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164th county fair ends five-day run Schroeder to reign as 2017 'Fairest'

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FAIREST OF THE FAIR

FAIREST OF THE FAIR — Ann Schroeder of Lake Mills took home the 2016 Fairest of the Fair crown Sunday afternoon during the 2016 Jefferson County Fair.



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By Alexa Zoellner azoellner@dailyunion.com

JEFFERSON — As the 164th Jefferson County Fair neared its close on Sunday, Ann Schroeder was crowned the 2017 Fairest of the Fair.

The Fairest of the Fair competition just was one part of what Fair Park officials are calling a successful fair.

Schroeder was selected by the judges as this year's winner on the final day of the 164th Jefferson County Fair. She was crowned by 2015-16 Fairest of the Fair, Jennifer Michel, at the Wilbert Betschler Memorial Grandstand prior to the Action Auto Demolition Derby.

"Honestly, it's an amazing feeling," Schroeder said. "I'm still kind of in shock — just coming down from it — so I feel pretty numb right now."

Schroeder, from Lake Mills, was one of seven young women competing for the crown. The rest of this year's fair royalty included Emiley Stade of Jefferson, Rachal Mark of Ixonia, Alexis Timmel of Johnson Creek, Josie Schreiner of Jefferson, Amber Ziebell of Johnson Creek and Lauren Rockney of Lake Mills.

"I'm extremely excited to learn about a whole new different world going on here (as Fairest of the Fair)," Schroeder said. "I've already learned so much and I can't wait to continue learning."

"When I was younger, we didn't do any showing here," she added. "We always came here as a family, and seeing all the girls dressed up in princess sashes and the crowns made me very excited as a child. I knew from that moment that I needed to do this and I just pursued one of my dreams."

A 2015 graduate of Lake Mills High School, Schroeder now is attending Lakeland University where she is pursuing a degree in marketing with an emphasis in accounting. She hopes to pursue a marketing career in sports upon graduation.

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A 'FAIR'-Y GOOD TIME

A 'FAIR'-Y GOOD TIME — The 164th Jefferson County Fair ended Sunday after a five-day run. Attendance was down due to rain and other factors, but still is being considered a success. Attendees were able to enjoy a variety of family shows, animal shows, project exhibits and music. For more photos, click here. — Daily Union photos by Alexa Zoellner and Pam Chickering Wilson.

FAIR CONCERTS



Prior to the crowning ceremony Sunday, the contestants were asked a final question in the Jefferson County Activity Center.

The question asked contestants to describe a new event or activity they would like to implement during their 2017 reign, should they be crowned Fairest of the Fair, and why.

"I think we should get more hands-on activity like, we should have a class day to bake either cookies or cakes," Schroeder answered. "We should get all ages involved from young to old.

"How fun would it be to learn how to make somebody's grandma's secret recipe of the best sugar cookies you've ever tasted?" she asked, rhetorically. "If that doesn't sound like a sweet treat, I don't know what does."

Also present for the final question and crowning was the 2016 Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs, Gloria Kesler.

"All these ladies ... have so many memories of the fair," Kesler said. "I am fortunate enough to be the 50th Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs and continue a wonderful tradition of women that are leading the Wisconsin agriculture, entertainment and the food industry. As Fairests, we're able to represent our main passion — our fairs."

Meanwhile, this year's fair was good, David Diestler, Jefferson County Fair Park director, said.

"We've heard a lot of great comments," Diestler said. "We've actually heard some comments from people that have come from further away that they really love our fair. ... One thing that people that came up from Illinois said, they liked it because it was more family orientated. I'd like to promote that and push that even more.

"You always wish you had more money to bring bigger stuff," he added later. "I try to make us different than everybody else. I try to make the fair different than other places."

As of Saturday, the attendance numbers were down by 4,331 compared to the same time last year, with a total of 32,372 in attendance. Wednesday brought in 8,433 people; Thursday, 6,357; Friday, 7,853; and Saturday, 9,729. Sunday's attendance was not available at deadline.

"Numbers are down a little bit," Diestler said. "There's a couple reasons, I think. One is because of the date on the calendar it fell. It's so close to the fourth and people do stuff on the fourth and are gone, and then next thing, you turn around and it's the fair. I think that's part of the reason — it just doesn't fit in their schedule really well.

"Our vendors have said this and a lot of people coming in, 'Oh, I didn't realize it was already this week,' and that type of thing," he added. "I think that's really hurt us.

"Then, of course, the weather with the storms on Tuesday night going into Wednesday," Diestler continued. "Wednesday morning we were pretty much down because almost every tent went down."

Several of the shows were new, the fair park director explained.

"The Wallendas were really popular," Diestler said. "I had a lot of people comment to me that, 'boy, I've never seen something like this at a fair before. That was really cool.' So I think that was a big attraction.

Throughout the competition, the Fairest contestants participated in a variety of activities promoting the fair, including dairy breakfasts and parades, producing radio commercials, communicating with businesses and community members, and assisting the reigning Fairest of the Fair throughout fair week.

The women were evaluated on professional appearance, community activities, personality, poise, fair knowledge and experience, speaking ability, the personal interview, radio commercial and their written application.

As winner, Schroeder will go on to compete for the title of Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs in the Annual Wisconsin Association of Fairs Convention in January of 2018.

Michel will compete for the title in 2017 with Schroeder attending as a representative of the Jefferson County Fair.

"This past year as Fairest, I've attended many events," Michel said. "The best part of being Fairest was the ability to walk through the barns and down the midway, to talk with the fairgoers and the exhibitors to ask them what their favorite part of the fair is. It has truly been an honor to be the 2016 Jefferson County Fairest of the Fair and I look forward to competing at the state competition in January."



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"The sharks were a pretty big attraction," he pointed out. "We've always had a good turnout for the sharks."

Also popular was Cassidy's Critters petting zoo.

"I think people really liked that," Diestler said. "They got to see the different animals and everything. Not that a lot of them were really unusual, but you don't see a lot of camels, llamas, alpacas."

In addition, the Friday and Saturday night concerts went "great."

"I had a lot of people tell me that both groups were really good," Diestler said. "They sounded good, they did a good act, they were energetic — that type of thing. ... The people that were there liked it a lot. I guess I always wish more people would come to it because I think the concerts we try and put on are really good."

Looking forward, he said he would like to try and have more shows take place later in the day or in the evening.

"Especially on a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday it's hard for people because they're all working, and so a lot of the time they can't get to the fair until later," Diestler said. "By that time, those ground acts are closed."

"So getting stuff later," he added. "I'm trying to figure out how that works, going to other fairs to investigate how they do it, and what works best."

The fair park director said he gradually has tried to get things later and later.

"This year I wasn't too sure about it, so we didn't have stuff too late," Diestler said. "(Having stuff later) gives people other things to do besides just going to a tractor or truck pull. Maybe they don't want to go to the concert, but they still want to go to the fair and see the other stuff, get the food."

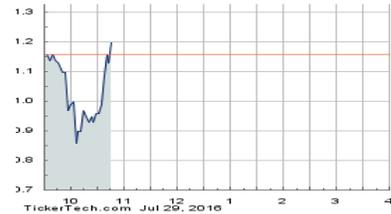
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