



A Change in Plans: Adjusting the Fair after a Global Pandemic

By Caroline Smith

The Maple Festival was cancelled on March 11, 2020, in response to the world-wide pandemic. The Fair Board met on March 19th and began the painful process of planning for the fair, to be held at the beginning of September, which seemed a long way off.

The fair is planned and maintained by a non-profit organization that consists of two representative each from the Lions Club; the Blue Grass, Bolar, Mill Gap and Stonewall Ruritan clubs; the Chamber of Commerce and four officers. There are so many planning steps. In February, the department heads check classes and rules and make corrections for early April. They order ribbons and trophies for their events.

April 16th was the first Zoom online meeting, which required LOTS of learning as twelve people struggled through interrupting each other and forgetting to push that all-important “mute” button. The first piece of the fair disappeared that night as the board decided that no inside events would be held.

Each sponsoring organization polled its members and reported at the May meeting that no one felt comfortable serving food or providing staff for amusement rides. All of the meetings were becoming pretty gloomy. At the May meeting, the board decided to wait for Governor Northam’s announcement in early July before deciding to cancel the fair. An exception was made for the 4H/FFA livestock show and sale. The fair board’s deepest commitment is to youth agriculture. With youngsters raising livestock for the fair, trusting that the event would happen, there was no choice but to plan for a virtual livestock show.

Board spirits were very low on July 15th when the Fair family reunion, music and shows, demolition derby, and truck/tractor pulls were officially cancelled.

The decision placed the fair itself in a dangerous financial position to move forward for a fair in 2021. The board appointed a committee to write a grant asking the Little Swiss Fund for one year’s worth of minimum operating expenses to keep the organization afloat. To the board’s great relief, the grant was approved.

Everyone in Highland County should be grateful to a very frugal and savvy anonymous individual who amassed created a large foundation with the guidance of the Community

Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. The fair you enjoy this year is largely due to the grant.

The 2020 4-H and FFA Livestock Show and Sale committee was challenged to carry-out their event. Youth working with livestock were on-edge not knowing if the event would be virtual or in-person. In early August, the livestock committee voted for a two-day in-person event held during the original fair dates, with cattle and hogs shown on one day and sold the same afternoon, and the sheep and goat show and sale the second day in order to follow governing guidelines. The events could also be viewed on Facebook live. The 23 youth participants were blessed with high bids of support from the community for their project work, which grossed over \$70,000.

The Monterey United Methodist Church offered Funnel Cakes during this event, which was a special treat!

The 2021 Fair was not certain early in the year. Governmental guidance was still quite cautious for all, but vaccinations were being administered and positive case numbers were lowering. On June 17, the board organized a meeting with Virginia Department of Health official, Tim Abbott. He noted that public limits were finally lifted. The board voted unanimously to hold the 2021 Fair.

As you enjoy the fair this year, please remember that COVID-19 is very, very real and the danger it poses to everyone requires that we work hard to remember to keep social distance where possible, to wear a mask always if you are unvaccinated and when working closely with the public. More handwashing sinks will be seen on the grounds for the healthiness of all.