

Wisconsin Association of Fairs
Celebrating "A Golden Affair"



of crowning Wisconsin's
Fairest of the Fair

93rd Annual Convention

January 10-13, 2016

Chula Vista Resort * Wisconsin Dells



Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs
50 Years of Memories
1967-2016



The Wisconsin Association of Fairs and the Wisconsin State Fair have been proud sponsors of the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs program. A one-year, part time position, promoting Wisconsin's county, district and state fairs.

For 50 years, this program has promoted Wisconsin's fairs throughout the State of Wisconsin and beyond. The importance of the Wisconsin fairs, including the educational opportunities, community involvement and fun for the entire family, are values each of the Fairest of the Fairs has promoted to children, parents, community leaders and to the media.

As many of our previous Fairest of the Fairs have noted, this was not just a learning opportunity for the non-fairgoers. Each of the Fairest of the Fairs gained a lot during her year, as well. During their terms, each of the Fairest of the Fairs learned about Wisconsin, its agriculture, industries and people. Their travels took them from one corner of the state to the other in various towns and cities, attending unique events and visiting unforgettable places. They met a variety of people that not only helped and supported them throughout their year as Fairest, but those same people continued to help and support them for many years after. Serving as the Fairest of the Fairs provided these women with skills including communication, public relations, poise, spontaneity, charisma, and a multitude of life-long lessons.

During the early years of the program, the Fairest of the Fairs candidates wore evening gowns and learned dance routines. Today's candidates wear business suits, prepare radio advertisements and attend workshops which prepare them to serve as the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs. The skills they learn during the three and a half-day interview process help them not only in their role as Fairest of the Fairs, but also in their role as community leaders.

Fifty years of Fairests now span the country from Alaska to Massachusetts. And, their passion for Wisconsin Fairs did not end at the end of their reign. These amazing women continue to promote the importance and value of county fairs in their new communities and cherish the opportunities they experienced during their year. As you will read, this elite group of women was honored to serve as Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs and will cherish their memories for a lifetime.

Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs

1 st	Connie Platts.....	Walworth County Fair.....	1967
2 nd	Pattie Lee Grantin	Sauk County Fair	1968
3 rd	Peggy Gay	Columbia County Fair	1969
4 th	Gay Alberts	Milwaukee County 4-H Fair	1970
5 th	Courtenay Francis	Northern Wisconsin State Fair.....	1971
6 th	Julie Truax.....	Trempealeau County Fair.....	1972
7 th	Cheryl Humer	Waukesha County Fair.....	1973
8 th	Linda Klapperich	Calumet County Fair.....	1974
9 th	Holly Humphrey	Rock County 4-H Fair.....	1975
10 th	Susan Frank	Waukesha County Fair.....	1976
11 th	Bonnie Bagstad.....	Vernon County Fair	1977
12 th	Faye Wink	Calumet County Fair.....	1978
13 th	Valerie Hegna.....	Sauk County Fair	1979
14 th	Brenda Huber.....	Waukesha County Fair.....	1980
15 th	Clare Folger	Ozaukee County Fair	1981
16 th	Kay Matthys.....	Barron County Fair	1982
17 th	Carol Mann	Waukesha County Fair.....	1983
18 th	Heidi Scadden	Washington County Fair.....	1984
19 th	Lisa Nelson.....	Rock County 4-H Fair.....	1985
20 th	Dawn Stein	LaCrosse Interstate Fair.....	1986
21 st	Kim Nettesheim.....	Walworth County Fair.....	1987
22 nd	Ann Morris.....	Waukesha County Fair.....	1988
23 rd	Elli Hackemer	Kenosha County Fair	1989
24 th	Kay Simmet.....	Manitowoc County Fair	1990
25 th	Angie Hafemeister	Dodge County Fair	1991
26 th	Michelle Bielke	Fond du Lac County Fair	1992
27 th	Sue Adams.....	Fond du Lac County Fair	1993
28 th	Katie Olson	Barron County Fair	1994
29 th	Jane Koepke	Waukesha County Fair.....	1995
30 th	Courtney Ott	Calumet County Fair.....	1996



Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs

continued. . .

31 st	Stephanie Brunner	Manitowoc County Fair	1997
32 nd	Julia Ellison	Barron County Fair	1998
33 rd	Angela Smith	Walworth County Fair	1999
34 th	Hayley Barker	Green County Fair	2000
35 th	Allison Gonske	Barron County Fair	2001
36 th	Jill Makovec	Grant County Fair	2002
37 th	Amber Swenor	Shawano County Fair	2003
38 th	Gena Cooper	Waukesha County Fair	2004
39 th	Susan Orth	Grant County Fair	2005
40 th	Kimberly Schoessow	Ozaukee County Fair	2006
41 st	Sheri Nelson	Walworth County Fair	2007
42 nd	Claire Carroll	Langlade County Fair	2008
43 rd	Melissa Ploeckelman	Wisconsin Valley Fair	2009
44 th	Natalie Salkowski	Ozaukee County Fair	2010
45 th	Alexis Nickelotti	Vernon County Fair	2011
46 th	Richelle Kastenson	Racine County Fair	2012
47 th	Steffani Koch	Dodge County Fair	2013
48 th	Kaitlyn Riley	Crawford County Fair	2014
49 th	Deanna Schlies	Brown County Fair	2015
50 th	2016

Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs by County

BARRON COUNTY

1982Kay Matthys
1994Katie Olson
1998Julia Ellison
2001Allison Gonske

BROWN COUNTY

2015Deanna Schlies

CALUMET COUNTY

1974Linda Klapperich
1978Faye Wink
1996Courtney Ott

COLUMBIA COUNTY

1969Peggy Gay

CRAWFORD COUNTY

2014... Kaitlyn Riley

DODGE COUNTY

1991Angie Hafemeister
2013Steffani Koch

GRANT COUNTY

2002Jill Makovec
2005Susan Orth

GREEN COUNTY

2000Hayley Barker

FOND DU LAC COUNTY

1992Michelle Bielke
1993Sue Adams

KENOSHA COUNTY

1989 Elli Hackemer

LACROSSE INTERSTATE

1986 Dawn Stein

LANGLADE COUNTY

2008.....Claire Carroll

MANITOWOC COUNTY

1990 Kay Simmet
1997 Stephanie Brunner

MILWAUKEE COUNTY

1970 Gay Alberts

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

1971 Courtenay Francis

OZAUKEE COUNTY

1981 Clare Folger
2006 Kimberly Schoessow
2010 Natalie Salkowski

RACINE COUNTY

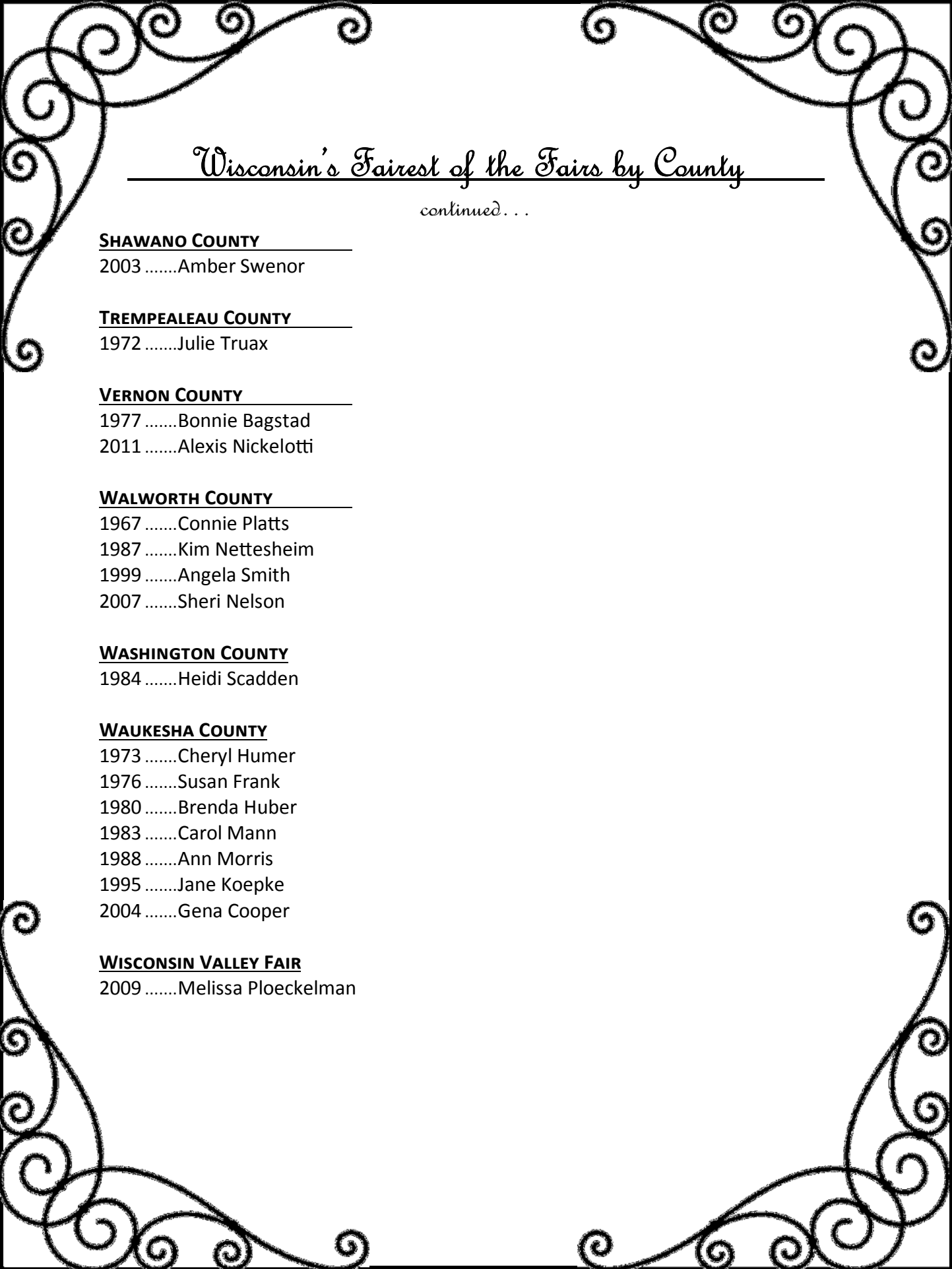
2012 Richelle Castenson

ROCK COUNTY

1975 Holly Humphrey
1985 Lisa Nelson

SAUK COUNTY

1968 Patti Lee Grantin
1979 Valerie Hegna



Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs by County

continued...

SHAWANO COUNTY

2003Amber Swenor

TREMPEALEAU COUNTY

1972Julie Truax

VERNON COUNTY

1977Bonnie Bagstad

2011Alexis Nickelotti

WALWORTH COUNTY

1967Connie Platts

1987Kim Nettesheim

1999Angela Smith

2007Sheri Nelson

WASHINGTON COUNTY

1984Heidi Scadden

WAUKESHA COUNTY

1973Cheryl Humer

1976Susan Frank

1980Brenda Huber

1983Carol Mann

1988Ann Morris

1995Jane Koepke

2004Gena Cooper

WISCONSIN VALLEY FAIR

2009Melissa Ploeckelman

Connie (Platts) McCallister

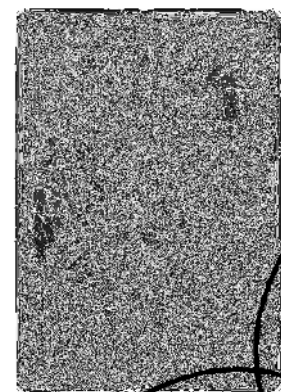
Walworth County *ca* 1967

In 1984 I graduated with a Masters Degree of Divinity from Luther Seminary in St. Paul and was ordained a Lutheran Pastor. I have served congregations in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Presently I am the executive director for "SonShine Early Learning Centers", a non profit Christian corporation serving three areas in the St. Paul area. I have been married for 46 years and have three grown children and five grandchildren. I plan to retire March of 2017 at the age of seventy.

My favorite memory of being fairest, there are so many, but if I have to choose I would say it was greeting the little children that came to the fair daily.

My most embarrassing memory as fairest was meeting Governor Knowles in my baby doll pajamas. We were staying in the old administration building. The Governor was also spending the night in the old administration building. We turned in for the night and heard a bat flying around in our room. My princesses began screaming. I grabbed my pillow and ran for the door. I knocked on the door of our chaperone. She told me to run downstairs and get the night guard. So I did, running as quickly as I could covering up the best I could with my pillow. As I returned upstairs all the screaming had brought out Governor Knowles and his entourage into the hall way. He walked up to me and extended his hand to say it is nice to meet the fairest of fairs. I am sure my face was as red as could be as I stood in my blue baby doll pajamas and holding tight on to my pillow.

The greatest benefit for me was to have the opportunity to speak in front of the grandstand each evening as I welcomed people to the fair. It gave me confidence and I discovered I enjoyed speaking publicly, which has helped me in my career as a pastor.

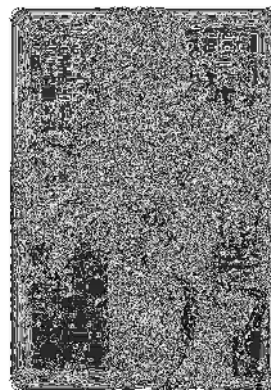


Patti Lee Grantin

Sauk County 1968

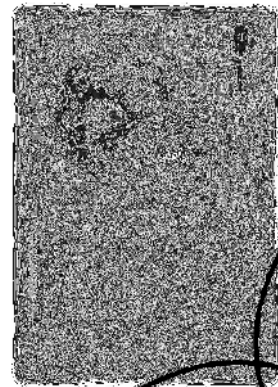
From the 30th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

I was serving as a flight attendant for United Airlines, and I lived with my husband Bucky Gros in Denver, Colorado.



Peggy Gay

Columbia County 1969



Gay (Alberts) Ruby

Milwaukee County *c*s 1970

I have spent the last fifteen years as a Public Affairs Disaster Assistant Reservist for FEMA, following decades of work in media and public relations. My husband Jake and I were blessed with two children; our married son John is an actor in Los Angeles and our married daughter Jeannine is a medical doctor in Madison, WI. We are awaiting the birth of two grandchildren ~ one from each couple! Before moving back to Wisconsin, Jake and I lived in California and Washington State. We enjoy traveling, biking, hiking, and reading.

I have three favorite memories of being Fairest of the Fairs: The honor of giving ribbons out to horse and livestock award winners, the thrill of announcing nightly grandstand acts, and the excitement of riding on the horse-drawn wagons during the daily 5 pm parade.

I don't remember an embarrassing moment as fairest, although I am very good at blocking out negative memories!!!

My biggest benefit of being Fairest is that I met my husband, Jacob W Ruby, at the 1970 fair during my tenure as Fairest. He also dated the 1970 Alice in Dairyland! We married in 1973 so have been married almost 43 years.



Missy Courtenay (Francis) Stepanek

Northern WI State *ca* 1971

Jeff and I have been married for 43 years. We have lived in Eau Claire since 1979. We have three grown children, all of whom are gainfully employed, healthy and happy! We also have been blessed with three beautiful granddaughters and a wonderful grandson. My husband is a veterinarian and we, together, have had the privilege and enjoyment of owning the Ark Animal Hospital in Eau Claire for 31 years. I am very involved in our church, as well as the non-profit world, especially with literacy. We love to travel as often as we can.....and we cherish the times with our family.

Looking back, which was a **long** time ago, my favorite overall memory of being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is the people that I had the privilege of meeting and working with while living on the grounds. Not just the celebrities, but I remember the children, who were so excited to be at the Fair! I also really enjoyed getting to hear the *Kids From Wisconsin* perform every day!

I think I was the last Fairest of the Fairs to actually be crowned at the Fair. I believe that all succeeding Fairest of the Fairs have been crowned in January at the Convention. I think that makes my tenure the shortest!

I don't recall any really embarrassing moments as the State Fairest of the Fairs, but at our local Fair, when I was crowning the next Miss Northern Wisconsin State Fair, I stepped in front of her to put her crown on her. A local photographer, from the paper, took a picture of me doing this, put it in the paper and wrote "things not to do when crowning your successor"!! I never made that mistake twice!!

I think the biggest benefits for me from being Fairest of the Fairs were becoming more self-confident and getting to know our state, and all that it has to offer, a little better.



Julie (Truax) Gore

Trempealeau County 1972

From the 40th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

I am living in River Falls, WI with my husband, Lance. We have three children: Corey, Lacey and Kensey. I am the Director of Sales for MVP Marketing and Design. I retired as the program director for the former Miss River Falls Pageant Program, currently the River Falls Ambassador Program, which I enjoyed working with for 21 years.

My favorite memory is the reaction from my hometown and family after I was crowned Fairest of the Fairs. Everyone was thrilled and excited for me and the attention it brought to our village.

My most embarrassing moment was when I slipped and fell in the mud at State Fair!

Serving as the Fairest of the Fairs mean several things to me then and even to this day!



Cheryl (Kumer) Livesay

Waukesha County 1973

I work in business development for a psychiatric hospital. I am married to a wonderful man, and we currently have two four-legged feline children.

My favorite memory and honor was representing the fair. I grew up with the fair. My dad was a New Berlin Lions Club member and the corn roast was a big deal in our house. They were thrilled when I was crowned.

My most embarrassing moment as Fairest of the Fairs was almost getting fired from the job.

My biggest benefit for me being the Fairest of the Fairs is that it was a wonderful opportunity to experience a different aspect of the fair.



Linda Klapperich

Calumet County 1974

From the 40th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

My daughter, Angelina, and I reside in Wasilla, Alaska, where I have been a middle school special education teacher for 15 years. I am currently pursuing my master's degree and was recently selected as "Teacher of the Year."

While I have many fond memories from my year as Fairest, one of my favorites is that during my year they named a sundae "The Fairest of the Fairs Sundae" made with all my favorite ingredients, especially lots of nuts and butterscotch.

My most embarrassing moment which actually took place immediately before being Fairest of the Fairs. I was dining with the judges and was cutting a slightly greasy pork chop. Suddenly, I had a large grease spot on my bright yellow gown. Fortunately, I had another gown in my room. I quietly excused myself from the table, and my mom helped me make a quick change. I laugh when I think of the dilemma I was in and happy I had another gown for a situation just like this!

I was so proud and excited to win the state title. I felt a deep pride for all of the fair's activities and was excited to be an ambassador for a program I really believed in.



Holly Humphrey, MD

Rock County 4-H ☞ 1975

From the 30th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

I am a physician and an Associate Professor of medicine at the University of Chicago-Pritzker School of Medicine, from which I graduated in 1983. Since 1989, I have served on their faculty as Director of Medicine Education Programs for the Department of Medicine.

One of the benefits of being Fairest was meeting so many people from different walks of life and meeting wonderful musicians.



Susan Frank

Waukesha County ☞ 1976

It is with great sadness we report Susan passed away in the late 1970s. She was married, and she was an elementary school teacher at the time of her death. She is missed by everyone in our fair family.



Bonnie (Bagstad) Anderson

Vernon County ☞ 1977

I attended UW La Crosse and earned my Bachelor of Science Degrees in Health and Art Education, and Master's Degree in Human Performance/Cardiac Rehabilitation. I married my high school sweetheart, Mark. We have two children, Nicholas and Natalie, and one granddaughter Lily. I manage the Cardiopulmonary Diagnostics and Rehabilitation, Respiratory Therapy, Diabetic Education, and Sleep Medicine departments at Vernon Memorial Healthcare. I serve on the Board of Directors for both the American Association for Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation and its Wisconsin affiliate and have been honored to receive the Award of Excellence, Rural Health Ambassador Award, Presidential Recognition Award, AACVPR Distinguished Service Award, and Wisconsin Distinguished Service Award. I am active with our church and along with my husband, have led 8 youth and adult mission trips to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

There are many favorite memories of being fairest, but one of the best was having longtime friends and Vernon County Fair and 4-H supporters, Armin Fruechte, Bob Fredrick, Joanne Hornby, and Helen Hornby present in the audience when I was crowned the first Vernon County recipient of the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs title. Their look of pride and joy in having Vernon County recognized is something that I will remember and treasure forever! But some of my other favorite memories include being asked by Art Lundell of our local weekly newspaper if he could come down to the fair and follow me around for a day to take photos for the paper; meeting and introducing all the grandstand entertainers including the Oak Ridge Boys and Kenny Rogers; Watching and congratulating the winner of the Bettenhausen 200 on the Milwaukee mile; trying to eat Cream Puffs without wearing too much of it; Not being allowed to go to the Midway ("queens just don't do that"); watching the Kids From Wisconsin perform; and probably the most significant memory was being in the Cattle Barn when the announcement came over the Public Address system that Elvis Presley has passed away and suddenly the laughter and music seemed to be hushed.

I remember two most embarrassing moments. One was driving my first solo mission to Milwaukee in my used Mercury Capri...It was about 98 degrees outside and my car overheated...I turned the heat on high and the fan on full blast and prayed that I wouldn't stall in the middle of all those cars! When I finally arrived at the State Fair office, I can't imagine what they must have thought about this red faced, sweaty new Fairest!! That same day, as I was leaving home to come to the State Fair, my dad who is an avid fisherman, was leaving home to go on a Canadian fishing trip. After my eventful arrival at State Fair Park, I finally got to my room and opened my suitcase to find fishing lures and other bait and tackle. The only thing that kept me from tears was picturing my dad in Canada opening his suitcase only to find a crown and pantyhoes!! 😊😊

My biggest benefit was the experience of meeting and talking to people from around the state during that exciting year of travel to county fairs and other events on behalf of the Wisconsin State Fair really opened my eyes to the wonderful people and places in Wisconsin. Although the work of public relations did not become my profession, the skills learned during that year have certainly contributed to my career decisions, taught me many tips of customer satisfaction, and fostered my love for public service.



Faye Wink Klessig

Calumet County 1978

I am married to my husband Steve for 31 years. We have 4 wonderful children, Katie, who is the marketing Manager at Animart in Beaver Dam; Troy, who is a Sr. Analyst/Auditor at Verizon Corp. in Orlando; Blake, who will graduate from UW Madison in May and will continue on to attend graduate school to become a chiropractor; and Hope, who will be graduating from high school and will attend college for musical theater. I recently retired from more than 30 years in a dental career. I enjoy spending time with family and traveling with my youngest daughter as she performs nationally and internationally.

My favorite part about being Fairest was meeting people from all walks of life, especially grandstand performers and Bob Hope calling me back on stage.

I don't really recall an embarrassing moment as fairest, but it might have been when we had the 6 & 8 horse hitches in the daily parade, and getting on the wagons gracefully in a dress.

The biggest benefit I earned as being Fairest was the communication skills. The public relation skills have helped me throughout my life.



Valerie (Kegna) Kolschbach

Sauk County 1979

From the 30th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

I have been married for 25 years to my husband, Mike, and together we have three children: Brienne, Chase and Chelsea. We own and operate a 150-cow registered Holstein dairy farm, where our son is also a partner in the operation. In addition, I work part-time at a local bridal store.

Looking back when I was Fairest. I was on my own as far as traveling around the state to attend different events. One of the Sauk County Fair board members, Ed Reuter, owned a large motor home. He had large signs printed to hang on the front/sides as he and his family personally escorted me to every fair, parade, etc. I attended that year. To this day we often reminisce about those trips.

It was an honor to share my enthusiasm and knowledge of the State Fair with others and represent an event of such magnitude and value. I still enjoy the fair and help out with our county Fairest program. It will always be a special memory that our daughter, Brienne, was selected as the 2001 Sauk County Fairest of the Fairs and was also a Top 10 Finalist at the state contest.



Brenda Huber

Waukesha County 1980



Clare (Folger) Boyle

Ozaukee County ✧ 1981

I have been married for 27 years. We live in Shirley, Massachusetts, which is 40 miles west of Boston. We have 2 sons: Teddy (23), who is a December graduate from Marquette University with a degree in civil engineering and music; and Alec (20), who is a sophomore at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, majoring in biomedical engineering. My husband is a 29 year veteran-civil engineer with the Federal Aviation Administration. I am the buyer/manager at Red Tail Golf Club in Devens, Massachusetts—which is ranked #47th in the country for public golf courses. Red Tail was built on the former Ft. Devens Army Base, and it is the first course to be a registered member of The National Audubon Society. I also have a professional make-up artist business called "Perfectly Clare", and am an advocate for the National Kidney Foundation. Today (Jan 13th) marks the 16th anniversary of my kidney donation to a friend.

My favorite memory of being the Fairest of the Fairs is assisting in the steering of the Budweiser Clydesdale's 40-horse-hitch through the entire parade route.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs was introducing and presenting The Beach Boys on the Main Stage with a gift basket from WI, and Brian Wilson threw it into the audience yelling, "We don't eat this garbage; how dare you give this to us???" He and the band were booed off the stage, and not invited to return for many, many years.

My biggest benefit from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is that—in spite of a broken-off tooth with blood on a white gown in front of hundreds of Boy Scouts, and cold, wind and rain during the formal introduction of "Willy B. Bacon"— the show must go on!

Manners matter, and graciousness is always appreciated!

And...to quote Father John Naus SJ, Marquette University,
"See Written on the forehead of everyone you meet,
Make Me Feel Important." It's the motto I live by.



Kay Matthys

Barron County 1982



Carol (Mann) Heyn

Waukesha County 1983

I have been happily married for 25 years to Ross Heyn. I am a teacher of middle school grades at a small Lutheran school. I have 3 wonderful daughters who daily bring a smile to my face! My husband and I live in the country in Northern California and share our property with a large dog, named Sarge, 10 laying hens, and 2 steers. We have a large garden and many fruit trees that provide for us well into the winter months!

My favorite memory has to be meeting so many wonderful people! From the staff in the office, to the Runge family who I rode with in the daily parade, from the 4-H kids to the exhibitors, from the fairgoers across the state at the county fairs, to those attending the State Fair. Everyone was pleasant and happy to discuss what they liked about the Fair. Also, presenting the assortment of Wisconsin sausage and cheese to the Main Stage acts was a thrill! Got to meet Loverboy, Wayne Newton, Kenny Rogers, and the Beach Boys!

Although very cool, my most embarrassing moment was: after I presented the box of goodies to Kenny Rogers before the show, my chaperone and I didn't have seats to watch it. So, we hung out backstage for awhile. Well, Mr. Rogers saw us there and during his show, he invited me onstage with him to personally thank me for the cheese! He said he loved Wisconsin cheese!! I will not forget that!

The way I benefited most was the amount of confidence the whole experience gave me. My kids always laugh at me and say that I will talk to anyone, anytime about almost anything! I also grew to love the family farm. It is truly amazing how many farms are still being operated by multiple generations within the same family! That is not seen much these days. Having our gardens, orchard, and animals is our little way of living the "family farm!"



Heidi (Scadden) Miller

Washington County 1984

I am currently married to Rex Miller and have three children - Ali (24), August (23) and Aubre (20). We have made our home on Pewaukee Lake, in the Town of Delafield in Waukesha County for 26 years.

In 1985, I received my B.S. degree in the School of Allied Health from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I was a member of the UW-Milwaukee Women's Swim Team and earned All-American honors all four years. In 1986, I was selected as a Finalist for the Alice in Dairyland Program. I remained in my field before making the decision with Rex to be a stay at home mom and raise our children.

At that time, I served on the Board of Directors for the Waukesha County Fair and was the Chairperson for the Waukesha County Fairest of the Fairs program. I continued with the Fairest of the Fairs program and served as the Chairperson for the Wisconsin Association of Fairs - State Fairest of the Fairs Program. In the past, I have been a judge for local County and State Fairest of the Fairs Programs. For several years I had the honor of assisting the Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs during the duration of the Wisconsin State Fair. It was a pleasure to work with so many gifted young women!! I am proud to say that I have missed only one year of attending the Wisconsin State Fair since my reign!!!

I have served on the Town of Delafield's Park and Recreation Committee and Sunday School Superintendent for Gethsemane United Methodist Church in Pewaukee, WI. Ten years ago, I returned to work as a Cardiovascular Technician for Aurora St. Lukes's Medical Center in their Cardiac Catheterization Lab.

The best think I remember is I enjoyed traveling to all the County Fairs, experiencing the unique qualities of each one. Meeting all the wonderful people at the county fairs and at the Wisconsin State Fair. It was rewarding to promote the State and County Fairs throughout Wisconsin and Illinois via radio, TV promotions, local community events and parades.

The most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs moment was Eating a Wisconsin State Fair Cream Puff the wrong way!!

The biggest benefit I had while being fairest was that I learned more about our great state of Wisconsin - It's agriculture, our industries, all of the recreational opportunities our state has to offer and meeting so many people. Allowing me to promote the fair industry in so many venues.



Lisa Field (Nelson) Stark

Rock County 4-H ☞ 1985

My son, Harry, who is 15, and my husband and I live in Madison. I work part-time at the Family Clinic of Natural Medicine where I work in the lab doing blood draws and processing tests.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is giving a cheese plate to the Oak Ridge Boys

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was being saved the embarrassment when one of my friends actually showed me how to milk a cow since I was going to do a cow milking contest. I grew up on a farm, but not a dairy farm!

I benefited most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because I really learned to adapt a message to my audience. I still use a skill in public speaking and also when I perform doing music in the Madison area.



Dawn (Stein) Kapka

La Crosse Interstate 1986

I am a wife of 27 years to my husband and best friend, Stanton. I am a mother of three. Brittney 25, Kyle 23, and Kevin 21. I am a Principal of a Catholic Elementary School in the Northwest suburb of Chicago.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is that I loved traveling throughout the summer and visiting county fairs throughout the state of Wisconsin. However, I especially enjoyed the frenzy of those 11 days in West Allis in August. I recall so vividly friends and family members that came to visit me, and experience the fair...many of them for the very first time. I also recall meeting so many new people that enjoyed participating in the fair at the State level with a myriad of competitive exhibitions of livestock, agriculture, and award winning products! The pride that those individuals displayed was a fabulous take away for me!

Fortunately, I do not recall any "embarrassing" moments as Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs; however, on a positive note, I do recall the constant warmth and welcome that I felt...which gave me the courage to stand up and participate in ways expected of the Fairest of the Fairs. I was somewhat shy by nature, so this experience stretched me in some wonderful ways!

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs with the confidence that I gleaned from this experience, is still with me today!



Kim (Nettesheim) Flitcraft

Walworth County ☞ 1987

I am married to Tony and I have 4 handsome sons, ages 22, 21, 15 & 13. I also have an 8 year old beautiful daughter, who we adopted from China 6 years ago. I work with my husband managing the office of our plumbing and real estate businesses. I also hold a Bachelor of Science Degree in nursing. I continue to live in my hometown of Elkhorn, near my extended family. Each year, I get the privilege of attending the greatest county fair in the Midwest, the Walworth Co Fair! Every Labor Day weekend, we spend the week camping at our county fair, watching our kids exhibit their 4H projects and making more fair family memories!

I have countless fond memories of being the 1987 Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs. My most cherished experience is that after 29 years of being crowned, I continue to maintain many of the friendships I established while being Fairest of the Fairs. The people I had the opportunity to meet and form a relationship with is truly the greatest memory and gift.

Without a doubt, it was giving the longest, most boring farewell speech ever! I still feel awful about this "embarrassing moment" 29 years later. I sincerely apologize to each and every person who was there!

My greatest benefit is most definitely the lifelong friendships I made. For one example, in 1987 I met Kris Gratz-Welsh, Alice in Dairyland, when I served as Fairest of the Fairs. We got to know each other fairly well working together during the State Fair. We continued our friendship by keeping in touch throughout the years. In 1997, Kris called and told me she was moving to Elkhorn. I was so excited to have her living near me in my hometown. My oldest 3 kids were in the same grades as Kris's 3 kids, and they are all very good friends to this day. We do many family outings together and Kris and Dave are Godparents to our daughter. Kris is one of my closest friends and it all started at the State Fair in 1987!

Being Fairest also inspired me to apply for Alice in Dairyland and in 1990, I was hired as the 43rd Alice in Dairyland. The job of Fairest of the Fairs certainly prepared me for the rigorous interview process and demanding job of Alice. To this day I'm proud to say, I was the first woman in Wisconsin to be hired as Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs and Alice in Dairyland!



Anne (Morris) Beier

Waukesha County 1988

I am a fourth grade teacher in Mt. Horeb. I have two children, Laura who is a freshman at the University of Minnesota, and Josh who is a sophomore at Mt. Horeb High School.

My favorite memory of being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs was meeting so many people throughout the state, and I enjoyed hanging out with the Kids from Wisconsin.

My most embarrassing moment of being Fairest of the Fairs was, after meeting a cute guy who worked at the fair, I invited him to the Alabama concert and was excited about new possibilities. Later that week, I saw him holding hands with someone else!

While I was fairest the greatest benefit to me was that I improved my public relations skills through all of the TV and radio interviews. I learned how to think on my feet!



Elli (Kackemer) Dai

Kenosha County 1989

I've been married to my husband Tony for nearly 25 years, and we have three kids, Jordan, Elena, and Julia. I work at Wells Fargo as the Head of Benefits for the company.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is that I loved traveling to all of the county fairs. Each one was unique, but the common threads were how warmly I was welcomed and the fantastic people that I met in each county.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was one day during State Fair, I was asked to wear a formal dress for the parade, and it hooked at the back of my neck. As I kept stretching to wave, the hooks came undone, and my dress threatened to fall off. Our fantastic driver, Russ, was laughing with me and said, "Keep smiling and waving, no matter what!" Thankfully, we made it to the end of the parade all in one piece.

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs by having such a diverse role as a young woman prepared me so well for the career that I've had since then. Whether traveling to new places, doing radio or TV interviews, cold-calling new contacts, or jumping into the many different activities across the state, being Fairest helped me to be flexible, adaptable, and have confidence in any situation.



Kay (Simmet) Pickar

Manitowoc County 1990

I have been married for 21 years. I am a mom to three children, and an active community volunteer, including 4-H.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs includes any time I could make it back to my home county to promote the Manitowoc County fair and Fairest program.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was announcing a grand stand event at the Fond du Lac fair and there was a very long delay on the PA system. I waited for my voice to catch up and my mom said I sounded like I was drunk!

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because the experience gave me many wonderful opportunities to meet people, be interviewed, perform and be quick on my feet.



Angie (Kafemeister) Molkentin

Dodge County 1991

Jon and I have three children: Ted is a sophomore and Katie is a freshman at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School; Tristan is in 5th grade at Morning Star Lutheran School in Jackson, Wis. I am a freelance public relations writer and strategist.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is that I enjoyed meeting so many people and seeing how dedicated they were to their community and to the success of their fairs. Those memories of the local flavor of each Wisconsin community have stuck with me throughout the years and helped me truly appreciate Wisconsin.

I can't recall any particular embarrassing moments as Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs; however, I do know that it bothers me when I meet someone that I know I have met before, and I can't recall their name. That is something I have worked to improve, and it really started with these statewide travels.

I benefited most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because I gained an appreciation for the heart of service that so many people have in our Wisconsin communities. I saw it in my own county, and to experience it everywhere I traveled helped me truly appreciate what can be accomplished when people work together. I saw people who really cared about the traditions in their communities problem solve for keeping those traditions alive while also progressing with the times and meeting the needs of changing communities. That challenge never goes away, no matter where you serve. Over time, I've learned that the truly successful are those who do not lose heart and keep the will to serve others.



Michelle (Bielke) Priebusch

Fond du Lac County 1992

From the 30th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

I currently live in Cottage Grove, WI with my husband, Dan, and three children: Michael, Matthew and Elizabeth. I am a stay-at-home mom, but up until recently, worked part-time for Dean Care HMO typing at home for the Psychiatry Department.

Two funny stories come to mind when reflecting on my year as Fairest. Both include parking lots. At the Waukesha County Fair, my mom and I could not remember where we parked. Before we knew it, we were separated in the parking lot and calling out to each other. The other was after the Walworth County Fair, when one of the Board members drove them out to the car, I noticed it was the one with the visor light on. I said, "Apparently I left the light on for us!"

"I think the Fairest of the Fairs is an excellent way to promote our county and state fairs. I am truly honored to be part of such a great piece of fair history."



Sue (Adams) Bett

Fond du Lac County 1993

I live in Santa Clarita, California with my husband Matt Bett and my four girls, Jasmine (11 years old), Ashlyn (9 years old), Isabelle (6 years old) and Sophia (4 years old). I am Assistant Principal at West Creek Academy, an elementary school with 940 students, in the city of Santa Clarita, California. Over the last 7 years I have been fortunate to have one to three of my daughters at my schools that I was an Assistant Principal at. Prior to becoming an Assistant Principal, I taught 3rd grade in Beverly Hills.

What is my favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs? Truthfully I loved it all! I loved that everyday was unique and that I was able to try unique experiences ever day. I remember racing on tiny tractors, racing to eat a cream puff the fastest, being interviewed by about 98 radio stations, introducing the Kids from Wisconsin, being on TV while in the pig barn, meeting the County Fairests and hosting them for a day at the Wisconsin State Fair. My two very favorite memories were being crowned the Fairest of the Fairs as it was such a surprise and my other favorite part truly every day at the Wisconsin State Fair. I remember truly not wanting the Wisconsin State Fair to end as I was having such a blast!

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment—I always think of how I loved and tried everything during my time as Fairest. I even decided to go down the big slide with Willy B. Bacon. I was wearing a pretty tight short dress. Little did I know how slippery the slide was and then next thing I know I was lying down on my back with my legs in the air. Determined to show I was a good sport, we tried it again and the same thing happened, maybe just a little less exposure. The second time was the last time.

What did you benefit most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs? This might not be the response you're looking for, but I'd have to say my husband Matt. I had met Matt my freshman year of college and my sophomore year he had transferred to a different college. I became the Wisconsin Fairest my junior year of college. Matt saw my picture of being crowned the Fairest of the Fairs on the front page of the newspaper and said, "I know Sue Adams, I went to college with her." He wrote me a creative congratulations letter and asked me to call him. We went out on our first date exactly a month after being crowned Fairest of the Fairs. Matt was there during my journey of Fairest of the Fairs. Matt even Sumo wrestled me at the Wisconsin State Fair (somehow I won, perks of being Fairest I guess). Having Matt in my life when I was WI Fairest of the Fairs was a great start to our last 22 years together, including our family with four wonderful daughters.



Katie (Olson) Nesbit

Barron County ☞ 1994

I live in Sun Prairie, WI with my husband, Rick, and our two boys (Jackson, 10 and Mason, 7). I am an assistant principal at Sun Prairie High School. Prior to this position, I was a New Teacher Mentor and teacher in the Sun Prairie School District.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is that on one of the first days of the fair, Alice in Dairyland (Angela Rule) and I ended up at the WKTI radio booth together. The radio announcer, Lips Labelle, thought it was funny that we were both there at the same time, so he decided that we needed to be in competition with each other. Everyday after that, Angela and I met at the WKTI booth at the same time and Lips Labelle had a contest arranged for us. Throughout the run of the fair, we competed in cream puff eating, arm wrestling, rock wall climbing, cow milking, veggie racing, etc. People got really into the competition both live at the fair and listening to it on the radio. Angela and I had a blast with the whole thing.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was that one day, I mentioned to Heidi (my State Fair escort and golf cart driver) that I thought one of the workers at the fair who drove a golf cart with supplies was cute. Heidi arranged a meeting where this fair worker and I were both interviewed by a radio station. I was so embarrassed that I could hardly answer any of the questions the radio host was asking.

I benefited most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because I gained an incredible amount of confidence and independence being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs. I grew up in a small town, so living in Milwaukee and traveling the state of Wisconsin were new adventures for me. The places I traveled, the people I met, and the experiences I had all helped shape me into the confident and independent person I am today.



Jane Koepke

Waukesha County ☞ 1995

From the 30th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

After I graduated from college, I spent two years volunteering in Ecuador. Currently, I am the Development Director for Messmer Catholic Schools and reside in Milwaukee, WI.

My favorite memories include the cream puff eating contests and meeting so many different people from all over the state.

Serving as the Fairest of the Fairs was a wonderful opportunity to really do a lot for the state of Wisconsin and the fairs. In addition, when you serve in this type of role, you get so much more in return than you actually give.



Courtney (Ott) Booth

Calumet County 1996

I live in Plymouth, Wisconsin with my husband Chris, a large animal veterinarian, and our four children (Cole-14, Ava-12, Campbell-9 and Royce -4). Together, we operate Booth-Haven Holsteins which consists of a select group of show heifers and cows with our primary focus on Red & White Holsteins. Our children also enjoy raising show pigs. My main focus is being available as a wife and mom, however this past fall, my husband and I started our own small business with a company called AdvoCare, a world-class nutrition company specializing in health and wellness.

My favorite memory of serving as Wisconsin's Fairest of the Fairs is developing the Willy B. Bacon and Violet the Cow traveling Roadshow. This marketing campaign took the three of us to over 10 county fairs to promote the individual county fair's entertainment line-up as well as the Wisconsin State Fair. To participate, local fair attendees dressed-up as close as they could to their favorite State Fair mascot "Willy or Violet." We generated thousands of extra non-paid media coverage for Wisconsin fairs during the campaign.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was during the 11 day run of the Wisconsin State Fair. I presented a welcome speech in my sleep to my immediate family in a hotel room.

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because I was blessed to be able to build friendships with people from all over our great state of Wisconsin while sharing the love of the Fair Industry. I treasure all the unique opportunities I experienced in this role and enjoy sharing my knowledge and love of service with other young women as well as my own daughters by leading our local Sheboygan County Fairest of the Fairs program.



Stephanie (Brunner) Polak

Manitowoc County 1997

From the 40th Anniversary questionnaire, she replied:

I live with my husband, Jason, in Oshkosh, WI. We have two children, Owen and Reid. I will be graduating with my master's degree in special education in May. Currently, I work at Oshkosh East High School as a special education teacher and serve as the head boys and girls cross country coach.

I could not pick a favorite memory from my time as Fairest of the Fairs, but I remember it as one of the greatest experience in my life. Traveling all over the state and meeting wonderful people gave me several memories that will last forever.

My most embarrassing time as Fairest was when I tried to be an auctioneer at the auctioneer contest. Everyone just laughed and laughed at me.

It was a great honor to represent and promote the fair industry.



Julia Ellison Loiselle

Barron County 1998



Angela (Smith) Kargus

Walworth County 2019

I am the managing veterinarian for a small animal practice in Richmond, Virginia. My husband and I have been married for 13 years and we have two dogs.

I have so many wonderful memories of my time as Fairest. A few of my favorite include winning the Celebrity Swine Showmanship Contest (I can't begin to tell you how excited I was to see my hog jump off the ramp for 50 bonus points!), appearing on the Orion Samuelson radio show, and landing a front page story in the Wisconsin State Journal.

My most embarrassing moment occurred at the Fond du Lac County Fair. It rained heavily the night before, and without thinking I parked in the grassy parking lot just outside the fairgrounds. When I went to leave that night, I quickly realized my car was stuck in inches of mud. I tried to ease the car out of the parking stall, but to no avail – I was buried to the doors! It took four members of the Army National Guard to push me out of the mess.

There were many benefits I received from being Fairest of the Fairs. At the time, I was thankful for the opportunities to develop my public speaking skills, to meet some wonderful people and to visit much of the great state of Wisconsin. But most importantly, my summer as Fairest is how I met my husband. Brian's grandmother sent him a postcard from the Wisconsin State Fair, and by chance she chose to send the card featuring my photo. What began as a bet among his West Point classmates – could he get the girl pictured on the card to return his e-mails – blossomed into a true love story several years later. We have been married for 13 years and we still have that original postcard.



Hayley (Barker) Jordan

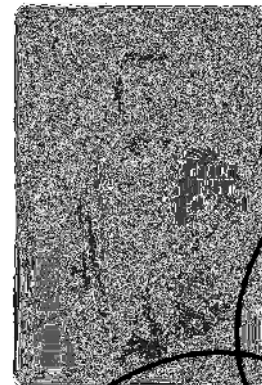
Green County ☞ 2000

My husband, Matt, and I reside in Juda, Wisconsin with our two daughters Peyton (6) and Mykenna (3). For the past 13 years I have practiced as a Registered Occupational Therapist specializing in Lymphedema and wound care. Since 2006, my husband and I along with his parents, have owned and operated Jordan Implement LLC, a Massey Ferguson machinery dealership. This January I am excited to be joining the dealership full-time as the Office Manager. My greatest joy in life has come from being "mom" to our two daughters. In our spare time our family enjoys camping all over Wisconsin.

My favorite memory occurred at the Wisconsin State Fair with Alice in Dairyland Roxanne Westphal. We were participating in the celebrity cream puff eating contest with a pro-wrestler named "Thumper". I was fortunate enough to be seated between "Thumper" and Alice for the contest. Amazingly enough Alice and I tied and won the contest (our cream puffs may have been just a tad smaller than everyone else's)! Well, it seems Mr. "Thumper" did not take our win too well and proceeded to smash the cream puff - that had been in his mouth and he spit out - into my face. Alice came to my rescue and smashed another cream puff into his face! The whole experience turned out to be a hit with the media and many laughs have been had over the years looking back on that sticky afternoon! The only downside was that very soon after the competition Alice and I were to be at a press conference with the Governor announcing the new developments set to occur at State Fair Park. I quickly showered and changed in the basement of the administration building, received a new corsage at floral hall, and literally had a police escort across State Fair Park to the conference! All in a days work as Fairest!

I am in no way graceful and am definitely a self proclaimed klutz as proven by my most embarrassing moment as Fairest. Shortly after arriving at the Kenosha County Fair I walked through the fair office door...and promptly passed out! My knees and hands were shredded and I had a red bump on my chin. I quickly excused myself to the bathroom and attempted to put myself back together. Even though I did not feel well, I did manage to right myself and complete my visit, even attending a wedding during the Demolition Derby! The next day I discovered I had walking pneumonia and was very ill for the next week. Apparently my summer as Fairest had caught up to me!

The ability to dream big to achieve my goals is the greatest benefit I took away from my experience as Fairest. The Fairest program dramatically changed not only my life but that of my husband Matt. Matt and I were married the summer I served as Fairest and he often accompanied me at events. An individual cannot be involved in this program without gaining confidence, ease in dealing with the public and a general desire to achieve one's dreams. Without this experience, I have no doubt, we would not be small business owners.



Allison (Gonske) Rick

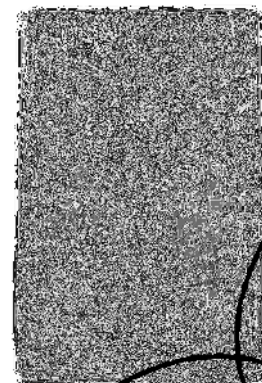
Barron County © 2001

I have been married for 14 1/2 years and have 4 children - Audra 10, Alivia 8, Aidan 6, Axton 4. I am currently working part time at the Almena Elementary School in the Library, full time as a mom and wife and part time sewing and creating with my label A to Zinky - AAAAAadorable Designs.

My favorite memory from being Fairest of the Fairs was the challenge of planning a wedding during my reign; I was married a week after State Fair! Also traveling the State and being able to experience so many other Fairs.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was during the Fairest Reunion at the State Fair I was set to introduce the Kids from Wisconsin, meaning to say "Wisconsin's own musical Ambassadors - the Kids from Wisconsin" I flubbed and said "The Wisconsin Kids from Wisconsin", or wearing a khaki skirt and sweater tank top to a crowning, not knowing everyone else would be in formal attire!

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs was that this experience was a once in a lifetime opportunity, meeting so many different people and being able to experience so much of Wisconsin's rich heritage and traditions in the Fair industry. It definitely took me out of my comfort zone and challenged me in my navigation skills (traveling the state all by myself) as well as being able to self direct and work independently.



Gill Makorec

Grant County ☞ 2002

For the past eight years, I have worked as an account executive with Learfield Communications representing Wisconsin Radio and Brownfield Ag Networks. This past summer, I was promoted to a national account executive and, while based in Madison, Wis., now represent Brownfield throughout the central region covering Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. I am also very involved in our family farm, where I work alongside my mother to continue the tradition of our century dairy farm.

My favorite memory would be the night I was selected. I attended the competition as Grant County's first Fairest in 20 years, so I didn't know what to expect. As the final program began, I focused on making my county board proud that they had reinstated the program and selected me to represent them after such a long absence. I couldn't believe I kept making the cut for the next group! The support and encouragement I received from the board and committees members that night and throughout the year is unforgettable.

I had so many embarrassing moments. . .how do I pick just one! One of my most embarrassing moments was having to admit that I didn't know how to drive a manual transmission car! While I grew up on a farm and had driven tractors, I didn't know how to drive a stick shift car! However, it was time to learn as my sponsor car for the summer would be a manual transmission Kia Sportage. I assumed it was similar to a tractor, but something about pulling out onto Highway 100 in Milwaukee versus driving 25 mph on a county road was terrifying. Thank goodness for the State Fair interns. They helped me pick it up, drive it back to State Fair Park and spent the day teaching me how to drive it all around the Fairgrounds. That is one way to learn the Park prior to the Fair!

Serving as Fairest was a tremendous honor! I learned more about my home county, the state of Wisconsin and agriculture. It is the combination of knowledge gained and skills learned that have helped me accomplish numerous goals and adventures throughout my life and career. Never could I have imagined the experiences I would gain when I embarked on my journey that January night.



Amber Swenor

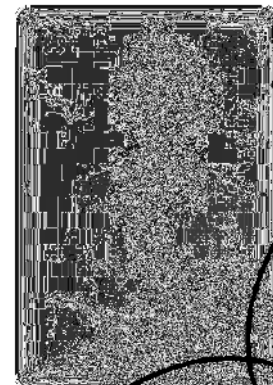
Shawano County 2003

I live and work in Madison with my awesome husband Brandon and our two spoiled fur-babies, Titus and Nova. In April 2015 I founded Strategic Partners Marketing, an integrated marketing company specializing in brand development and integrated marketing strategies such as web design, Social media, online marketing, broadcast media, PR and event management. My husband and I are passionate rock musicians and we look forward to spending more time on the road, seeing the world with our band.

One of my favorite memories is remembering the feeling of returning to participate in my home county fair, Shawano, and the feeling that I had somehow helped bring people together. As the WI Fairest you represent the entire state, and you also represent where you come from. Returning home to stand side-by-side with our local fairest and to have friends, fair volunteers and my Ag Teacher so proud of me was such an amazing feeling. I wasn't originally from a farm background, but was lucky enough to have an amazing Ag Teacher who embraced all students and got many of us involved in fair projects. Doing that opened my eyes to a whole new community. I raised pigs, lambs and borrowed some dairy, and learned so much about life, agriculture and community. That what's so unique and important about our county fairs, that they transcend beyond the barn doors and are truly the gathering place to bring everyone in the community together. As agriculturalists (yes, even though I'm a city girl, I'm an agriculturalist too!), we must embrace, connect with and educate those who aren't farmers; I felt that was my role as Fairest, to help bridge those communities and those are my favorite memories.

My most embarrassing moment. . .Well... since you asked.... I suppose it's been long enough now that I can share this story ... it was the Outagamie County Fair, July 2003. I was wearing my white pants with a white vest (what I was doing wearing white to a fair? I don't know). I had walked around and participated in events all day and it was getting late so I went to the fair office to say goodbye. I felt like I had some funny looks from some of the fair board members, which I remember being a room full of men, but nobody said anything other than a brief goodbye. One gentleman followed me outside to offer me a ride on the golf-cart to my car which I was grateful for. He dropped me off at my car and I proceeded to take off my crown and sash to prepare for my drive home, and then I noticed... that my white pants were split right open on the back side! I quickly jumped in my car, embarrassed about who might have seen I left the fairgrounds as quickly as I could! Ever since that day I have wondered how long I walked around the fair grounds with my pants split open... thankfully Meat Loaf had been performing at the fair that night so I can only hope that he was a bigger spectacle than me :).

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs through the relationships and friendships that were formed during my time as Fairest. It's now 13 years later and I still run into people that I met through my time as Fairest. Even if we haven't seen each other in years, those people are just like old friends. There's a special friendship that the fairest gets to develop with the wider fair community, from Fairest contestants, to fair-boards and fair-goers. The fair community has a special bond and I'm grateful to be a part of it.



Gena Cooper

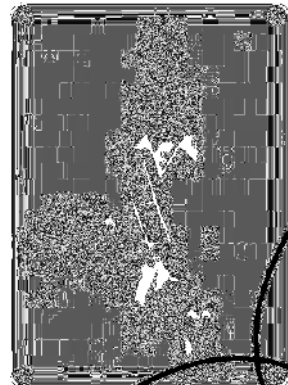
Waukesha County 2004

I am a pediatric emergency medicine physician in the Twin Cities. I am married with two wonderful sons.

My favorite memory is an accounting of all time I spent with wonderful fair-goers across Wisconsin. I can't pick one experience that was better than another because they were all so wonderful!

My most embarrassing moment was watching my fairest golf cart at State Fair get pooped on while I was on a live TV interview.

I benefited most from the opportunity to learn more about Wisconsin and our strong Fair tradition.



Susan (Orth) Rieden

Grant County 2005

My husband, Joe, and I welcomed a son, Otto, in February 2015. After his arrival, I “retired” from World Dairy Expo, where I had spent 6 years managing the trade show and working with the sponsors. In addition to my new role as a full-time mom, I help out on my husband’s 450-cow dairy farm.

My favorite memory is the millions of little memories that make the Fair family a special group of passionate, kind-hearted people.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was any moment that required singing.

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs in addition to amazing experiences and lifelong friends, the one area of personal growth where I most benefited was communication skills. Of course, the public speaking and media interviews expanded my skillset. However, it was the daily conversations, many writing requirements and effectively tweaking my message for the audience that honed my skills and has since played a key role in my life.



Kim (Schoesson) Rusch

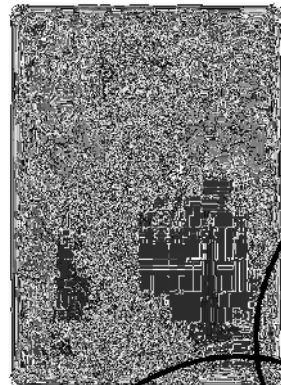
Ozaukee County © 2006

I am currently a stay-at-home mommy to my three beautiful miracles: Clara, 4 1/2, Levi, 1 1/2, and Kolby, 1 month. I am happily married to my husband, Dave, for 6 years.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs. . .There are so many, how can I choose just one? I think being at State Fair everyday, all day was the most fun I've ever had. Every experience during those 11 days was unforgettable.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment was singing the national anthem in front of a crowded grandstand at a county fair. I am not a singer! :)

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because serving as Fairest of the Fairs introduced me to so many wonderful people that have become lifelong friends and even co-workers. I will forever be grateful for being chosen to serve as Fairest of the Fairs.



Sheri (Nelson) Sutton

Walworth County 2007

After ten wonderful years in Madison, both at UW-Madison and working as the Director of Communications for the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, me, my husband Bradley and our two sons – Carter, 3, and Quinton, 1, will be moving out to Denver this month to start pursuing graduate degrees in justice and mission and apologetics and ethics at Denver Seminary. I fuel my passion of empowering the less fortunate across the globe with my non-profit, WaterDrops of Hope, and helping create opportunities for entrepreneurial pursuits to impact lives with the social enterprise, Trading Hope.

It was a joy for me to visit a fair or take part in an event in every county in our state. The definite highlight was the incredible people I was blessed to meet and spend time with along the way. From riding in golf carts with staff and fair board members to handing out ribbons to well deserving participants, and from eating amazing food with fairgoers to announcing grand stand entertainment to an excited crowd, I had a grand champion time with so many incredible people. I was honored to serve and represent our amazing fair industry full of such hardworking and inspiring individuals.

What was my most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs moment? Should I tell about the time I locked my keys in my car at the Brown County Fair or about putting the wrong boutonniere on Governor Doyle? Or maybe I should tell about the time at state fair when the reporter/meteorologist asked me on live tv to give the weather report and I couldn't see the screen and didn't know what all the weather symbols meant. So my weather report was telling viewers it was good cream puff eating weather.

What I benefited the most as being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs was the incredible opportunity to develop and fine-tune so many life skills – from confidence to public speaking, networking to independence and from organizing schedules to thinking on my feet, the list is endless in how this experience developed me for the better. I am forever grateful for this amazing honor of serving the Wisconsin fair industry. Thank you!



Claire (Carroll) Dupont

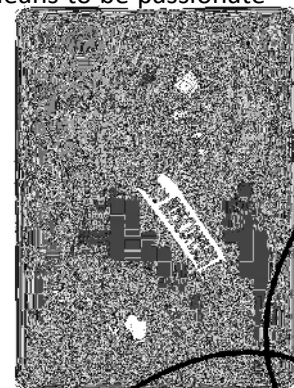
Langlade County 2008

Currently I work for Bergstrom Automotive at their BMW dealership in Appleton, WI as a Service Consultant. Basically, I get to drive a lot of fun cars, meet and interact with some really great people and help them get the most out of their dream car. As far as family goes, my husband Chad and I got married in April 2012 and are expecting our first baby due to arrive March 2016.

My favorite memory is the whole experience. Coming into the state contest as the first ever Fairest from my county, I was blown away by much how much some of the other girls did to promote their fairs and the opportunities they had in their individual counties. I knew from day one that I had no idea what I was getting myself into but, I wanted to dive in head first and do it all. I loved every minute—from the countless pedal tractor pull contests, speaking to crowds of every age, eating some of the best food around and making friends that I still hold dear to this day. The highlight of year was of course the State Fair. Each day brought about incredible new fun, smiling faces and endless opportunities to explore the fair. Like I said in my farewell speech, I'm not crying because it's over, but because it actually happened.

My most embarrassing moment as Fairest of the Fairs was on a long road trip I forgot two of my most important things: sash and tiara. By the time I remembered, I was almost 2 hours away from my apartment and couldn't turn back. Knowing I had to drive through my hometown to get to my destination, I figured I could stop and make something quick. So, after a run to Walmart to pick up some satin and mailbox letter stickers (the only things with enough stick to hold on for the duration of the day), I made a quick sash and grabbed my old tiny tiara from high school homecoming and headed up north for a fair and a rodeo.

I benefited the most by being Fairest of the Fairs through what I learned in regard to poise, professionalism and passion. Walking tall in a dress and high heels each day through barns and fields is no easy task, but I can truly credit my year as Fairest to the professional standards I now hold myself to. Nothing makes me feel more confident at work than a killer dress, power heels and the right accessories to still feel like a lady but know I've the power to conquer the day ahead. I also gained a true understanding of what it means to be passionate about something. Traveling for 36 days straight and fully submersing myself in the fair culture as Fairest, not only made me realize just how much I loved everything about what I was doing but also allowed me to truly see what the fair meant to other people. The unwavering demonstration of pride and passion everyone has for their "Biggest Little Fair in Wisconsin" is something to be admired. That understanding of true inner passion has taught me how to focus on the things that are most important to me.



Melissa Ploeckelman

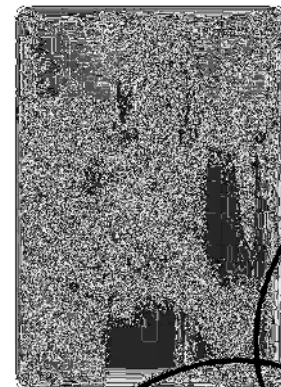
Wisconsin Valley Fair 2009

I am the Colby High School Agricultural instructor. I am also the Colby FFA advisor and have had two of my students become state FFA officers in 5 years of teaching. I am living close to the home dairy farm where I can stay connected to my grassroots in diversified agriculture.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs is all of the people! Meeting so many people and staying in touch with them was the best thing that ever happened to me.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment happened because I am not a singer, so when they told me at the 2010 WI Association of Fairs Convention that I had to sing God Bless America, I was more than nervous. When it was time to start the song; instead of singing "God Bless America" I started with "America..." One lady sung that with me and sung "America" again. But no one else did. I apologized (without stating, Just Kidding) restarted the song right and cried through the rest! Not only was it the last day of being fairest for me and having to say goodbye, but I also left a great legacy!

I benefited by being the Fairest of the Fairs the most from the contacts that I made, the skills that I gained and the memories that I will never forget!



Natalie Salkowski

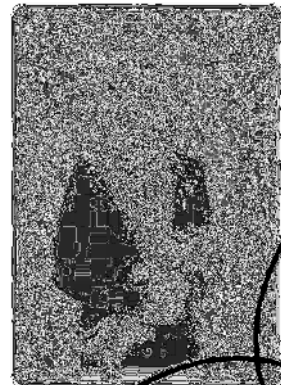
Ozaukee County 2010

I currently teach high school biology, environmental science and biotechnology at Random Lake High School in Random Lake, WI. I am also the Co-head Track and Field Coach, specializing in distance athletes and strength and conditioning training. Previously I taught biology and physical science for two years at Badger High School in Lake Geneva, WI.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs was talking to young 4-H and FFA youth about their projects and animals. I met so many enthusiastic, passionate, and well-spoken youth all over the state. This experience really ignited my fire for education and staying involved in my home county fair in order to pass on this fire to new generations of people who will have a positive impact on their communities.

My most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment happened when I was in my hometown 4th of July parade I was standing in the bed of a dark blue lifted 1970's Chevy Truck for the parade. The combination of the hot weather, dark paint, and metal surface I was standing on made me sweat profusely...I mean...glisten; Fairests do not sweat. :) My dress was so wet that when I bent down to pick up a bottle of water my dress stuck to my legs and caused it to rip right down the back. I asked the driver how bad it was and I knew by the look of terror on his face I should be glad I was wearing clean undies. My dress split from the center of my back down to my knees. Here I was, standing with my posterior at everyone's eye level with what now resembled an open back surgical gown. Through some 4-H ingenuity I was able to duct tape and pin part of my dress closed and held the rest of it shut for the whole parade. I never went any place without a spare dress after that.

I benefited the most from being Fairest of the Fairs from being able to hone my public speaking skills and discover my passion for the entertainment side of the fair industry. With what I learned that year, I am now able to use those skills both in my classroom and as a Fair Board Member in my home county. At the age of 26, this is my 4th year on the Ozaukee County Fair Board, and I couldn't be more excited each year for the fair to come!



Alexis Nickelotti

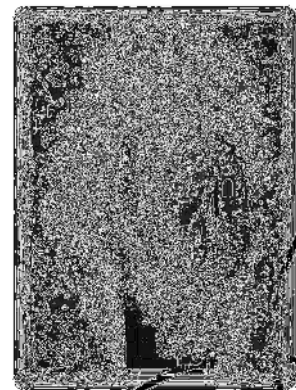
Vernon County *ca* 2011

I am the Director of Online Communications for the Wisconsin Beef Council in Madison, WI.

My favorite memory from being Fairest of the Fairs is that I remember the excitement I would feel as I drove to each county and district fair. As I approached the fairgrounds my excitement always heightened at the sight of the Ferris Wheel. I loved the smell of the livestock barns, the energy of the fair boards and the passion of the exhibitors as they introduced their projects to me. This makes it hard to summarize my experience into one favorite memory, because each and every fair I attended has its own memory that stands out to me.

My most embarrassing memory is because I hated arriving late. If I started to run behind I was always embarrassed to call and explain why I was behind schedule. (Such a hard question!!)

I benefited the most from being Fairest of the Fairs because I learned that each fair around the state has its own unique flare. I learned to embrace what draws attendees to your fair and not to get caught up in what other fairs offer. By meeting board members and Fairests around the state I was also able to gain new ideas and energy when it comes to making my fair great!



Richelle Kastenson

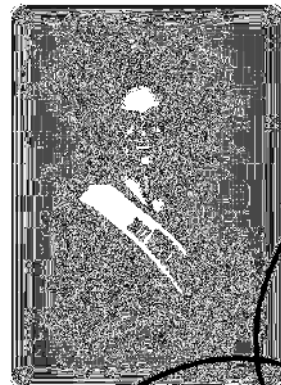
Racine County ☞ 2012

Right now I continue to reside in Racine County. This is my 3rd year teaching 2nd grade at Drought School, which is a small 4K-8th grade school. On my weekends and breaks I enjoy working at my family's meat processing facility. During the summer I work in the Agriculture Department at the Wisconsin State Fair. This past summer was my fifth year working at the State Fair. In December I was elected onto the Racine County Fair Board, and am so excited to give back to my fair.

I have so many great memories as being the Fairest of the Fairs! Something very memorable during my term was riding the carnival rides. There were multiple fairs that I rode on different rides ranging from bumper cars, the Ferris wheel, and some other twisty, turning rides. At the Wisconsin State Fair I took on Spin City, State Fair's amusement ride area, with Governor Scott Walker. Also at the State Fair, I slid down the Giant Slide with many other fairests, Chairman of the State Fair Park Board, John Yingling, and Alice in Dairyland, Rochelle Ripp.

I was traveling from the Sauk County Fair to the Lodi Ag Fair and my GPS told me to turn down a short road. Little did I know I was actually getting in line to ride a ferry! There was no turning around and I was going to be late. I waited what seemed like forever to get across the river. Most people on the ferry ride got out to enjoy the views, and I just got strange looks as I used hairspray and fastened my crown and sash as I kept telling the ferry to move faster. Even though I was late I made it just in time to announce names at the livestock auction, where I learned very quickly how to pronounce Rio (ri-oh). To this day I cannot visit the Lodi Fair without someone mentioning my day.

Being Fairest of the Fairs I benefited the most from the connections I made within the Fair industry. This networking has allowed me to stay involved in and continue to learn about Wisconsin's fair industry. Also, I learned numerous facts about Wisconsin. This has enabled me to teach my students about our prestigious state. My students always find it fascinating that I know so much about Wisconsin.



Steffani Koch

Dodge County 2013

I am currently finishing my last semester at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine. After graduating in May, I hope to practice bovine medicine in Wisconsin and become involved in my new community through local 4-H, FFA, and Fair events.

My favorite memory is attending the WAF convention at the end of my year as Fairest. All of the people who made this experience possible were gathered together, once again, to enjoy a fair tradition. Working with the new Fairest contestants, hearing their stories, and sharing my experiences is a memory I will never forget.

The most embarrassing moment of my year as Fairest was when I accidentally tossed a pile of confetti directly at a police officer monitoring the parade route. Needless to say, he was less than impressed.

What I benefited the most from being Fairest of the Fairs was learning to communicate with people. From large groups to individuals, being a Fairest taught me to connect with others and share a message effectively.



Kaitlyn Riley

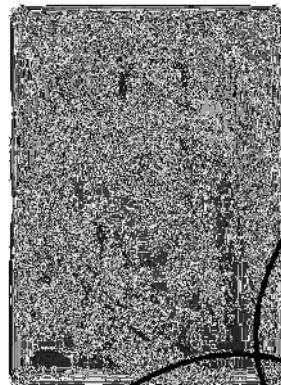
Crawford County ☞ 2014

I am currently a multimedia journalist with WQOW News 18 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. A farm girl at heart, I enjoy digging into agricultural stories to educate viewers about trends in the industry. Keeping the fair flame alive, I am also a member of the Northern Wisconsin State Fairest of the Fair Committee. I still make it back to my parent's dairy farm in Mount Zion whenever possible to help with tasks on the farm and see my favorite animals.

My favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs was going on amusement rides with Governor Scott Walker. Laughing, screaming, and enjoying rides at SpinCity was great for putting away all other cares for the day and focusing on the amazing entertainment the Fair has to offer. Plus, Governor Walker threw me for quite the loop when the ride operator tricked me into taking two rounds on one of the wildest rides of my life! Whenever I see Governor Walker for an interview, he always remembers the famous Twitter picture from our time together, and it never fails to bring me back to that day.

My most embarrassing moment was before opening ceremonies at the Wisconsin State Fair. I was nervous about pinning flowers, and had some practice from the horticulture department. They said it was okay to poke my own finger as long as I never poked the other person. I poked my finger a little too hard while pinning a flower on Rick Frenette, CEO at Wisconsin State Fair Park. I had no Band-Aids and had to use my spare pair of nylons to keep blood from running down my hand. Luckily, Rick's nice white shirt stayed clean! I always remembered to bring Band-Aids after that!

There are so many ways I benefited from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs, but most of all, the experience gave me confidence. When I was crowned in 2014, there were nearly forty girls on stage with me, all of which would have been wonderful representatives for the Wisconsin State Fair. Being selected and having an entire committee supporting me is a feeling I will never forget. I cannot thank the Fairest program enough for improving my speaking skills, teaching me about the industry, helping me grow networks, and giving me some of the greatest friends I will ever have.



Deanna Schlies

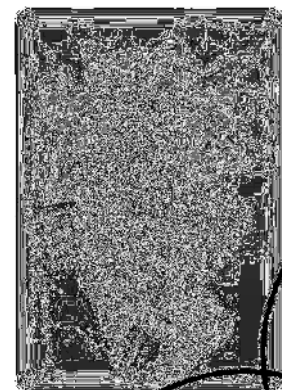
Brown County 2015

I am currently planning my wedding to a wonderful man. We are purchasing a home and getting our lives put together. I am a middle and high school music teacher for the Mishicot School District and loving every moment of it.

What is your favorite memory of being the Wisconsin Fairest of the Fair? It is so hard to pick just one memory, as the whole year was exciting. One that truly stands out though was being a part of the Veteran's Day ceremony at the Bank Mutual Amphitheater. I was able to meet the commander of the Navy, the commander of the newly commissioned USS Milwaukee, and the crew that would be running the ship. I got to sing the National Anthem in front of many of our National Heroes, and was brought to tears as the Operation Coming Home staff gifted a home to a Veteran and his wife. It was truly a day to remember.

What was your most embarrassing Wisconsin Fairest of Fairs moment? This wasn't really embarrassing, but I was at the Waukesha County Fair and I had some extra time to give away state fair tickets. It was one of my first giveaways, so I hadn't had time to come up with fair trivia, so I decided to play stump the fairest. It worked well, but I realized how many things I didn't know.

I benefited the most from being Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs because I have always been a little shy when it came to talking to people, especially people I was meeting for the first time. This position has really opened my eyes to the benefits of getting to know people and allowing yourself to talk to and meet others.



50th Fairest of the Fairs

To be crowned on Wednesday, January 13, 2016

