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Weather leads to low turnout for 4-H Fair



Organizer Fran Wendelboe said those who attended were pleased as usual
By BOB MARTIN

BELMONT — What started as a field day 73 years ago, where children could practice fitting and showing their animals, has grown into a full 4-H county fair that attracts hundreds of people every August.

This weekend, the Belknap County 4-H Fair took place at the 4-H Fairgrounds on Mile Hill Road, and while the rain on Saturday and the intense heat on Sunday deterred some people, organizer Fran Wendelboe said those who attended went home with a smile.

“We’re going to be down on attendance a little bit this year, but we had some great things here this weekend,” said Wendelboe. “We had pony rides, all the great exhibitors and great food. People have been excited. There are a lot of out-of-staters who really love it, and said they will be back again next year.”

The fair was originally held in 1943 at Walker’s Lombardy Farm on Parade Road in Laconia, and was led by Lillian Walker, who had a dream of a 4-H fair to support local farmers. It evolved into the “4-H Food for Victory Fair” at Opechee Park.

After World War II, the fair moved to the Belknap County Recreation Area, and then returned to Opechee Park in 1950, which is where it took place until it moved to the former Royal Smith Farm on Mile Hill Road 27 years later.

The fair is known for its small size, as it is the smallest of the recognized agricultural fairs in the state. There are a variety of children’s games, food vendors, petting areas, animal shows, exhibits, live entertainment, horse and tractor pulls, sheep shearing, face painting, blacksmithing, demonstrations and more.

“We are really a different kind of fair,” said Wendelboe. “We aren’t all about the rides or things like that. This is more about the family atmosphere, the animals and kids being able to really see and do things. Everyone always raves about what a nice little fair this is.”

Eight-year-old Kelton Wilson and his brother Brian, 11, came to the fair from neighboring town Gilmanton. They were both at the fair for the first time, and said they would gladly come back again. The Wilsons enjoyed the horses, petting sheep and the archery.

Wendelboe said 4-H is a wonderful training program where people don’t need a farm or even their own animal. She said there are all kinds of projects relating to environmental and agricultural issues. It also focuses on gaining self-confidence.

“It’s a wonderful program for helping youth mature and grow the right way,” said Wendelboe.

For the past two years, Cora Peterson has worked with cows at the Hillsdale 4-H Dairy Club, and she was at the fair for the first time. She was there with a cow named Harriet, and Peterson said when she works with the cows, she teaches them how to walk, behave, sit upright and have a healthy diet. She goes to various fairs around the region.

“4-H is an awesome program,” said Peterson. “Education-wise, learning-wise – it’s a really cool hands-on environment to work with.”

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