites are back, there are also four new vendors. And just like every year, there is no shortage of new things to try. Just a bite of each new option will likely fill you up – there are 15 first-time offerings.

All new foods will be judged by a team from outdoor concessions; the six top choices will compete in the celebrity judging for the title of Best New Food at 3 p.m. Aug. 19 on the Wenger Stage.

NEW VENDORS AND ENTRIES:



All About Bacon. Find this new vendor in front of the Bingo tent.

Entry: *Bacon-Wrapped Chicken on a Stick* features chicken tenders, coated in seasoned flour and fried on a stick. It is served with a Hawaiian bun and a side of All About Bacon's special sauce.

Blue House Concessions will make its debut at the 2026 SCFF with a spot in front of the Fine Arts Building. They are part of Andover-based Blue House Corn Company, specializing in roasted sweet corn, Mexican street corn (elote), fresh-squeezed lemonade, and pork chops on a stick.

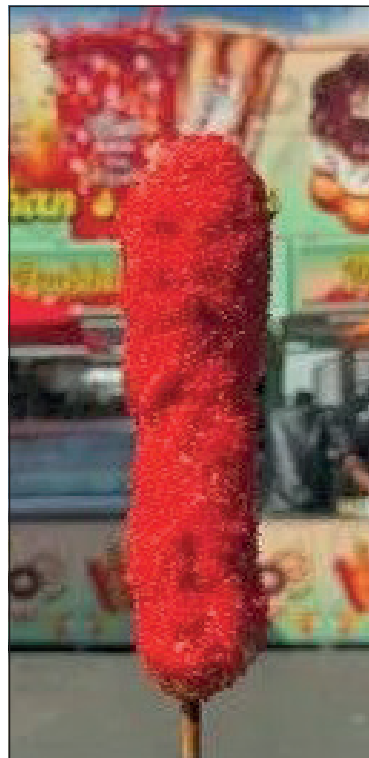


Entry: *Pork Chop on a Stick*, is just as the name implies – a large juicy pork chop, grilled to perfection.

Chan's Eatery will bring the taste of South Korea to southern Minnesota with its signature Korean corn dogs, mochi donuts and boba tea to their stand in front of the 4-H Exhibit Building.

Owner Leslie Chan, along with her business partners and friends, Ze Li and Yuan Chang, had their first large gig at the

2023 Los Angeles County Fair. Korean corn dogs are, according to Chan, an upgraded version of the American corn dog: A hot dog, mozzarella cheese, rice cake, fish cake (or a combination) are battered in wheat or rice flour and panko bread crumbs, then topped in creative ways, from a simple dusting of sugar to fried potatoes, ramen and Cheetos.



Entry: *Hot Cheeto Korean Corn Dog* will feature a mozzarella cheese hot dog coated in rice flour, then battered with panko crumbs. The dog is slathered in homemade spicy mayo and coated with Hot Cheeto crumbs.

All Family Concessions seems to know exactly how to reach Minnesotans, despite hailing from Hudson, Wis. We'll probably even forgive them if they're Packer Backers, because

we all know Top the Tater makes everything better. They will be located west of the FFA Barnyard.



Entry: *Deep-fried Top the Tater. The Midwest's legendary dip inside a potato chip-encrusted shell, fried to golden perfection. Available in original chive and onion or zesty buffalo Top the Tater. Served with a side of sweet chili sauce.*

RETURNING VENDORS, NEW FOODS:

Samosa Sambusa is back with its African food truck out of Bloomington. The crispy, golden pastries packed with potato and pea fillings, as well as your choice of spiced beef, chicken or fresh vegetables have a rich tradition.

Like many of the new and existing vendors, it provides an opportunity to experience global flavors and textures. The truck will be north of the grandstand.

Entry: *Pork Samosa*, a crispy golden pastry filled with seasoned ground pork and savory spices.

Mami's Churro & Creamery, a southern Minnesota mobile-only business owned by Emily Navarrete, is back for its



third year. They make authentic churros to order, then handcraft them into the shape of a halo and served in a cup of soft serve vanilla ice cream, east of Fair Square near the Flower Building.



Entry: *Strawberry Cheesecake Churro Sundae. A warm churro, lightly dusted in cinnamon sugar, drizzled with a luscious strawberry sauce, served over creamy vanilla soft serve ice cream, topped with rich cheesecake bites.*

See **FOODS** on 22 ►

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SCFF foods will feature something for everyone

◀ FOODS from 20

Just Take the Cake Too, out of Austin, is also back for its third year, bringing in two new items, including a decadent dessert. It can all be found on the north end of the fairgrounds, near the exotic petting zoo.



Entries: *Caramel Toffee Crunch Extreme Sundae. Waffle cone bowl with smooth soft serve, fresh donut, house-made whipped cream, covered with caramel sauce and toffee pieces.*



Tiramisu Pour Over Affogato. House-made tiramisu with vanilla ice cream and chocolate swirls with an espresso pour-over.

Lake Co. Eats is back with its food truck, though their signature cheese breads can be found at the Medford Muni, as well as establishments in Faribault, Waterville and Elysian. They are bringing yet another luxury dessert item. Taste it south of the Four Seasons, near Fair Square Stage.



Entry: *Scotcheroo cheesecake. Their signature cheesecake, topped with a peanut butter and butterscotch whipped topping with a chocolate drizzle and crunchy, chopped scotcheroo pieces.*

Bourbon Chicken is back, this time with its Louisiana spin on the classic macaroni and cheese. Their new food – and old favorites – can be found north of the Four Seasons Centre, in front of the Fine Arts Building.

Entry: *Bourbon Mac Attack, described as a cheesy bed of creamy mac, topped with juicy bourbon chicken, finished with shredded cheese and their signature bourbon sauce.*



Piggy Blues BBQ is bringing some sweet and savory on its summer tour of southern Minnesota. You be the judge with a visit to their stand on Elm Street, in front of the 4-H Exhibit Building.



Entry: *Sweetie Pie is a savory sweet potato stuffed with butter, brown sugar and tender pork, topped with diced onion and jalapeno slices.*

Richie's Cheese Curd Tacos doesn't want the fair to go by without a serving of cheese curds. The stand has several varieties of its signature food that can be found near the grandstand ticket booth.

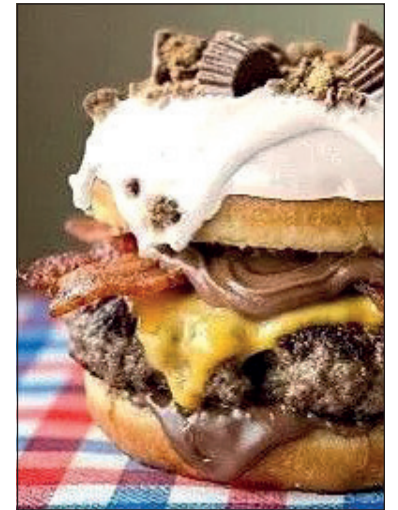


Entry: *Brisket Cheese Curd Taco is perfectly prepared sliced brisket and white cheddar cheese curds fried in a flour shell, topped with slaw and BBQ aioli.*

DeAnna is keeping busy this year, offering fairgoers their choice of three different stands – and three new items. DeAnna's newest stand is her baked potatoes, located near Fair Square Park, where you'll also find her DeAnna's Burgers stand. DeAnna's Steak Sundaes is located south of the Poultry Barn.



Entry: *Steak and Shrimp Potato. A fluffy baked potato topped with DeAnna's perfectly seasoned steak pieces, juicy shrimp and shredded cheese.*



Entry: *Reese's Donut Burger. A fresh grilled burger with cheese and bacon, served between a homemade donut topped with Nutella, vanilla icing and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.*



Entry: *Red, White, Bleu Steak Sundae celebrates America's 250th with fresh-cut fries layered with red rocket sauce and grilled onions, then topped with sirloin steak chunks, white homemade Ranch dressing and bleu cheese.*



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Free, you say? Absolutely. Here's how

BY KAY FATE

STAFF WRITER

Any time a new-comer hears about the Steele County Free Fair, one word tends to jump out: Free.

“But you have to pay for rides, right? And food? And concerts? And parking?”

Well, yes, yes, and not necessarily.

Still, unless you're 4 years old or younger, just getting into the gate at the Minnesota State Fair will set you back at least \$18. That's a significant chunk of change, just for the privilege of being on the grounds – and you're just getting started.

Can you really attend the SCFF and not spend a nickel?

Not only yes, but heck yes – and you can spend a full day doing it.

We've compiled as many options as we could find, and we're providing it here – for free, of course.

Parking

There is parking on the grounds, but it will cost you. Instead, join the legions of people who find a spot on one of the dozen residential side streets and walk a few – or more – blocks to the fairgrounds.

Be aware, though: Do not block driveways (even a corner), and watch for signs that may dictate off-limits parking, because you'll end up paying ... a fine.

Another option: Arrange for a friend or relative to drop you off and pick you up at one of the many gates.

Side note: If you do pay to park on the grounds, chances are good that the money will go to a worthwhile local nonprofit, so really, win-win.

Food and drinks

Plenty of people plan their weekly menu around the 100 or so food stands available at the SCFF each year. It's definitely where most folks spend a good portion of their money.

There are a few ways to tackle this, from eating at home before you head to the fair to packing your own lunch to eat at one of the hundreds of picnic tables around the grounds. Don't forget snacks.

That goes for drinks, too. Most people carry a water bottle these days, so fill that at home initially. There are drinking fountains around the fairgrounds, so filling up will not cost you a thing.

Pro tip: Head through the Four Seasons Centre or to other vendor booths and watch a cooking demonstration – or just ask for a sample at booths that sell food products. Don't abuse it.

Celebrating

Opening Day is Aug. 18, with a flag-raising ceremony at 5 p.m. in Fair Square to kick off the week.

The Wenger Fair

See **FREE, YOU SAY** on 39 ►



Dan Stursa and his polka band will once again provide entertainment at the SCFF.



The pig races on the north end of the fairgrounds are one of several free entertainment options.



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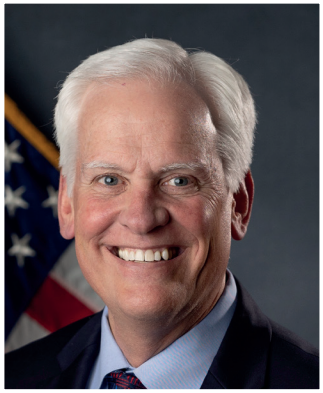
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For Jirele, it’s important to have faith and encourages others to do the same. “Life is here today and sometimes gone tomorrow,” she said. “Why not believe? The other is a really bad, bad alternative. Life is really short.”

She added, “Jesus is the blessed assurance.”

Asked about the energy created from Christian music, Mrozek said, “It’s powerful when you get thousands together to worship. I believe the Lord can touch a heart in the whole atmosphere of a concert. God’s spirit just comes down and works in the life of each person.”

In addition to the concert, Mrozek said OACR will have a booth at the grandstand as well as in the Four Seasons Centre throughout the entire fair.

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- **Future generations** – That’s why I’m cautious about incurring more debt.
- **The character of Owatonna** – I will not pursue growth at the expense of our identity.
- **The trust placed in elected officials** – It’s not simply about voting “yes” or “no.” It’s about asking, “Is this wise?” and “Is this what my neighbors want?”

★ **Pillar Two:
People Before Process**

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★ **Pillar Three:
Integrity in Action**

Meaning: It’s not about being right; it’s about being diligent and trustworthy.

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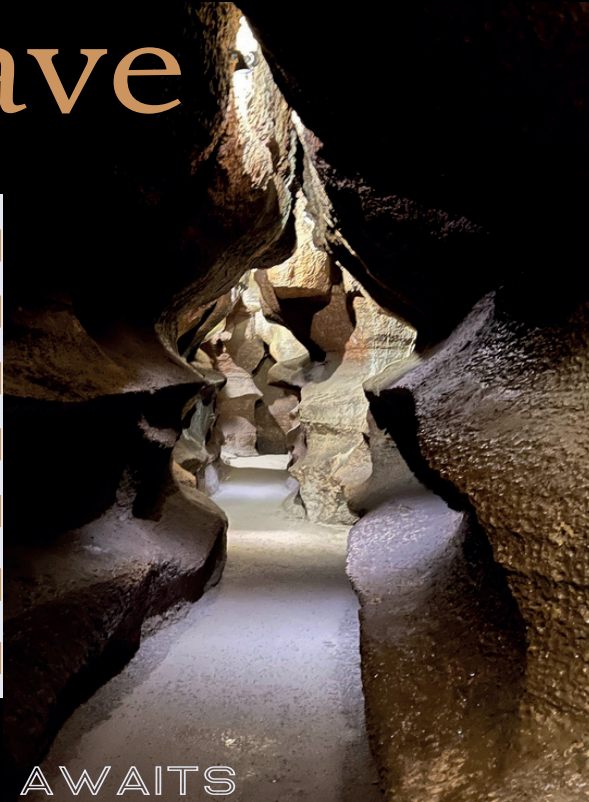
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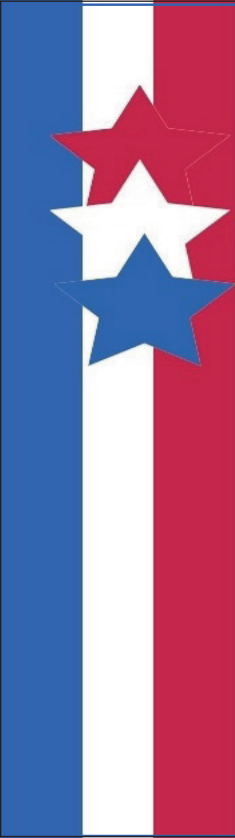
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Meet Ann

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Ann has also dedicated countless hours to community service, serving on local boards and helping found the Harry Wenger Marching Band Festival. She believes strong schools are one of the greatest investments a community can make.

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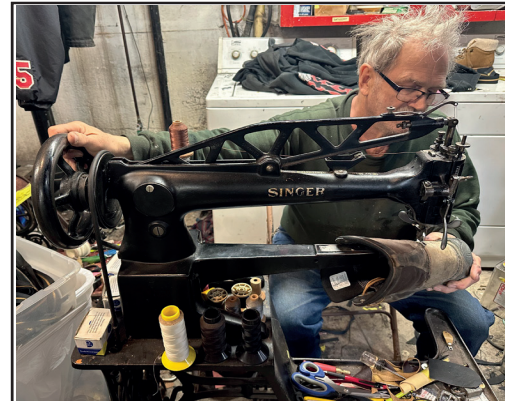
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PHOTO COUTESY SCFF

The SCFF board of directors poses for a group photo outside of the Steele Saloon.

Fair board recruits younger generation

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

The Steele County Free Fair (SCFF) board of directors has its sights set on the future of the fair, and while it has a wealth of experience putting on the annual spectacle, a new recruitment wave of younger associate directors suggests the time to impart decades of wisdom is now.

A group of five new associate directors, including Greg Karsten, Paul Smith, Jeremy Saufferer, Travis Ahrens and Tyler Cochran have joined forces with the fair to shadow current directors in their specialized roles.

"The reason is, this fair is getting so big, so large, and you can't just find anyone off the street who can step in. We're looking for people to

gain experience and wait in the wings to step in when others retire. That way we're not starting from scratch," said SCFF President Dan Deml.

According to Deml, the five new associates will specialize in certain areas of the fair.

"Paul Smith is helping with outdoors concessions. He backs up Jon DeMars. Tyler Cochran is backing up Wayne Steele in the entertainment area. We've got Jeremy Schafferer, and he backs up Tim Arlt as far as the treasurer's job is concerned. Travis Ahrens will be in the infield to back up Bruce Busho and help with the liquor in the Steele Saloon with Doug Meier," said Deml.

The new hires have a lot to learn before eventually taking over, but in the mean-

time, they also bring a fresh view to the fair.

"They're a huge help to us. They enjoy all of the board benefits except for the fact that they don't vote yet... They come in with a lot of ambition and enthusiasm. They're always throwing out ideas and suggestions like, 'Why don't we do this, or try that?' Some of us that have been around longer are like, 'Oh wow, that's great. Never thought of that,'" said Deml.

It's all a necessary process to ensure that the SCFF stays the crown jewel of Minnesota's county fair scene.

"We're doing our due diligence and preparing for some people to transition off of the board in the next few years. It helps us keep things up and going... Probably better than ever," said Deml.

'Snake Guy' Benjamin was a 'big inspiration'

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

A familiar face will be missing from the Great Outdoors Center (GOC) at the Steele County Free Fair this year after "Snake Guy" Barry Benjamin passed away suddenly in April.

Benjamin, a lifelong Steele County resident and a 2001 Owatonna High School graduate, was one of the first entertainers to help kick-start the GOC back when it first opened at the fair.

"When we took that building over, Barry just stepped in and developed that whole thing with snakes, reptiles and so forth. He was a big inspiration in getting that whole thing up and running for us. He was a huge part of that whole operation," said Dan Deml, president of the fair.

According to Deml, the fair has not yet decided on a full-scale memorial tribute for Benjamin, but current plans include having a permanent print of him hung up in the GOC for his years of dedication to entertaining and educating fairgoers.

"We're hopeful to have a program for Barry on Sunday, but there isn't anything concrete yet," Deml said in an interview with the *Times* in late July. "There will be a print of Barry because we wanted to recognize him for all of his contributions over the years."

Helping fill the void left by Benjamin's passing will be Owatonna's Jamie Pastika with Reptile and Amphibian Discovery Zoo (RAD Zoo), who will be doing shows throughout the fair.

According to the RAD Zoo website, Pastika has "been working with animals for 35 years" and has had a love for reptiles his "entire life."



PHOTO FROM FACEBOOK

Barry Benjamin smiles for a photo with one of his snakes at the SCFF Great Outdoors Center. Benjamin, known affectionately as the "Snake Guy" for his lengthy career showing reptiles at the fair, suddenly passed away in April.

Pastika's RAD Zoo profile says that his show includes a wide variety of amphibians and reptiles, as well as a small crocodile.

Also on site will be Rochester's Oxbow Park & Zollman Zoo with shows scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 20 from 1-6 p.m.

"Oxbow Park will bring in some snakes to help fill in the gap from Benjamin passing away," said Deml.

Other shows in the GOC will include the National Eagle Center (Aug. 19 from 1-6 p.m.), National Loon Center (Aug. 21 from 11 a.m.-6 p.m.), Paul Bunyan Live (Aug. 21-22 from 12-6 p.m.), University of Minnesota Raptor Center (Aug. 22 from 11 a.m.-2 p.m.) and the Sustainable Safari (Aug. 22 3-9:15 p.m., and Aug. 23 from 12-7:30 p.m.).

Owatonna 4-H family gets ready for fair

BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN
STAFF WRITER

Like many 4-H members in Steele County, for Quinn and Heath Knutson the Steele County Free Fair is on their minds.

Members of the Owatonna Victory Boosters Club, both are busy with the animals they will be entering this year as well as other 4-H projects. Quinn, 13, has been involved in the regular 4-H program for three years and Heath, 10, is in his second year in the regular program. They joined 4-H at the same time, Heath as a Cloverbud.

When it comes to animals, both have gravitated to raising and showing goats and rabbits. They live in Owatonna so the animals they show are housed at their grandparents' home, just south of Owatonna.

Most of their goats are dairy goats, Quinn said,

so they are milked twice a day unless it has a baby goat or kid, in which case the milking is only once a day. They have also had some meat goats.

On a recent afternoon, they were at their grandparents' home, taking care of their animals. Quinn said that since both of their parents are at work they are at their grandparents' home most of the week. On that afternoon she was walking the goats in preparation for their trip to the fair. The dairy goats also have to be shaved or clipped all over before a show, she said. The full-body clips help judges clearly see the goat's body shape, bone structure and dairy traits, according to goat show rules.

She said they also clip their hooves and give them a bath before the show.

Quinn said she had a champion dairy goat last

year and showed rabbits at the State Fair. She added she enjoyed her experience at the State Fair and stayed in a camper with a dairy goat friend.

For this year's Steele County Fair, the 4-H rabbits will be brought in on Monday with the 4-H rabbit show Monday evening and the goats come on Wednesday night and Thursday with the goat shows Thursday afternoon and evening. The goats come in later in the week as they share the facilities with the sheep.

They will also bring their general projects to the fairgrounds on Monday.

Quinn said when it came time to sign up for the non-animal projects she probably signed up for about 20 but said it would need to be narrowed down. It was reduced, she said, to photography, health and wellness and creative writing as well

as veterinary science. She chose a veterinary science poster because "I really want to be a vet." She added that she is thinking about large animal veterinary work.

She explained they got many of their dairy goats from Dr. Carey Prigge in Waseca who is a large animal vet.

Heath said he is planning on showing goats and rabbits and projects in photography, wildlife and geology.

Like many 4-H members, Quinn and Heath come from a fourth generation 4-H family. Their mom, Jennifer Gehring, said she had been a member of the same Owatonna 4-H club growing up and so had her mother. Quinn and Heath's great-grandfather, Gene Pichner, had also been a 4-H member and was inducted into both the Minnesota State Livestock Hall of Fame and the Steele County



STAFF PHOTO BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN

Heath and Quinn Knutson with two of their goats, Faye and Tootsie.

Livestock Hall of Fame.

Gehring said that while Jesse Knutson grew up in Owatonna he was not involved in 4-H but with the kids joining he has "been a real trooper." It's been a whole new ball game for him, she said, but he has gotten involved with the goats.

Gehring said she encouraged Quinn and Heath to join 4-H because it offers positive experi-

ences. They also learn skills such as public speaking and leadership. Quinn said that she had once worked at the 4-H food stand and Heath volunteered that he is looking forward to doing that also.

Both Quinn and Heath said 4-H has been fun and they have met a lot of friends and during the fair can usually be found at either the goat or rabbit barn.

Big fair, big economic impact

BY KAREN M. JORGENSEN
STAFF WRITER

Most Steele County residents probably agree that the Steele County Free Fair in August is the biggest event of the summer. What they may not give as much thought to is the economic

impact that the fair has on the local economy.

The fair is the largest county fair in Minnesota with attendance being estimated at about 300,000 visitors over the course of the six days, Fair Manager Scott Kozelka said. The exact number is not known because the fair does not charge for admission.

That many people attending the actual fair plus those attending all the other events that take place on the grounds each year will have a large economic impact. Kozelka and Owatonna Chamber of Commerce's Glenda Smith agreed that the combined monetary impact of the fair itself

and the other events held on the fairgrounds, have a direct economic impact of about \$16.5 million locally.

The fact that the fair is free, Kozelka said, most likely contributes to the number of people attending. For a fair with an admission charge a family may only attend once or twice but for a fair with

FAIR'S IMPACT

\$16.5 million

Annually to Steele County

Source: Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce

no charge they will come more often. The fair is always listed among the top 10 events in attendance in Minnesota, Smith said.

It also hosts more than 500 vendor booths including more than 100 food stands.

Both Kozelka and Smith

said that for fair week alone, an event drawing that many people is going to have an impact.

Fair week brings in many people from out of town and those people also spend money outside of the

See **BIG FAIR** on 40 ►

Free, you say? Absolutely. Here’s how

◀ **FREE, YOU SAY** from 24 Square Stage will also be the site of the “Best of the Fair” New Food Competition – where you can hear firsthand what makes the winner (and all of the entries, really), worth the title. That event is at 3 p.m. Aug. 19.

The Senior Citizen Recognition is held at 11:15 a.m. Aug. 20, honoring the most selfless people among us with a presentation, speeches and lots of family photos. The award ceremony will be on the Fair Square stage.

The final day of the fair, Aug. 23, will feature a community church service at 11 a.m., a taekwondo demonstration at 12:15 p.m., a presentation to the United Way at 6:30 p.m. and the grand finale: The OHS football season kickoff rally.

All of those events will also be held in Fair Square, which offers all the amenities a fairgoer needs: Seating at picnic tables, benches and bleachers, shade trees, nearby restrooms and easy access to the fair offices, if needed.

Music

After the flag-raising ceremony on Opening Day, followed by a concert

by the Owatonna Community Band and LP & the 45s, every day will feature at least four musical acts on the Wenger Fair Square Stage.

Even if you’re not a drinker, you can make your way into Ye Olde Beer Garden for multiple musical acts at 8:30 each night, as well as a 3 p.m. concert Aug. 21 and a 3:30 p.m. concert Aug. 23.

There is no admission fee to enter the beer garden – which often has free popcorn!

While you’re there, use your electronic device to play Jindo, the music bingo game. Access your Jindo card with a QR code, then listen to the snippets of music as they play. If five of the song titles on your Jindo card line up, you will win a small prize! There is no charge to play.

More music can be found at the Village of Yesteryear, on the east side of the fairgrounds. It, too, provides plenty of shade to listen to the likes of the Dan Stursa Band, a polka-playing favorite for more than half a century, and harmonica music by Paul Proft.

Also at the Village will be Owatonna native

Curt Copeland, with his acoustic, original rootsy rock tunes and covers, and former U.S. Rep. – and current Owatonna resident – Tim Penny’s band.

Animals

Adjacent to Fair Square is the Great Outdoors Center, which allows fairgoers a chance to slow down, explore and connect with the outdoors in meaningful ways.

Among the shows planned on the GOC Stage throughout fair week are presentations by the National Eagle Center, the University of Minnesota Raptor Center, the National Loon Center, Zollner Zoo, and Sustainable Safari.

On your way from Fair Square to the Village of Yesteryear, check out the literal years of work put in by the 4-H members.

There are barns full of coifed cattle, sheared sheep, groomed goats, strapping swine, preening poultry and unbelievably squishy rabbits.

Take in a few live-stock shows, where the exhibitors show off their animals en route to a prize-winning ribbon. The young people’s composure and command in front of the judges is truly impres-

sive – and some of those kids are *little*.

There is also the FFA Children’s Barnyard, allowing your little ones to get up close and personal with some of those farm animals they usually only see from a car window.

Health tip: Wash your hands. Twice.

History

If you’re already at the Village of Yesteryear for some music, stick around for the hands-on, immersive exhibits and activities and artifacts to experience the stories, sights and traditions that shaped Steele County.

There are several historic buildings, including the History Center, all with free admission and plenty of volunteers who will provide demonstrations and storytelling.

The Auto Museum and Muckle Fair Museum, both on the west side of the fairgrounds, are must-sees for the history buffs and the simply curious.

The Auto Museum showcases the craftsmanship, innovation and history of the automobile through the decades; the Muckle Museum is chock full of crazy memorabilia from past fairs. Take a

stroll through the decades and see the way things used to be.

Admission to both is free, of course.

Entertainment, exhibits

Scattered across the vast grounds and in the Four Seasons Centre will be more than 300 indoor and outdoor vendors, all with plenty of things to learn about and explore.

There are multiple shows and exhibits that are available all day, every day.

On the north end, near the barns, you can find any number of free shows that will keep the entire family learning, laughing and cheering.

Visit the All Star Stunt Dogs, airborne mutts who amaze crowds every year; Squeals on Wheels pig races; and Jurassic Kingdom, which keeps kids wide-eyed with prehistoric animatronics. The Ninja Experience is a comedic show with ninjas doing flips, breaking boards and running a parkour course.

On a similar vein is Tumbleweed Crossing, a Wild West stunt show featuring gunfights and more in an “authentic” frontier town.

Stop by Robinson Wood Carving, who are artists with chainsaws. The “free” part stops if you bid

on their pieces at the Aug. 22 auction.

John Cassidy brings his comedy magic to the Federated Insurance Pavilion with a lot of audience participation; the Southwest Mobile Dairy Classroom brings a dairy cow to show visitors the route milk takes from cow to cup.

Finally, support your friends, neighbors and co-workers by admiring their hard work in the department competitions.

There are buildings full of award-winning exhibits in fine arts, culinary arts, flowers, youth art, photography, wood carving, homemade beer, rocks and minerals, textiles and more.

Warning: If you decide to take up a hobby after seeing the incredible work displayed, it will most decidedly not be free.

Heading home

On your way out, peek through the bag you hopefully remembered to bring to carry all of the gadgets and tokens handed out in the Four Seasons Centre – there should be dozens.

Once you’re home, put your feet up and reflect on your day.

Getting through it without spending a nickel: Great.

Enjoying the state’s biggest and best county fair: Priceless.

New game combines music, bingo at SCFF

◀ **NEW GAME** from 11 every decade and genre.

The game will be offered from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. Aug. 20 and 1:30 to

3:30 p.m. Aug. 23, only in the beer garden.

“We have a long history of having bands in the evening in the beer garden, so

the beer garden crew from the board and staff are always looking for unique things to fill in during the day,” Rinehart said.

“It’s maybe a little slower in the beer garden right after lunch, so we have some more entertainment during those times, too.”

Jindo is “adding some more variety and something new and different that people can try,” he said.

As far as measuring its success, Rinehart said, “it’s the same theme as it is

for the entire fairgrounds for any given event:

“If someone had a good time, we did our job. It doesn’t matter if it’s five people or 500 people; if someone got something positive out of it, we’re happy.”

Holmes and McRostie to be inducted into Hall of Fame

◀ **HALL OF FAME** from 13 said Eustice, noting that's exactly what Holmes and McRostie accomplished. "Mina Holmes may not be a household name like Betty Crocker, but back at the turn of the 20th century, she was a World Champion buttermaker."

McRostie also won many awards for her butter from 1889 to 1904, according to Eustice. Both women owned dairy farms near Owatonna.

"These are two remarkable women," Eustice said.

While there was a time during the first half of the 1900s when Owatonna proudly called itself, "The Butter Capital of the World," no one ever challenged the distinction, Eustice said. He noted how Steele County was home to 24 creameries, two per township. Today, there is only one left in Hope.

"These two pioneer women put Minnesota

butter on the map," he said. "Before that time Minnesota butter was discounted two or three cents per pound on eastern markets, simply because it was not promoted."

Eustice said that Holmes and McRostie often traveled together with their butter. "The amazing thing is if you think about what our country was like—there was no refrigeration, no electricity," he said. "Butter had to be taken by train, and the logistics of taking such a perishable product is incredible."

Eustice found that Holmes was credited by Oliver Gibbs, a former Dairy Commissioner of Minnesota, with having brought Minnesota its first recognition as a producer of high-quality butter by winning the world's sweepstakes prize for the "best butter made

at any time or place on earth." The first ever medal awarded for Minnesota butter went to Holmes at the 1884-85 World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition in New Orleans.

Holmes operated a 160-acre farm in Meriden Township. She and her husband, Frank, operated the Clover Lawn Creamery on their farm and are considered pioneers in developing the creamery and dairy business in Minnesota. Frank also traveled as a salesman for creamery machinery, while Mina made the butter and ran the farm.

Mina managed the dairy herd, mostly Jerseys, from the time she started farming in 1874, milking about 35 cows by hand daily. After her children went away to school, she had two hired men to help but still milked nine cows daily herself. She also raised

corn, hiring the plowing done, and had a half-acre strawberry patch, which netted her as much as \$200 a year. During the early 1880s, Mina's butter took two first, two second and two third prizes in other butter classes at that fair. She also exhibited her strawberries and other produce.

By 1884, Holmes had already won local fame in Steele County for her butter. Besides the local fair, she also exhibited at the Minnesota State Fair during the 1890s. She took many awards at State Fair for "her skills in making fancy shapes of butter, as well as for the quality of her product," Eustice said.

At the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, Holmes exhibited butter formed in rare German buttermolds. She also gave demonstrations of buttermaking at the State Fair.

Oliver Gibbs said in an address to the Minnesota Dairymen's Association in 1902: "Within six months after that award was announced there was scored an advance of over \$200,000 in the selling value of Minnesota butter... That was the real beginning of the present immense development of the dairy industry in this state." He went on to advocate that the Minnesota Dairy Industry remember their obligation to Mina Holmes and give her a tablet or a statue in their hall of fame.

Holmes developed her own "dog-powered" cream separator. The dogs were trained so one of her two dogs would jump on the separator treadmill and run until he got tired, then the other would finish the job. The unit is now on display at the Village of Yesteryear in Owatonna.

Looking back on their

accomplishments, Eustice said: "They were ahead of their times. They are courageous, and they are innovators and produced a quality product. They were competitors in a time when women couldn't even vote."

Eustice said the two inductees should be "an inspiration for young women by doing things that their grandmother would not think of doing."

Holmes died at her home in Owatonna in 1936, and McRostie died in 1930.

They both will join Eustice in the Livestock Hall of Fame. He was inducted in 2016.

Eustice is writing two books about Holmes and McRostie: "Brave Women Who Broke Barriers" and "Owatonna: The Butter Capital of the World." He hopes to have the first one done by the end of September.

Big fair, big economic impact

◀ **BIG FAIR** from 38 actual fair, Smith said.

Visitors come from the Twin Cities, other areas of Minnesota and northern Iowa, she said, as well as from numerous other states. Many of those people stay at local hotels, she said, and statistics show that hotel and motel occupancy rates increase during fair week. Those

spending a day or two generally will also visit other local businesses and restaurants. She added that week is popular for class reunions and former residents returning to visit.

Kozelka said that the vendors and their workers also have an economic impact on the community. Vendors may make purchases at local stores

throughout the week and eat at local residents and stay at local hotels.

Visiting the fair from out of town also introduces people to Owatonna who may return for additional visits.

Kozelka said one thing he remembers from last year is a phone call he received after the fair was over from a person in the Twin Cities. The

caller told Kozelka they were first time visitors and were so impressed that the fair was so family friendly that they would be coming back again and getting a hotel room.

While the fair alone accounts for much of the total economic impact, the ever-increasing number of events held on the grounds each year also adds to the total. This year, fair officials say, has been the busiest year for events on the grounds during

the other 51 weeks of the year. One of the largest events on the grounds and sponsored by the fair was the Spring into Summer event in May which drew about 8,000 people for its first year. The addition of the Steele Saloon on the fairgrounds has also been popular as it is one of the buildings on the grounds that is heated and can be used for events all year.

The Four Seasons Centre is owned by the county and booking events

there are done through the county not the fair, but it also has an economic impact on the community. An example is the North American Farm & Power Show, a multi-day event, that draws large crowds to Owatonna and the fairgrounds each March from throughout the Midwest.

Added together, fair week and the activities on the grounds the rest of the year have a large economic impact on Owatonna and Steele County, all agree.

A TIMELESS TRADITION PHOTO CONTEST

Send in your BEST photos of the Steele County Free Fair during this year’s fair and you could win a prize!



First Place One pair of Chanhassen Dinner Theatre Tickets (\$150 value)	Second Place One year subscription to Steele County Times (\$69 value)
Third Place Six-month subscription to Steele County Times (\$35 value)	

- Rules:**
- 1. Submit your photography (black and white or color) taken at the 2026 Steele County Free Fair in Owatonna. Email to: news@steelecountytimes.com with “2026 Fair Photo” in the subject line. (Please include your name, address, phone and photo information, if emailing). You can also mail to Steele County Times • P.O. Box 247 • Blooming Prairie, MN 55917 or drop off at either the Blooming Prairie office (411 E. Main St.) or Owatonna office (109 W. Rose St.) Please include the contest entry below.
 - 2. Entries must be received by Friday, Sept. 4, 2026. One entry per household. Three winners will be chosen by a panel of judges. Decision by the judges is final.
 - 3. Winner’s photographs will be featured in upcoming edition of Steele County Times and maybe used on social media. They may also appear in other promotional pieces by the newspaper.
 - 4. Employees of the newspaper and their immediate families are not eligible. Must be 14 years of age or older to enter.



STEELE COUNTY FREE FAIR PHOTO CONTEST

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

PHONE: _____

DESCRIPTION OF PHOTO: _____





Steele County Free Fair

A TIMELESS TRADITION
The 2026 Edition

Steele County Free Fair
Aug. 18-23

Tuesday, August 18
Grandstand

5 p.m. FFA Alumni Antique Tractor Pull

Wenger Fair Square Stage

5 p.m. Flag Raising Ceremony
6 p.m. Owatonna Community Band
7:30 p.m. LP & the 45's

Village of Yesteryear Stage

6 p.m. Curt Copeland

Ye Old Beer Garden

8:30 p.m. Travis Thamert

Wednesday, August 19
Grandstand

7 p.m. Faithfest: Jeremy Camp

Wenger Fair Square Stage

11:30 a.m. Eclipse
1:15 p.m. Mark Cameron Band
3 p.m. Best of the Fair Food
4:30 p.m. Sawyers Dream
7 p.m. Six to Midnight

Elmer Reseland Stage
(Great Outdoor Center)

1, 3 & 5 p.m. National Eagle Center

Village of Yesteryear Stage

12 p.m. Senior Moments - Bruce Bernhart & Tim O'Connor
3 p.m. Page Family Singers
6 p.m. Alan O'Malley-Laursen

Ye Old Beer Garden
8:30 p.m. Good for Gary

Thursday, August 20
Senior Day
Grandstand

7 p.m. Hairball

Wenger Fair Square Stage

11:15 a.m. Senior Citizen Recognition
11:30 a.m. Dan Stursa Band
1:45 p.m. ipolka Band
3:45 p.m. Just Friends
5 p.m. Soulfire
7:30 p.m. The Whitesidewalls

Elmer Reseland Stage
(Great Outdoor Center)

1, 3 & 5 p.m. Oxbow Park/Zollner Zoo

Village of Yesteryear Stage

12 p.m. Paul Proft
3 p.m. Dan Sturza Band
6 p.m. Kiwanis

Ye Old Beer Garden
12:30 p.m. Jingo Music Bingo
8:30 p.m. Old Country Boys

Friday, August 21
Grandstand

7 p.m. Randy Houser with special guest Cori Kennedy

Wenger Fair Square Stage

11:30 a.m. Angel Val Band
2 p.m. Sarah Holdyn
4:30 p.m. Chad Johnson Band
7 p.m. Little Chicago

Elmer Reseland Stage
(Great Outdoor Center)

1, 3 & 5 p.m. National Loon Center and Paul Bunyan Live

Village of Yesteryear Stage

12 p.m. Pollinator/Butterfly Craft Activity
3 p.m. Curt Copeland
6 p.m. Senior Moments

Ye Old Beer Garden

3 p.m. Swerve
8:30 p.m. Self Titled

Saturday, August 21
Grandstand

7:30 p.m. Bulls-N-Barrels

Wenger Fair Square Stage

11:30 a.m. Orchid Jane Band
2 p.m. Branded
4:30 p.m. JoJo Green
7 p.m. The Jimmy's

Elmer Reseland Stage
(Great Outdoor Center)

1, 3 & 5 p.m. U of M Raptor Center Sustainable Safari Paul Bunyan Live

Village of Yesteryear Stage

12 p.m. Tim Penny
2 p.m. Paul Proft
6 p.m. Dunnell Lenort

Ye Old Beer Garden

3 p.m. Led Penny
8:30 p.m. Rough House Rox

Sunday, August 22
Grandstand

2 p.m. Demo Derby

Wenger Fair Square Stage

11 a.m. Community Church Service
12:15 p.m. Tai Kwon Do
1:30 p.m. The Singing Cowgirl
4 p.m. Jeremy Poland & Lantz Dale
6:30 p.m. United Way
7 p.m. Owatonna Football/ Cheerleader Rally

Elmer Reseland Stage
(Great Outdoor Center)

1, 3 & 5 p.m. Sustainable Safari

Village of Yesteryear Stage

12 p.m. Kiwanis
2 p.m. Alan O'Malley-Laursen

Ye Old Beer Garden

1:30 p.m. Jindo Music Bingo
3:30 p.m. Poppa Bear Norton

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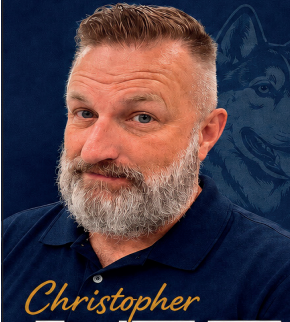
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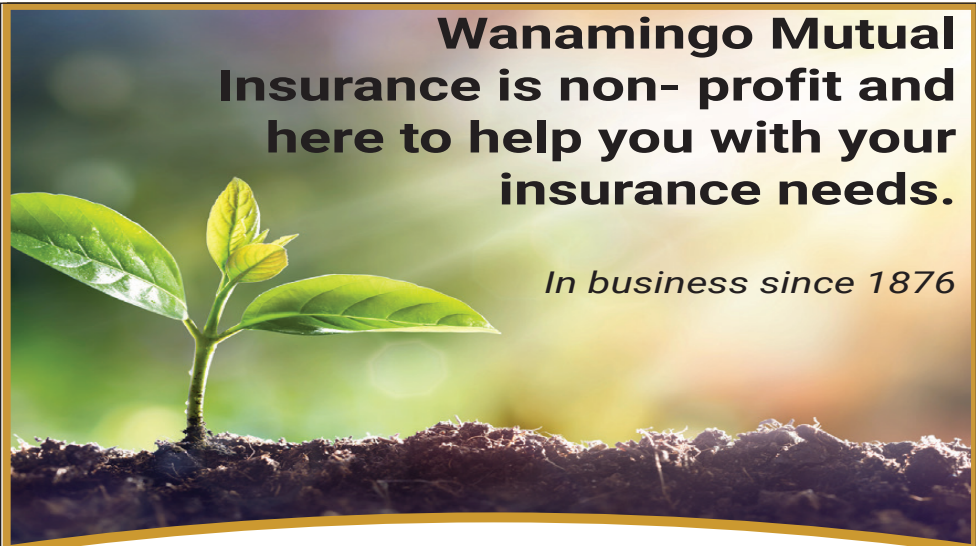
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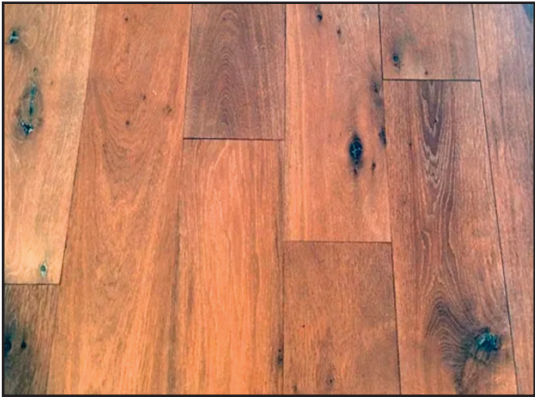
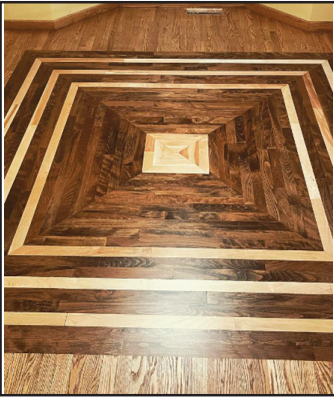
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What to do in the event of a **POWER OUTAGE**

Lightning strikes, high winds, fallen tree branches – summer storms can be powerful, but leave us power-less! Rest assured, Owatonna Public Utilities will work non-stop until your power is restored. Here are some things to do in the event of a power outage:



REPORT YOUR OUTAGE

For fastest outage reporting, log into your SmartHub Account (there is a mobile app available). This feeds the information directly into our outage management system. If you don't have a SmartHub account, set one up today by following the link on our home page. (You will need your utility bill account number.)



KEEP REFRIGERATORS AND FREEZERS CLOSED

- A refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened.
- A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours for a half full freezer) if it remains closed.



PLAN AHEAD

- Have alternate plans for refrigerating medicines or using power-dependent medical devices.
- If you need to use a generator, keep it outdoors and away from windows.
- Use surge protectors, or disconnect appliances and electronics to avoid damage from electrical surges.
- Have portable power banks charged and ready for cell phones.
- Prepare an emergency kit with flashlights/candles and a weather radio.



IF YOU SMELL NATURAL GAS CALL 911!



**OWATONNA
PUBLIC UTILITIES**

View our interactive
outage map at
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2026-2027



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"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" adapted by Simon Stephens, Based on the Novel by Mark Haddon.

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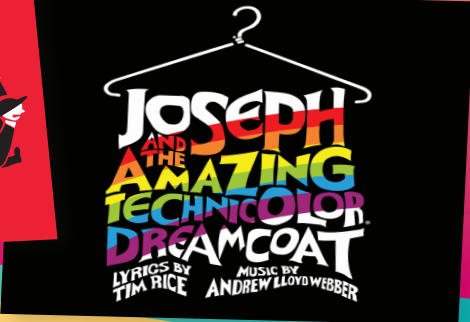
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"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Dramatists Play Service. www.concordtheatricals.com
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