

Fair to feature new pavilion

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By NATE HUBBARD/Staff

The big tent is gone, but the fair is back.

The 83rd annual Bland County Fair will begin in earnest Wednesday night at 6 with a parade from Bland High School to the fairgrounds.

While many of the old fair favorites will return this year, a notable landmark will be missing.

The temporary tent erected – in a tedious and difficult process – each year for the fair has been replaced with a permanent wooden pavilion.

“It’s been a big help for us,” said Elaine Dillow, treasurer and general manager of Bland County Fair Inc.

Fair organizers aren’t the only ones who will benefit from the new event headquarters.

Dillow said the pavilion is an 80-by-100 foot structure, up from the 50-by-80 foot space the tent provided.

The extra room, she said, will allow for more vendors to take part in the event.

While the tent is out, a number of new activities in 2008 will return for the 2009 fair.

Dillow said entries are still being accepted through Thursday for the “Greatest Grandparents Essay Contest,” which allows children in three age groups to salute their grandmas and grandpas.

Entry forms are available in the free Bland County fair booklets, of which a limited number of copies are available at area businesses, or by calling Dillow at (276) 688-3566.

Winning essay writers in each division will receive \$50 and winning grandparents will receive plaques.

Also returning in 2009 after debuting last year will be Saturday’s all-breed fun horse show.

Dillow said the fair traditionally was associated with a larger horse show before the equine event got too big and began to overwhelm the rest of the fair’s activities.

While the bigger horse show continued as a separate event and will again be held this year at the fairgrounds on Sept. 11 and 12 with 96 classes, Dillow said the fair organizers decided to add the fun horse show to the fair weekend last year as a manageable way to reconnect with the old tradition.

Saturday’s show will feature 35 classes and will begin at 5 p.m.

Wednesday night’s parade is the official kickoff of the fair, but one event, the fifth annual chocolate contest, was scheduled for Tuesday night.

After the parade, Wednesday’s festivities include drawings for prizes and cash provided by area businesses as part of “Bland County Day.”

Admission to the fairgrounds will also be free on Wednesday, although carnival rides will still have a charge.

Other admission costs for the week include single day tickets (\$5 for adults, \$3 for children age 6-18), season tickets (\$10 for adults, \$5 for children) or a family season ticket (\$25 for two adults and the children of the household).

Children under 6 and adults over 75 receive free admission throughout the fair.

The fair ends Saturday with the conclusion of the carnival and the Hollybrook Band performing at 9 p.m.

The carnival begins each evening at 6 (except for a special 1 p.m. start time on Saturday) and lasts until closing, which Dillow said usually occurs around 11.

Musical entertainment will be provided in the new pavilion each night as well, with performances beginning at 7 p.m. Wednesday, 8 p.m. Thursday and 5 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Additional information about the fair is available in this year's official booklets and Dillow said a complete schedule of events will be available at the fairgrounds each day.

Other details about contests and nightly entertainment during the five-day festival is also available in a news item from the fair association published on page B5 in the July 22 edition of the Messenger.

"It's always been one of the biggest community events of the year," Dillow said. "I just enjoy seeing people come out and have a good time."

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