

At the 4-H Fair - Kids and animals hold spotlight at annual Belknap County 4-H Fair (672 w/cuts)

By ROGER AMSDEN, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — Animals and the children showing them held the spotlight at the 73rd annual Belknap County 4-H Fair, held over the weekend at the former Royal Smith Farm on Mile Hill Road, which was once a dairy farm with 240 head of milking cows.

The fair continues to focus on the things that it does well by maintaining its agricultural roots, said Fran Wendelboe, fair chairman, who took over leadership of the fair five years ago after a period of declining attendance amidst an effort to turn it into a three-day affair, which included carnival rides.

"We've always been a small fair focused on kids and agriculture, and that's what we continue to be. We had pony rides and lots of entertainment, but the focus has always be on a things like the steer-pulling competitions, goat and sheep and dog shows, as well other animals raised by the children," said Wendelboe.

She said threatening skies on Saturday and high heat and humidity on Sunday cut down on this year's attendance, but that those who did show up had a good time and enjoyed themselves.

Among those taking part in the steer-handling competition Sunday was Mason Farmer, 10, of Alexandria, who was showing his 5-month-old Brown Swiss team, Wes and Lou. It was his fourth time showing in 4-H competitions and he said he's learned a lot from them.

Also putting in time in the show ring was 16-year-old Emily Emmalee of Barnstead, who had her miniature horse Ultra in the horse show ring.

She said her horse stays with her grandfather, John Cotton, in Barnstead, along with with four other miniatures that her family owns.

"We're only 10 minutes away from the miniature horse farm in town, which is where we got them," she said.

"They're lots of fun and people really like them because they're so gentle."

The fair got its start in 1943 as a dairy fitting and showmanship competition at Lombardy Farm on Parade Road in Laconia during World War II. Interest in the fair, sparked by Lillian Walker, owner of the farm, grew rapidly and it was later moved to Opechee Park in Laconia, where it was billed as the 4-H Food for Victory Fair.

At the first fair, War Bonds were sold to buy bombs for the war effort and the drive was so successful that the following year the goal of raising bonds to buy an Army training aircraft was established.

The War Bond fund drive went statewide and by the time the fair was held in 1944 enough money had been raised to buy nine training aircraft.

Following the war, the fair moved to the Belknap County Recreation Area, returning to Opechee Park in 1950, where it was held until it moved to the former Royal Smith Farm on Mile Hill Road in 1977.

CAPTIONS:



Emily Emmalee, 16, of Barnstead, shows Ultra, a mini-horse, in the horse show ring at the Belknap County 4-H Fair. (Roger Amsden photo for the Laconia Daily Sun)



Studio Two, A Beatles Tribute Band, performs at the Belknap County 4-H Fair. (Roger Amsden photo for the Laconia Daily Sun)



Ella Poire and Hannah Baker of Belmont show their Hampshire sheep at the Belknap County 4-H Fair. (Roger Amsden photo for the Laconia Daily Sun)



Jeff Keyser of Ramblin' Vewe Farm in Gilford gave a demonstration of sheep shearing at the Belknap County 4-H Fair. (Roger Amsden photo for the Laconia Daily Sun)

