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Monster trucks, talent show lend final-day flair at Three-County Fair

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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Tuesday, September 8, 2009

NORTHAMPTON - Attendance this Labor Day weekend was 50 percent higher than last year at the Three-County Fair.

And while the weather was favorable both years, fair superintendent Bruce Shallcross said new attractions likely drew new faces. In fact, the fair premiered monster truck shows that nearly sold out the grandstand's 2,000 seats.

"People like the craziness," Shallcross said Monday as he watched a truck with 66-inch wheels fly over a line of four cars. Owned by Tennessee-based Predator Racing, each truck weighs 9,500 pounds and has 1,500 horsepower. One truck's engine blew Sunday, leaving three to show Monday. The engine's value is \$50,000, according to Shallcross.

Next up, team New Jersey competed Monday against Team Massachusetts in quad racing. Fans booed the New Jersey team as its four-wheelers looped around the track, trailing dirt clouds, the smell of gasoline and the sounds of engines revving and roaring. The show announcer grabbed a towel to cover his laptop, which was showered with dirt every time the racing vehicles turned the corner.

A longtime Three-County Fair staple, the demolition derby drew massive crowds over the weekend. Sunday's derby oversold tickets, leaving some people standing, Shallcross said. Fans and dirty drivers prefer the ring at the Three-County Fair because it is 30 percent to 40 percent larger than the average fair ring, Shallcross said. About 70 cars participated in each derby show.

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"We have more exciting crashes," said Shallcross, who deems the demolition derby the most popular attraction in the 25 years he's worked at the 192-year-old fair.

People were also drawn this year to the first showing of "Aussie Kingdom," which features facts, photos and fun with 22 lizards, kangaroos and birds indigenous to Australia.

"Anything in Australia is extremely unique to the rest of the world," said Carolyn Lantz, owner of the Colorado-based traveling animal show. A legend Lantz shares in her shows is that when settlers first saw kangaroos in Australia and asked the Aborigines what the animals were, the Aborigines replied "Kangaroo," which meant "I don't know."

"The name stuck," Lantz said as she fulfilled her rounds at the cages of kangaroos, wallabies and walleroos.

Annie Smith, of Northfield, knelt down in front of a kangaroo.

"I like how they hop around," Smith said. "I would have one for a pet if they were small."

Meanwhile, festival-goers returned this year for the Three-County Fair's continuous charms, including fair food, midway rides and agricultural exhibits. Of approximately 25 rides offered, Shallcross said the "Zipper" is most popular. In that ride, participants zip up, down and around in circles.

"It's been really fun, but really scary," said Sophie DiLorenzo, 12, of Northampton. While the rides sometimes scare her, she's in it for the thrill. "Twister" and "1001 Nights" are her favorites.

DiLorenzo comes back to the fair each year for its rides, cotton candy and pierogi, a Polish pasta with potato filling. She took a minute to rest and relax Monday on the midway lawn with her mother, Lise Glading-DiLorenzo.

Rockwell Amusements, the ride company, received compliments from local folks in emails to Shallcross. People appreciated the company's friendly and professional tenants, Shallcross said.

Lots of talent

Late Monday afternoon, a youth talent show presented 16 young contestants. Acts included song, dance, violin, piano and guitar performances. Competitors were divided into junior and senior divisions for ages 8 through 17. Organizer Martha Cycz revived the show three years ago after a 15-year hiatus.

"The fair has leaned more toward family events and this is a really good family event," said Cycz, who introduced the talent show to Three-County Fair about 30 years ago. "When they have a bunch of family and friends with them it just helps them feel motivated."

Talent show winners were 12-year-old Una Jensen of Shelburne in the junior division, who sang and played guitar on her own composition, "I Can Tell," and Kyle Ray, 15, of South Hadley in the senior division, who sang a Josh Groban song.

Music has always been a family affair for the runner-up in the junior division, Charis Moeckel-Cole, 8, whose grandmother taught her how to play piano and violin. Her grandmother, Thelma Moeckel, is a former music teacher who lives in Deerfield. Charis and her brother Atticus, both of Deerfield, have competed in the fair's youth talent show for the past few years. The family plays music for learning and leisure, sometimes musically congregating over holidays.

Charis played the violin and piano separately to "Light Blue Road" at the youth talent show Monday. Stephanie Moeckel-Cole, her mother, said she was nervous for her daughter because she wanted her to do well. The two hugged off-stage after the performance.

"Hell ya, I'm proud," Stephanie Moeckel-Cole said.

And Shallcross, who has seen the good and the not-so-good at the fair, is also proud.

"It's been a really good year," he said. "We're really happy."

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Three County Fair

what a rip off! Spent \$100 on what? a grinder.. soda...a couple of games.. Not what it used to be that is for sure.

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3-County Fair 2009

We took our 2 grand-daughters, ages 3 & 6 on Friday. Toured the barns filled with baby chicks & bunnies, Aussie zoo, rode the horse drawn wagon, visited with all the Shriner Clowns, collected their cards, watched the pig race, rode on many good rides in the mid-field, had lunch & of course cotton candy. Wanted to stay for demo-derby, but little ones were tired out. Everyone was very friendly, hope to attend in 2010. Good Job!

ps: Born & brought up in Northampton

Donna

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