

## See You at the Fair!

Posted on Jul 29, Posted by [Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



This week Senator Kathleen Vinehout writes about her visits to area county fairs. While at the fair, Kathleen visited the exhibits and chatted with the exhibitors. She also got to listen to the pulse of the communities through her conversations with fair goers. Politics and local issues are as much a part of the fair as cotton candy and carnival rides.

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ALMA - The rain and wind didn't stop Elaine from coming to the Trempealeau County Fair. She brought the quilt she and her 90-year-old mother finished together.

"It's special to me," she told me. "I want to show it off!"

Across Wisconsin folks are picking the best of the flowers, quilts and corn stalks. Youngsters are whipping up tasty treats from scratch. Teens are washing cattle, training horses, and arranging flowers.

It's fair time.

County fairs have a deep tradition in our state. Waukesha County claims the oldest county fair in the state. In fact, this first county fair was held before Wisconsin was even a state!

The old agricultural expositions, as they were sometimes called, became a place for city folks to meet country dwellers and for farmers to show off their prize crops and cattle. Fairs helped

grow the dairy industry. During fair-time farmers learned the latest in new agriculture techniques and competed against each other in categories from corn to quilts.

Today competition is focused more on youth. But many county fairs provide an open class for arts and crafts, food, and agricultural products – giving people of every age a chance to show off their best.

As a 4-Her, I lived for the county fair. Now I enjoy talking with youngsters and sharing their enthusiasm.

Recently I spent several days at the fair and learned things have changed a bit.

Instead of sugar cookies, the 5<sup>th</sup> graders are making granola bars. In addition to tied quilts, youngsters are involved in robotics. Digital photography replaced the old 35mm film.

But the enthusiasm of youth and the warmth of the community have not changed.

Fairs are a great time to catch up with constituents and listen to the pulse of the community. It is also a time to discuss the current challenges facing our communities.

This summer I listened and learned more about sand mines from all sides of the issue. I learned from the technician who worked in the propellant plant in Jackson County. I listened as the local official shared concerns about balancing the needs of many constituents. And many of the people who live adjacent to mines shared worries about land, sand, roads, air and water.

I heard from those proud of their work to make the fair a special event. For example, the fair supervisor of youth projects who wanted to share the importance of 4H. She made sure to tell me the youth she'd worked with – over 40 years – never ended up in jail.

Lots of folks wanted to talk about state politics. Everyone had an opinion. Lots of folks had advice. Pretty much all of them agreed we needed more common sense in Madison.

When it came time for judging, it was the youth who stole the show. The hours of preparation made a difference in the show ring. From the shining coat of the lop-eared rabbit to the Holstein heifer that stood picture perfect every time she stopped.

I carry the memories I could not capture on film; like the girl who spent most of the afternoon walking her tall Suffolk sheep all across the fair ground. The sheep was fashionably decked out in a lime green Spandex sheep tube – something like a coat.

Even more fashionable was the fair queen and her attendant. They were dressed in their finest – but with a twist. Both young women were attired in lovely dresses but the queen had on her barn boots and the attendant wore her cowboy boots.

Only at the fair!

Wisconsin has more than 75 fairs in every corner of the state. Coming up soon are the Jackson County Fair in Black River Falls and the Buffalo County Fair in Mondovi both the first weekend of August.

Don't forget the Wisconsin State Fair in West Allis August 1<sup>st</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>.

You can find more information at the Department of Tourism website:

<http://www.travelwisconsin.com/things-to-do/entertainment-attractions/fairs-festivals>

or the Wisconsin Association of Fairs website: <http://www.wifairs.com/wifairs.asp>

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