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Belknap County 4-H Fair: The biggest little agricultural fair in NH

The fun begins

By JOHN KOZIOL

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GETTING READY on Friday for the start of today's 69th annual Belknap County 4-H Fair is Billy Swofford, co-owner of East Coast Midways, based in Clinton, Maine. Swofford is shown inspecting a Ferris wheel, one of nine attractions the company will be operating through Sunday at the fairgrounds, located on Mile Hill Road in Belmont. The fair begins at 9 a.m. Saturday and wraps up at 5 p.m. Sunday. JOHN KOZIOL/CITIZEN

BELMONT — Given Friday's torrential downpours, the feature attraction of today's start of the 69th annual Belknap County 4-H Fair may be a mud-tractor, not lawntractor, pull but the show, and the fair, say organizers, will go on rain or shine through Sunday afternoon.

Billed as the "biggest little agricultural fair in New Hampshire" and a place "where memories are made and fun is a tradition," the Belknap county 4-H Fair is also very well known for offering wholesome, safe, and affordable entertainment for the entire family. The good times kick off this morning at 9 a.m. and conclude at 5 p.m. Sunday at the 4-H fairgrounds on Mile Hill Road.

New for 2012, the fair has reintroduced a midway packed with carnival rides, and there is also bleacher seating for some of its most popular events, like the lawntractor pull, which kicks off at noon today. Children under 12 are admitted free to the fair, everyone else pays \$7; there is a

separate admission for the midway. Parking is free for both the fair and midway.

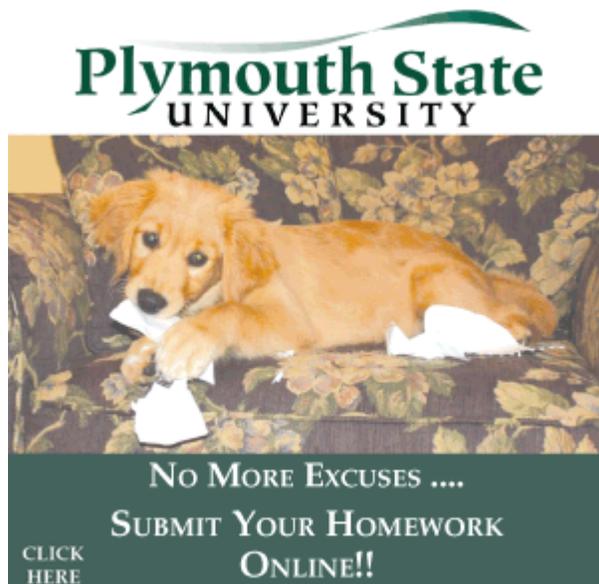
As becoming a 4-H fair, Belknap County's iteration has animal exhibits, ox pulls, draft horse demonstrations, and 4-H youth animal displays, while inside the local group's historic colonial-era barn there will be arts and crafts done by the youngsters.

There will also be plenty of food, including Italian sausage subs, french fries, onion rings, ice cream, fried dough, and fried seafood; and, for the kids, fun and messy contests like bubblegum blowing, pie eating, gelatin eating, and waterballoon throwing.

The fair's entertainment stage will be graced by performances of the Monadnock Bluegrass Band, the Natalie Turgeon Band, the Bel Airs, and the Shana Stack Band, while Ed the Wizard will wander the fairgrounds performing peripatetic magic tricks.

The complete schedule of events can be found online at www.bc4Hfair.org.

In between teeming rain showers on Friday evening, which made doing a phone interview challenging, Fran Wendelboe, the president of the Belknap County 4-H Fair, said the fair is most definitely on.



"Today's [Friday's] rain has given us some challenges but we'll be up and going in the morning," said Wendelboe, a former New Hampshire state representative from New Hampton who several years ago added the leadership of her home county's 4-H fair to her already extensive resume.

"The last report I saw said that the weather was supposed to be clearing midmorning Saturday [with] some scattered showers but hopefully it will have rained itself out in our neighborhood," Wendelboe said.

Wendelboe conceded, however, that the rain has softened the exhibition fields at the fairgrounds to such an extent that they may have turned into mud bogs, which will put a different spin on the lawn-tractor pull that is among the fair's most popular events.

While offering a myriad of activities, "The nice thing about our fair is that it's not so big that it takes you fifteen minutes to walk from one place to another. Everything is really nice and compact," said Wendelboe, adding that proceeds from this year's fair will be used to support 4-H programs in Belknap County as well as to send members — and their animals — to compete at other fairs.

Among the young people who'll be vying for a prize in the dairy goat competition at the Belknap County fair is Harrison Glover, an 18-year old whose family's agricultural history in the Pemi-Baker

Region spans several generations. On Friday, Glover brought four Lamancha goats and one Nubian goat — 5-month-old Flipper — to the fairgrounds.

None of the goats are champions, “but they’re hoping to be,” said Glover, as the curious goats poked their heads out of their pens to check out the people who were checking them out. This year marks the eighth that Glover has been showing livestock at the Belknap County 4-H Fair, to which he’s come with this family since he was a toddler.

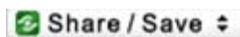
“It’s a small, little fair and I love it because there’s lots of different animals and because you get to meet a lot of people,” Glover said.

One of the people new to the fair in 2012 is Billy Swofford, the co-owner of East Coast Midways, based in Clinton, Maine. Swofford’s company brought nine rides to the party, among them a Ferris wheel, a twostory funhouse, and a rare — there is only one in New England — Wisdom Jolly Choo Choo, which will spin riders round and round into a tizzy of excited joy.

“This is our first year here and this is our first New Hampshire show ever,” Swofford said, explaining that fair organizers reached out to his company, which just happened to have the dates open on its calendar and also wanted to establish a presence at fairs in the Granite State.

“We’re looking to grow with them [the Belknap County 4-H Fair] for years to come,” Swofford said.

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