

Jefferson County Fair gets reviewed

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, August 21, 2015 8:31 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Fair Park committee held an open forum on Thursday to review the 2015 Jefferson County Fair.

Fair Park Director David Diestler, and Fair Park Marketing and Administrative Assistant Amy Listle wrote lists of what people liked about the fair and concerns they had.

Components of the fair that people enjoyed included the fair park employees; that the arenas were watered and dragged; the mounting blocks at the horse arena; the superintendents liked having walkie talkies; the online entry system; the campgrounds were well run, and the cat superintendent did a good job.

“Anything we needed, fair park employees were awesome about helping us out,” said one attendee who was with the horse and pony show.

Concerns expressed included a whistle the John Deere vendor had being blown too often and spooking horses enough to impact their performance; possibly bringing back the swine breed show; publishing the Fair Book earlier than January; food quality at the fair; questions regarding the fair budget; possible changes in campground dismissal time, and whether or not the cat superintendent could be both the superintendent and project leader because there was no project leader this year.

“One of the days the John Deere whistle was blowing almost nonstop,” a female attendee, who brought a list of people she was representing in the issue, said. “It was very disruptive to the horses showing. Several of the horses were spooked during their patterns (in the outdoor horse arena).”

She said there were no spookings serious enough to result in injuries to the riders, but it was enough to impact placings.

Another attendee who had worked in the Activity Center said that the whistle had echoed loudly inside.

“It was okay if the kids walked by and tooted it once,” she said. “But there were adults that were just holding it down.”

Suggestions for resolutions included relocating the vendor or unplugging the whistle during the horse patterns.

“When is our cut-off for (the fair book)?” a male attendee who had questions regarding the possibility of a swine breed show as opposed to only terminal, asked. “I don’t want to find out after the fact. I want to know up front, those of us that it impacts — do we get a chance to have some input on it?”

Diestler said the issue could be placed on the fair committee agenda. Committee meetings are open to the public.

Questions regarding food quality and the variety of options at the fair had to do with how outdoor vendors were charged for space and who was working in the Activity Center.

Fair officials explained that outside vendors all were charged by the square foot based on where they were located. Officials also explained that working the kitchen at the Activity Center was a “big commitment” because whomever worked the kitchen had to work it all year, not just during fair week.

Issues with the fair budget included how it could be increased to provide for larger entertainment, and how to improve the grounds and barns.

“As much as I would like to think the fair is all about the livestock, the reality is that the entertainment drives people coming here and spending money,” a male attendee said. “My question on that is how do we increase the money you have available to change the entertainment ... How do you increase the quality of the entertainment?”

Fair park committee chair Blane Poulson responded.

“I can tell you from sitting on this committee that bringing in the dollars seems good on paper, but it really doesn’t flush out,” Poulson said. “What we are is a small county fair that’s going to draw in between 40,000 and 50,000 people. ... We can spend an extra \$50,000 and get a headliner, but are we going to be guaranteed to get enough people through that gate to make the difference, and the answer is probably not.”

The male attendee then asked, if bigger entertainment is not the answer, how could grounds improvements be made.

“There’s a couple of things in play here,” Poulson said. “One of them is that we don’t want the taxpayers paying for the fair. Our number one goal is to get this off the tax levy, and we’ve pretty much done that with the fair. ... A couple years ago it cost the taxpayers \$350,000 a year in tax levy to have the fair. We’ve changed that.”

Poulson said that if they cannot keep the fair off the tax levy, the county will not throw the fair. There still would be a fair, but there would be a separate committee and they would have to run the fair for-profit.

A change in campground dismissal times was looked at when it was asked if people would be able to pull out Saturday night or Sunday morning as opposed to Sunday evening.

Diestler said that there were some problems with campers last year.

“We did some changes with superintendent changing things, but maybe we have to do something else different,” Diestler said.

After the conclusion of the forum, he said the session went as it usually does.

“(Hearing questions and concerns is) what the whole forum’s about,” Diestler said. “You try to answer people’s questions. Try to find out what’s good, find out what’s wrong, find out what we need to improve.

“It’s different each year, but there’s always something that comes up, and it’s like, ‘great. Let’s try to solve it then,’” he said. “That’s what we’re trying to do — make things better.”