

April 16, 2019
For Immediate Release

For more information contact:
Greg Stewart @ 248-7160

C.W. STATE FAIR PRESIDENT GREG STEWART ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

After nearly 48 years at the helm of the Central Washington State Fair, Greg Stewart is getting ready to retire from a job that was only supposed to be a short-term gig.

Stewart, who is the Fair's president and general manager, announced his retirement yesterday. His plan is to work through the end of 2019, to give the Fair board of directors a chance to hire his replacement.

When Stewart hired on as the assistant general manager of the then five-day Central Washington Fair in 1972, he took the job with the intention of only staying a short time, until he found something on the west side of the state, where he grew up.

"We were only going to stay a year or two," Stewart said of his wife Karen and his plan for their new life together. "We wanted to be closer to our families on the other side of the mountains."

Those plans changed when the following year, then longtime general manager Hugh King retired, and the board offered Stewart the job.

"I took the job and here we are, 48 years later." Stewart said. "We fell in love with the Yakima Valley and the fair industry."

The Central Washington State Fair and activities at the 120-acre fairgrounds, now known as State Fair Park, have grown considerably under Stewart's leadership. The Fair has become one of the biggest in the region, annually attracting over 300,000 people. Full time employment grew from 3 full-time employees in 1973 to 23 today. The staff oversees some 212 annual event days at State Fair Park, in addition to the now 10-day fair.

Along with his fair duties, Stewart has overseen the management of the Yakima Valley SunDome, located at State Fair Park. The 8000 seat SunDome, is a \$13 million multi-purpose facility used for numerous sporting events and graduation ceremonies. The building is also the home to concerts, rodeos, and many other events throughout the year.

He also oversees the management of Yakima County Stadium, which opened at State Fair Park in 1993. In 2014 Yakima County Stadium became the new home to the Yakima Valley Pippins, a West Coast League baseball team.

In 2000, the former Yakima Meadows horse racetrack, located on the grounds, was turned into a 3/8-mile racetrack, now called State Fair Raceway. The all-clay racetrack is utilized for Sprint car and dirt track car racing.

Active in community affairs, Stewart is a 21-year member of the Yakima Rotary Club, the Greater Yakima Chamber of Commerce, Yakima Valley Tourism, and the Central Washington Hispanic Chamber. In December 2017, Stewart received an award from the Yakima Latino Professional Association for his excellent leadership, vision and community support.

He was also selected as the Grand Marshall of the Sunfair Parade in 2015.

Last year Stewart received the Lifetime Achievement Award given by the Washington State Fairs Association Board of Directors for his accomplishments and contributions to the fair industry.

And it was just announced that Stewart will be honored with a Senate Resolution recognizing his accomplishments and contributions to the region on April 23. The resolution (SR 8630) was sponsored by Senator Honeyford, Senator King and Senator Warnick.

He has been active in several other fair industry organizations where he has served as a director and officer. Stewart was director and vice president of Western Fairs Association from 1979 to 1981 and was a Hall of Fame recipient in 1995. He had the honor of being the first person from outside the State of California to be on the Western Fairs Association Board and to receive their Hall of Fame award.

In 1984, Stewart received the designation of Certified Fair Executive from the International Association of Fairs and Expositions. He served as zone director for six years, treasurer for three years, was Second Vice Chairman in 2000, first vice chairman in 2001, chairman in 2002, and in 2003 was the past chairman. In 2010, Stewart received the International Association of Fairs and Expositions Hall of Fame award, the highest honor recognized by the fair industry.

Stewart was also a Director of the Mid-West Fairs Association, where members are selected by invitation only. In 2006, he served as president of that association.

Additionally, he has memberships with the Northwest Showman's League, International Association of Auditorium Managers, is a gold card member with the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association and a board member of the Outdoor Amusement Business Association.

Born and raised in Olympia, Washington, Stewart attended Centralia College in 1963 and graduated from Washington State University with a degree in Agricultural Economics in 1971. He served in the U. S. Army from 1966-1969, including a tour of duty in Vietnam.

Stewart and his wife, Karen, have two daughters, Tammy and Stephanie. In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, boating, horses, and fishing.

"This has to be the longest short-term job in history," Stewart said. "It has gone by fast, but I have loved every minute of it."

#