

Clark County Fairgrounds Revitalization Project planned

By Valorie Brecht

The Clark County Fairgrounds have served as a gathering place for many generations of community members invested in agriculture.

Now, a new project aims to revitalize the fairgrounds so they can be used for generations to come.

According to a handout on the project, "The planned additions and upgrades address the current issues and needs of the Fairgrounds and its users and should help attract new events and opportunities to Clark County. The primary goal is to provide a functional Fairgrounds and Event Center Property that

meets the needs of today and for future generations."

The two largest portions of the project call for the construction of a new multi-purpose livestock building, including additional show arenas, and the construction of a new multi-purpose event cen-

ter at the cost of roughly \$600,000 and \$900,000, respectively. The event center would be utilized as an all-season building. Currently, the fairgrounds are closed from Nov. 1 to March 1 each year.

Other proposed upgrades are to relocate and construct

a new Listeman Bandshell, remove deteriorated buildings and create a new family-friendly green space, expand the horse show arena and seating area and construct a draft horse addition. The project includes improving accessibility as well, particularly for people

in wheelchairs, by creating wider doors and removing lips on entrances.

Another project item is to continue to improve traffic flow, lighting, parking and camping areas. Some additional parking was created on the north end of the fairgrounds last year.

"We want to continue to fill in the [gravel] track and improve parking," said Dailey.

The project was initiated to address several challenges with the current fairgrounds. The swine barn does not have enough capacity for current needs and the beef barn is currently at capacity. The swine barn also has drainage issues, with water flooding one end of the barn on a regular basis. The beef barn has had concerns with the floor and foundation and needs a new clay base.

"A lot of it started with the hog barn. There wasn't enough space in the hog barn to accommodate all the animals that were being brought to the fair. That kind of initiated the strategic planning process," said Rick Dailey, Clark County Forestry and Parks Department administrator.

Several fairgrounds structures were also determined to be beyond cost effective repair. Needs for upgrades were identified in the areas of infrastructure, electrical work, drainage and accessibility.

"We knew we needed to

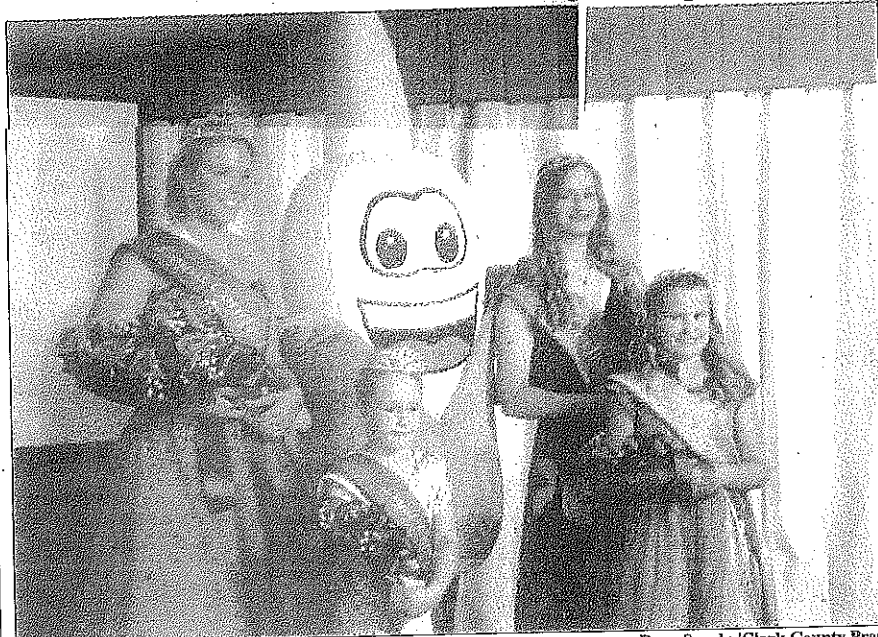
do some work at the fairgrounds. The buildings are old, the infrastructure is in a level of disrepair, and we knew we needed to do something," said Dailey. "But we wanted to do it in a planned matter. We didn't want to just build a building for a particular user group and then go to the next thing; we wanted to look at the entire fairgrounds as a whole. So that's why the planning process was involved."

The Clark County Fairgrounds is a facility owned by the county. The Forestry and Parks Department is responsible for oversight of the fairgrounds. In recent years, the department has received an annual budget of more than \$200,000 for fairgrounds operation.

Several entities are stakeholders in the Clark County Fairgrounds Revitalization Project: the Clark County Board of Supervisors, the Forestry and Parks Committee, the Fair Board, the Clark County Fair Liaison Committee, the Agriculture and Extension Committee, Clark County 4-H clubs, the Clark County Economic Development Corporation and Tourism Bureau, the Friends of the Clark County Fairgrounds, the Clark County Community Foundation and the city of Neillsville.

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Loyal has new Corn Fest royalty



Ryan Spoehr/Clark County Press

Loyal named the 2018 Corn Fest royalty last Thursday with a ceremony at the American Legion Post 175, with Hailey Rueth becoming the new Loyal Corn Fest queen and the runner-up was Harlee Zvolena (back, l-r). The princess royalty includes Jenna Haufe, the new queen, and Lillian Boushon, the runner-up (front, l-r). For more Corn Fest coverage, see pages 8 and 9.

Fairgrounds, continued from front page

Several evaluation and visioning steps have already been taken in the planning process. In 2012, economic impact surveys were conducted. The Clark County Fair of that year had an economic output of \$1,076,798, when measuring the spending of visitors to the fair, the effect to suppliers of the fair event and the effect to local businesses.

The three main sources of revenue for the fairgrounds are winter storage fees, the cell tower lease rent and facilities and grounds event rental fees.

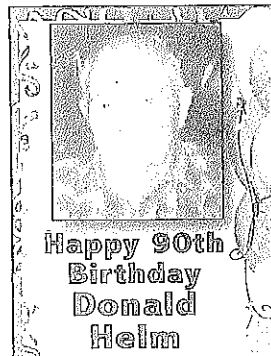
The fairgrounds are rented out for many events each year, including horse auctions, the city of Neillsville fireworks, the Ayrshires show and sale, the Make-A-Wish caravan, 4-H events, a woodworkers' auction, the Master Gardeners' plant sale and Clark County Humane Society pet vaccination clinics.

However, overall expenditures for the fairgrounds per year outweigh revenue generated.

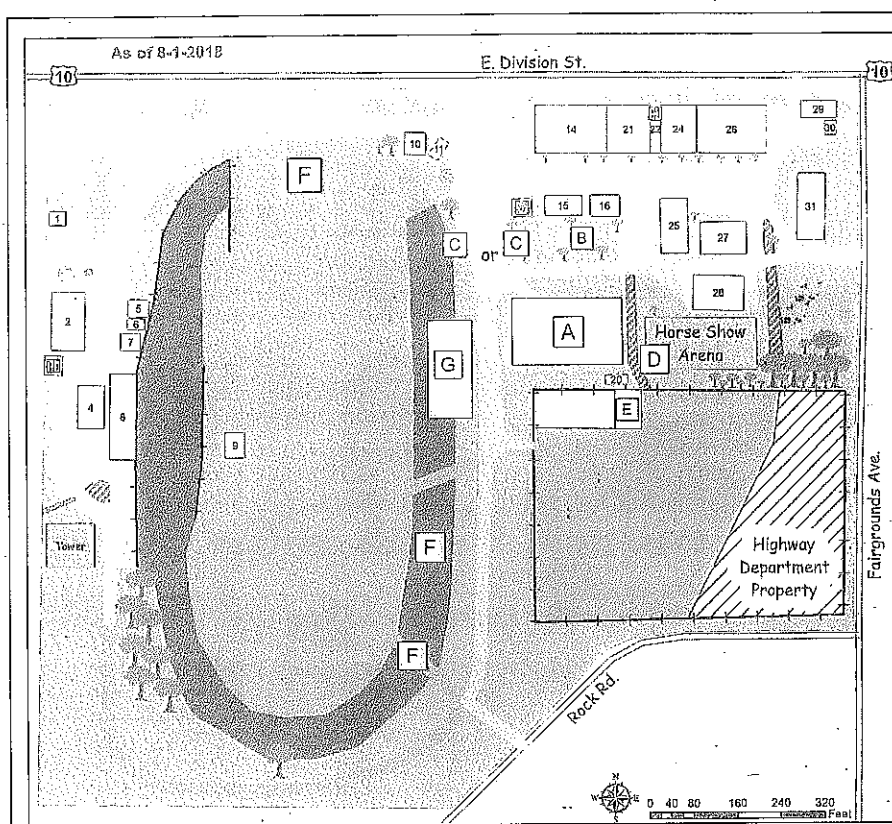
In recent years, operating costs have gone up while revenue from the fairgrounds has stayed approximately the same. In 2016, expenditures were \$202,281 and revenue was \$28,554 for a net cost of \$173,727.

"There is so much potential that exists with our Fairgrounds and ... currently it is being under-utilized ... It is important to remember that there is a cost to taxpayers to maintain the Fairgrounds, so I want the Fairgrounds to be an economic driver to the community, and to maximize its potential to draw visitors to our area," explained Melissa Kono, community resource agent of the Clark County UW-Extension.

After examining the economic impact, Fairgrounds visioning sessions were conducted in 2015 and 2016.



Happy 90th Birthday Donald Helm



Contributed image

Proposed updates to the Clark County Fairgrounds are as follows:

- construct an approx. 24,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose livestock building and arena (A)
- construct an approx. 15,000 sq. ft. multi-purpose event center (G)
- construct a new Listeman Bandshell (C)
- remove certain deteriorated buildings and create family-friendly green space (B)
- expand the horse show arena and seating area (D)
- construct a draft horse addition (E)
- repair/improve/upgrade: traffic flow, lighting, parking and camping areas (F)

In 2017 a livestock committee planning session was conducted as well as a fairgrounds' master-planning workshop. Kono prepared and led participants through a strategic plan in 2017.

"[Dailey] asked for a Fairgrounds Strategic Plan that encompassed some of the earlier planning but also expanded it to include ideas for new buildings and some redesign of the existing Fairgrounds," she continued.

In November 2017, the Master Fairgrounds Improvement Plan was approved to move forward by the Forestry and Parks Committee. In March 2018, the Forestry and Parks Committee entered into an agreement with the Clark County Community Foundation to act as fiscal sponsor for the Fairgrounds project.

The fairgrounds also recently acquired property from the Clark County Highway Department on the southeast part of the property. This will allow for expansion.

Another recent step in the project was the installation of a new scrolling

Center."

Dailey said the progress of the Revitalization Project is "donation dependent." He said that the biggest priority right now is constructing the new multi-purpose livestock building, but that will all depend on donations received.

"We hope to have a new building in time for the 2021 fair," he said.

Naming rights will be available for donations of various amounts. If an individual or business supplies the majority of the funds for a building or show arena, there is the potential of having it named after them and recognized with a plaque on the inside of the building. Naming right opportunities are also available for other items such as gates, doors and wash racks.

Cash and in-kind donations will be accepted for the project.

For more information on the project, contact Dailey at the Clark County Forestry and Parks Department, 517 Court Street, Room 103, Neillsville, call 715.743.5142 or email rick.dailey@co.clark.wi.us.

Community Foundation, 301 North Main Street, PO Box 116, Loyal. Call 715.937.6167 or email information@clarkccf.org.

Although it is a large undertaking, those involved in the project believe it will be well worth the investment.

"The fairgrounds have been around 146 years. That's a tremendous amount of history - we want to continue that history," said Dailey.

"We want to continue and improve the economic development."

Kono echoed Dailey, saying she wants to ensure that young people continue to have the experiences she had growing up at the fair.

"A big part of the draw of the Fairgrounds and the County Fair is the nostalgia that they bring ... I think of my time showing in 4-H; I also think of my dad showing Herefords at the State Fair. When I think about improving the Fairgrounds, I envision how it will be for my children and grandchildren to have those same experiences. The Fairgrounds is our legacy and is timeless,"