



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Summer Time Is Fair Time

JAMES L. SEWARD July 30, 2009

Summer is in full swing and one of the best ways to spend a day or night in upstate New York is enjoying some time at the local county fair. Young or old, there is nothing better than the enchanting sights along the midway, the lighthearted sound of children laughing with excitement, or the enticing aroma of sausage sandwiches and fried dough.

Although there is some dispute, many historians claim the first county fair in the United States actually took place right here in New York in Watertown nearly 200 years ago. During the early 1800s fairs were purely an agricultural affair, an opportunity for farmers to learn about the latest planting techniques, new equipment and other farming innovations. It didn't take long however for fairs to become a highly anticipated summertime event for all.

Along with displaying modern farming equipment, fairs became known for introducing the public to all types of newfangled inventions. Electric lights, automobiles and countless kitchen appliances were first seen by many at the local county fair.

Today, county fairs remain a great proving ground for the latest gadgets and innovative new products. More importantly though, it is an opportunity for farmers to showcase their wares. From livestock to fruits and vegetables to a variety of other homegrown products,

the county fair is the place to see and sample the best our region has to offer. Residents also have an opportunity to compete for a coveted blue ribbon in any number of categories.

We are extremely fortunate to have some splendid local fairs scheduled to take place in the coming weeks. These are annual traditions that families have enjoyed for generations as both presenters and fair-goers. Each is unique and offers its own special attractions. The upcoming schedule includes:

- *The Otsego County Fair in Morris, August 4 – 9;
- *The Schoharie County Sunshine Fair in Cobleskill, July 31 – August 8;
- *The Chenango County Fair in Norwich, August 11 – 16;
- *The Herkimer County Fair in Herkimer, August 18 – 23;
- *The Tompkins County Fair in Trumansburg, August 25 – 30.

Two other area fairs have already concluded. In Cortland and Greene Counties, the spotlight was on our young people. Both fairs highlighted the best and the brightest from our area's youth populations. Future leaders in industry, business and of course, farming all took part.

New York is also home to the longest running state fair. According to the Encyclopedia of New York State, the New York State Agricultural Society held the first state fair in Syracuse in 1841. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people turned out for the three day event that featured animal exhibits, a plowing contest and samples of manufactured goods for the farm and home. From 1842 to 1889 the fair traveled among 11 different cities around the state before permanently settling in Onondaga County in 1890.

The New York State Fair now runs for 12 days featuring the state's best agriculture, commerce, education, art and music. Just like the county fairs, the New York State Fair is filled with tradition. Time-honored, crowd pleasing exhibits are on display year after year, while exciting new shows and displays are constantly added to the line-up promising brand new surprises. They must be doing something right as more than 1 million visitors make their way through the turnstiles each year.

As many families look for ways to save a few dollars, there is no better value than your local county fair. In the age of the "staycation", fairs are offering visitors even more great activities. Most offer a low, and sometimes free, admission price coupled with affordable food and entertainment. Reduced admission, pay one price rides and other promotions are always available as well.

Fairs are also a wonderful educational tool. Children can learn history, science and so much more in one of the grandest classrooms available. I invite you to explore one of our local county fairs – you won't be disappointed.