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Celebrating the 100th Deschutes County Fair

By Tor Hanson

The Deschutes County Fair is celebrating its 100th fair this year. Today an integral part of the county, the fair had a contentious beginning. Steeped in controversy between the business communities of Redmond and Bend, the location of the fair took on a political fight in Salem.

Bend was on a phenomenal growth curve in the early years of the twentieth century. Driven by the arrival of the railroad in 1911 and the establishment of the sawmills in 1915, the United States Census recorded a 910 percent increase in Bend’s population between 1910 and 1920 (536 and 5,415 respectively).

In December 1916, Deschutes County was officially recognized by Oregon Governor Whitycombe. As the largest city in the county, Bend’s city fathers were vying for county seat status. Swept up in the excitement, Bend’s Commercial Club started planning for the one thing that would set Bend apart from the rest of the surrounding cities – a county fair.

The neighboring town of Redmond had held a low-key potato show since 1906. The annual gathering brought potato growers together to showcase the area’s most successful crop – the Deschutes Netted Gem. The gathering did not officially become the Potato Show until November 1911.

As the discussion about creating a new county went on, Bend’s businessmen set their sight on creating a fair that would feature “some of the wild west features of the Pendleton Round-Up, but not on such an elaborate scale.”

The first Bend industrial fair was held in the Bend Commercial Club room on August 31, 1916. The following year, the fair needed a larger venue and was held at the Richardson school house. Perhaps an outcome of the war or the influenza epidemic, the fair was cancelled in 1918, only to return the following year as a county industrial fair for youngsters during Reveille Week.

At the same time Bend experimented with an “industrial fair,” Redmond businessmen created the legal framework for hosting a county fair. At the end of 1917, incorporation papers for a Deschutes County Fair were filed and accepted on April 3, 1918.

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In January 1920, local Redmond lawyer and Oregon House of Representative Denton Burdick introduced a resolution to place the county fair in Redmond. Approved by both the Oregon Senate and House, Bend businessmen leaned on Governor Ben Olcott to veto the resolution, which he promptly did.

*The Bend Bulletin*’s editorial staff had earlier expressed the opinion that Redmond was the logical place for a Deschutes County Fair. After the Bend Commercial Club aggressively pursued a veto to the Burdick resolution, the editorial writer at *The Bend Bulletin* decided enough was enough. In an editorial published in March 1920 titled “County Fair,” the writer told Bend businessmen to stop acting “hoggish.” The members of the commercial club finally backed away from the issue.

With the controversy finally over, Redmond prepared for the first Deschutes County Fair. In a last minute rush to prepare for the first fair, the fair board spent $5,000 to finish the large 50x100 foot exhibit hall, stock sheds, and a perimeter fence. The first county fair premiered on Thursday, October 15, 1920 as the Potato Show and County Fair.

Although much has changed since the fair premiered in October 1920, much stays the same. Americana at its finest, much of what the fair has stood for the last 100 years is still on display: the rodeo, the showing of the animals, the carnival, and the chance to bump into friends you only see once a year.

Rodeo queen pageantry started in earnest in 1941. Although Eda Towne held court as the fair’s first rodeo queen in 1925, it would take another 16 years before the tradition took hold. The annual Buckaroo Breakfast become a tradition in 1944. Originally set up as a war bond drive, the event caught on and is still going strong after 75 years.

The old fairground, steeped in history, is no longer. The old buildings and rodeo grounds were razed and replaced by Fred Meyer Shopping Center.

A modern fairground and expo center, inaugurated on July 27, 1999, now greets fairgoers. Although old timers grumble about the long walks to the animal barns and the barren look and feel of the fairground, the Deschutes County Fair remains an important part of life for all the communities of Deschutes County.
New Film Footage Added to Cruisin’ 97 Exhibit

An internet search for souvenirs for sale from the Museum of Wonders, Bend’s forgotten museum of geology, recently turned up gold in an unexpected find. Film footage of a family vacation from 1937 showed what it was like to visit Bend when roads were barely paved and the mills were operating at full speed.

Found through an online film service specializing in providing stock vintage film footage, museum staff reached out to the film owner to see about acquiring a copy. Permission was granted for the use of the footage within the exhibit and for research purposes only within our collection thanks to the sponsorship of Drs. Josh and Brandi Kuhn of High Desert Chiropractic and Massage.

The family in the film is unidentified, but enough clues exist that museum volunteers are on the case to determine who they were visiting. The four minutes of footage can only be viewed within the exhibit, so make sure to plan your visit.

Crashing the Pet Parade

Much fun was had with swan floaties in the Pet Parade. Thanks to those who cheered from the side lines!
Remembering Donna Mae Meddish

July 6, 1934-June 20, 2019

Donna was born in Nicolaus, California, to Lester and Earlene Ricketts on July 6, 1934. She attended Yuba City High School and graduated from Chico State University with Bachelor’s in English and Journalism. She taught at Yuba City High School and later received a Master’s in Education from Syracuse University in 1961. Donna married Richard Ray Meddish on August 26, 1961 in Springfield, Illinois. They worked at Colorado State University in Fort Collins and University of Colorado in Boulder before moving to Portland, Oregon where she was as the Dean of Women for Pacific University.

After moving to Bend in 1969, she taught at Central Oregon Community College. Donna was a president of the Bend branch of American Association of University Women and was a founding member and researcher at the Deschutes County Historical Society. Donna played an important role in the renovations of Reid School and the museum in the late 1990s and the grand reopening in 2000, particularly taking interest in capturing the history of the school district.

Donna was an avid writer published in a variety of newsletters and Cascades East Magazine. She published “Rafting the Sacramento River” in 2015, and was working on a second book.

Donna is survived by her husband and her children, David and MaryAnn.
It’s Little Woody Time!

What better way to end the summer than sampling aged ale prepared in wooden barrels, while strolling the grounds of the historic Reid School building in the company of attendees dressed as gnomes? Started in 2009, The Little Woody Beer, Cider, and Whiskey Festival has grown into one of the area’s most popular festivals. Local brewers concoct libations using historic techniques of wooden barrel aging. The results are small batch, one time only libations only available during The Little Woody.

There is a long history of fermentation of beer and stronger spirits in the high desert of Central Oregon, dating back to the late nineteenth century. This makes the setting of the Deschutes Historical Museum a perfect match, with a portion of the proceeds donated to the Deschutes County Historical Society.

The Little Woody happens Friday, August 30, 5p.m. to 10p.m. and Saturday, August 31, Noon to 10p.m. (Open to children Noon to 6p.m.). To volunteer for the Deschutes Historical Museum at this event contact Vanessa Ivey, by email: vanessa@deschuteshistory.com. To find a full schedule of events and brewers visit thelittlewoody.com

Mark Your Calendars

**AUGUST**

3, 4  **VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL WALL AND DPA CELEBRATION**

3, 17  **HERITAGE WALKING TOUR: Early Days of Bend**
10:30 a.m. Deschutes Historical Museum

8-10  **SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK: TWELFTH NIGHT (or What You Will)**
7:30 p.m. Deschutes Historical Museum
Tickets available at BendTicket.com
Presented by Guerilla Shakespeare Co. See attached flyer for more info

10, 24  **HERITAGE WALKING TOUR: Architectural Tour**
10:30 a.m. Deschutes Historical Museum

27  **HISTORY PUB: THE BEAVERTON OUTLAWS; A Case Study in Resistance.** Presented by US Cultural and Modern History professor David A. Horowitz
McMenamins Old St. Francis
Father Luke Room, 7p.m., doors open at 5:30 p.m.
First-come-first-served seating, no reservations required.

30  **LITTLE WOODY AGED CIDER, BEER, AND WHISKEY FESTIVAL**
5 p.m.-10 p.m. Deschutes Historical Museum

31  **LITTLE WOODY CONT’D:** Noon-10 p.m. (open to children, Noon-6 p.m.)

**History Pub: The Beaverton Outlaws**
Presented by the Oregon Aviation Historical Society

Join us for the story of Oregon’s most notorious pioneering pilots. Called the "Beaverton Outlaws" these aviators flew in the face of the federal government in the 1930s when home built aircraft was marked illegal. Discover how these men, through their passion and dedication, forever changed the face of general aviation, as we know it today.
The Guerilla Shakespeare Company Presents...

TWELFTH NIGHT
(OR WHAT YOU WILL)
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

7 SHOWS ONLY!!!
8/8-8/10 @ Deschutes Historical Society (7:30 pm)
8/11 @ Village Green Park, Sisters (3 pm)
8/15-8/16 @ Deschutes Memorial Gardens (7:30 pm)
8/17 @ Maragas Winery, Culver (7:30 pm)
Tickets $15 adv/ $20 at door @ bendticket.com