

Fair signup problems disappoint some

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, July 7, 2015 9:35 am

JEFFERSON — The first day of judging at the Jefferson County Fair didn't go quite as planned for everyone, as issues with using the new online registration system resulted in at least a half-dozen entrants being turned away at check-in.

Blue Ribbon Fair Online is the same system that Jefferson County Fair Park has been using for years. However, this marks the first year entries were to be made solely online.

Jefferson County Fair Park director David Diestler told the Daily Union on June 11 that several reasons led to changing from a paper to an online process, including a reduction in duplicate and incorrect entries and saving time.

"This way, (exhibitors) have control of their own account. They can decide which category they want to go into," Diestler said. "There's less chance of us making a mistake and allowing them to control what they want to enter."

The main problem apparently arises when a junior, open or senior class fair entrant doesn't appear as registered in the system and is unable to provide confirmation of registration and/or payment.

"None of the people that have the problem can bring anything to us that states that they have (signed up and paid)," Diestler said on Tuesday. "If there was some kind of proof that we could go on, then we could make a decision on that. But we don't have anything and they can't produce anything."

Amy Listle, the Fair Park marketing and administrative assistant, said that there have been people who were able to provide confirmation.

"There have been people that have brought in their confirmations and have been able to pair it up to whatever their receipt is and see if there actually was a glitch and fix the problem," she said. "But when you have no confirmation, you can't prove it on your credit card statement even that your credit card went through or anything, then we just can't do anything."

Two people who had to deal with that very issue Tuesday were Tracy Jahnke and her daughter, Mackenzie, of Jefferson, who was showing swine in the fair. Tracy said she had submitted her daughter's hog entry in April prior to the junior class deadline. However, she had no confirmation to prove it on Tuesday.

"For \$7, the Fair Office is turning her away because I don't have a confirmation from the Blue Ribbon system," Jahnke said. "Mackenzie has her own pen, she's got everything set up. The entry fee is \$7 and then (all they would have to do would be) to write Mackenzie's name on the judges' list for swine, which isn't getting judged until Thursday."

Fair officials contacted Blue Ribbon and were told there was no record of an account for the Jahnkes ever being made.

"They're saying I didn't make an account. I know I did ... other people did, and they're getting turned away,"

Jahnke said.

Diestler and Listle confirmed there were about a half-dozen other would-be-entrants turned away due to lack of confirmation.

“Even (for) the people that called right away when they missed the deadline, like the next week, we’ve said no, they can’t sign up because they missed the deadline and we don’t have a late fee in place,” Listle said. “We can’t make an exception to the rule. Everybody’s been good with that, except now it’s the day before fair and they’re just now realizing they missed the deadline.”

Some fair entrants have mixed thoughts about the new system, such as Sara Mark and her mother, Pam Mark, of Ixonia.

“They didn’t get the information out there very well, I thought, but other than that, I liked doing it online because you didn’t have to write it out and get to the Fair Office in time,” said Sara Mark, 18, who is a Fairest of the Fair contestant.

Pam Mark said that signing up online was difficult, but it was something people have to get used to and it can only get better.

“It took us a while just to go online, figure out where we had to go, what we had to do, make sure we were pressing the right categories and keys and stuff like that,” said Pam Mark. “For being a new thing for the first year, I think it’d be helpful to have a little leeway with people, because I think some people aren’t comfortable with a computer.”

Fair Park officials did say, prior to the open and senior class deadline, that anyone having problems signing up was welcome to come to the Fair Office and an employee would be willing to help them.

“We had people that came into the Fair Office that couldn’t get the registration to work or couldn’t figure out how to do it correctly and we helped them,” Diestler said.

There were other people who simply called for help.

“There were some people that were trying to sign up and they were having glitches and they were calling us,” Listle said. “I was conversing with the software company and we were solving the problems right away.”

Others were happy with the migration to online.

“I thought it was nice to have the registration as computer based,” Jenny Bos, Fort Atkinson, said. “I liked getting a printout right away to tell me that these are the projects that you signed up for ... to me, it was a receipt so that I knew what was all registered.”

Bos, whose son, Julian Bos, 9, is participating in the fair for the fifth year, did have some difficulties when it came to categorizing entries into the correct classes and lots.

“There’s a lot that you have to look through and a lot that you have to figure out to make sure you’re in the right department and class and lot. That was maybe not as easy as having the booklet,” Bos said.

However, nearly everyone agreed that there are some learning curves associated with the new system.

“There’s an issue every year, but the issues are different,” Listle said. “You’re always going to have issues.”

As Tuesday wound down, the final registration total for entries were 840 in the junior class, compared to 860 last year. There are open and senior class entries totaling 153, while last year there were 238.

For more information about the fair, contact the Fair Office at (920) 674 -7148 or go to jcfairpark.com.