

Fair board dedicates this year's guide to: Debbi Stephenson and Fred Whitelaw

"They" is a very smart group of people. One of the smartest things I have ever heard them say is "If you really like what you do, you never work a day in your life." Over the years, the fair has been fortunate to find volunteers happy to accept difficult jobs and to treat them like they are a total joy. This year's guide is dedicated to two of them, Debbi Stephenson, chair of sewing and Fred Whitelaw, chair of hunter-fisherman trophies. They have the honor of being the fair's two longest-serving chairs.



Debbi became chair in 1994. When I told her that I would like to dedicate the 2022 guide to her and Fred, she said, "Oh, I love my job. I'm so happy that quilts have been added to my department." I didn't sense even the smallest amount of irony.

One of her favorite displays was in 2001, the Highland County Fair's 50th anniversary. To enhance the celebration, she called every seamstress she knew and proudly displayed 50 items—one for every year.

The fair has lots of volunteer observers who will point out little problems, whether they exist or not. One year Debbi allowed two children to wear clothes that had been entered in her department in the sheep costume contest and the horse show. (The rule is that items are required to be displayed for the WHOLE fair.) When people reported that the items had been stolen from the display, Debbi was ready with the reassuring answer that they hadn't, thank you. They just had to do double duty.



When Randy Richardson retired, Fred took over his job in 2003. Of all the departments, I am most impressed with Hunter/Fisherman entries. Seeing people walk in carrying a bear is spectacular. I asked Fred which were the largest and most challenging entries to display, expecting to hear the word *bear*. When he said that a mounted elk's head was generally heavier and more challenging, I was surprised.

The last night of the fair is a hassle for all department heads and entrants alike. People aren't supposed to pick up their exhibits or get their checks until 9 pm on Saturday, right at the most exciting part of the truck and tractor pull; right when every square foot of the fairgrounds is full of everyone.

I have always wondered how people stagger out to the back parking lot carrying the bear that they could conveniently bring right to the door on Tuesday night. Fred's eyes twinkled when I asked him how on earth the mission was accomplished, and he told me it was a bit of a secret.

He did say that he takes some exhibits to his house and delivers them to people after the fair is over. He's a much nicer person than I am in that respect.

There are 12 different departments responsible for entering and displaying everything from livestock to Lego castles. Each has at least one person serving as chair. Each requires volunteers to help enter items, judges to pick winners and one lucky person to record the statistics for the Recorder and the Fair website and to write checks. This last three jobs usually fall to the department chair.

Logistically, the most complicated department is the 4-H and FFA Livestock Show, requiring someone to organize several classes for each of hogs, beef, goats and sheep. Little Mary Lou's beloved steer requires a lot more care than the painting she entered in the art and photography show. Many supporting adults are there to make sure all animals are cared for and to keep order on the challenging journey from the stall to the show ring and back again. Thank heavens for people who will jump right in to separate two hogs that decide they don't like each other or the occasional steer that just can't take the pressure any longer!

Really popular departments like Baked and Canned Goods can 100's of entries and potentially 450 prize winners who might need checks on Saturday night. Thankfully, there are people who enter several different things, so the problem becomes one of being sure everything is accounted for each persons' winnings. The number of \$1 checks written at the fair must be pretty amazing. All told, the fair pays out over \$10,500 in prize money. This fund is partially supplemented by generous donors and local service clubs but is primarily paid through ticket revenue.