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Board keeps fair a hot-ticket item

LOVINGTON, N.M. – The Lea County Fair and Rodeo is the biggest community event for this nearly 4,400-square-mile section of land in extreme southeastern New Mexico.

There are 75,651 souls that live within the county’s borders, and most of them make their way to their county exposition throughout the 10-day affair, set for Friday, July 29-Saturday, Aug. 6, at the Lea County Fairgrounds in Lovington.

Beyond that, tens of thousands of others make the Lea County Fair and Rodeo part of their annual schedule. At just \$10 per person to enter the gates, the attraction to evenings out in Lovington is high, especially for folks that live in the region.

How can an event of this magnitude produce big-time concerts, a world-class rodeo, a first-rate carnival, livestock shows, other county exhibits and fun daily entertainment options?

The Lea County Commission underwrites the entire event. From paying for top concerts and acts to providing a big local purse for the PRCA Rodeo, the five people in charge of the county’s government make sure their people are entertained.

“The county commission is huge in what they do for the Lea County Fair and Rodeo and for the people of Lea County,” said Larry Wheeler, chairman of the Lea County Fair Board. “The added money they give us for our rodeo allows us to bring in all the big names in rodeo. Lea County is a big rodeo community, and everybody enjoys getting to see all the big names that come here.

“Of course, the concerts are a big draw now. I don’t think any event in this area tops what we can do as far as entertainment, but the county commission does just that.”

That’s big, and it’s a good sign of what each member of the county commission thinks of the fair and rodeo, and what that event means for the county’s residents. Each commissioner – Dean Jackson, Rebecca Long, Gary Edison, Jonathan Sena and Pat Sims – makes up one of five districts, and each district has two representatives that serve on the fair board.

That’s just the first step. The rest comes down to the budgeting process and what the commission decides to do with its allocation to the fair and rodeo each year. None of the money spent on concerts, rodeo, livestock shows or carnival can be designated without the approval of the commission.

But they do it every year. They realize the fair and rodeo’s importance to people from Tatum to Jal and all the farmsteads, ranches and homes in between.

It’s why over the years, the Lea County Fair and Rodeo patrons have seen world champions like Joe Beaver and Trevor Brazile and Ty Murray. It’s why they’ve seen, Dwight Yoakam, 38 Special, , Martina McBride and Cody Johnson.

“Because of what the county commission does, we’re able to keep our tickets at \$10 per person,” Wheeler said. “When you consider the price of going to a movie or seeing any concert, I’d say \$10 is a pretty inexpensive admission price. With \$10, you can go to a PRCA rodeo and catch a concert.

“In this day at time, that’s pretty awesome.”

Yes, it is.