

El Dorado County Fair retains ag roots as entertainment grows

By Kathryn Reed

Agriculture – it was the common thread of communities that led to the creation of fairs.

The selling of livestock and the celebration of the harvest are not what they once were. But fairs, they are still going strong.

The four-day El Dorado County Fair opens today with the theme Blue Jeans and Country Dreams.

El Dorado County's fair dates to 1859 when it was in Coloma. The current site in Placerville was first used in 1939.



Mutton bustin is usually a crowd favorite at the El Dorado County Fair. Photo/LTN file

The fairgrounds have grown to 47.77 acres. Loren and Mary Forni once owned this land. The \$6,196.50 needed to buy the land came from a horseracing pari-mutuel tax account created by the Legislature in 1933. Today the fair is run by a

nonprofit, with no money coming from the county's general fund.

"The importance of fairs is that they instill a sense of community. The community is coming together not only to run into each other at the fair, but to look forward to seeing the animals the kids have raised and to the auction to see how the community comes together for the kids," Jody Gray, CEO of the fair, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While plenty of livestock can be viewed – from cows to rabbits to goats – and an abundance of pies, jams and knitting to marvel over, many who attend this fair and others are doing so for the entertainment.

South Lake Tahoe Mayor Tom Davis, who has been on the fair board for almost nine years, said, "There is a lot less agriculture and more entertainment and bands."

The board members, though, buy one of the pigs each year and then in the fall have a barbecue. It's their way of supporting the kids.

Through FFA and 4-H many youngsters on the West Slope participate in a way of life that today is foreign to those living at Lake Tahoe. Cattle no longer have a presence in the basin and few horses are here. The rabbits that are hopping around are wild and tend to be a nuisance to gardeners.

It's the non-animal contests that Tahoe residents tend to participate in.

Gray, who graduated from South Tahoe High in 1980, said with the growing interest in locally sourced foods more people are competing in the pie and preserved goods competitions.

Plenty of eggs have come in as well because of the proliferation of backyard chicken coops.

Photography entries have also been escalating now that digital

is the norm.

Most of the events at the fair are covered with the \$9 entrance fee. The carnival rides are separate.

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Fair details:

- **Dates-times:** Opens at noon today and goes until midnight. Continues noon to midnight Friday; 10 am to midnight on Saturday; and noon to 10pm Sunday.
- **Location:** El Dorado County Fairgrounds, 100 Placerville Drive, Placerville.
- **Tickets:** \$9 for ages 13 and older, \$7 for ages 7-12 and seniors, free for children 6 and under and attendees in military uniform. Ride wristbands are \$30.
- **More info:** Website or (530) 621.5860.