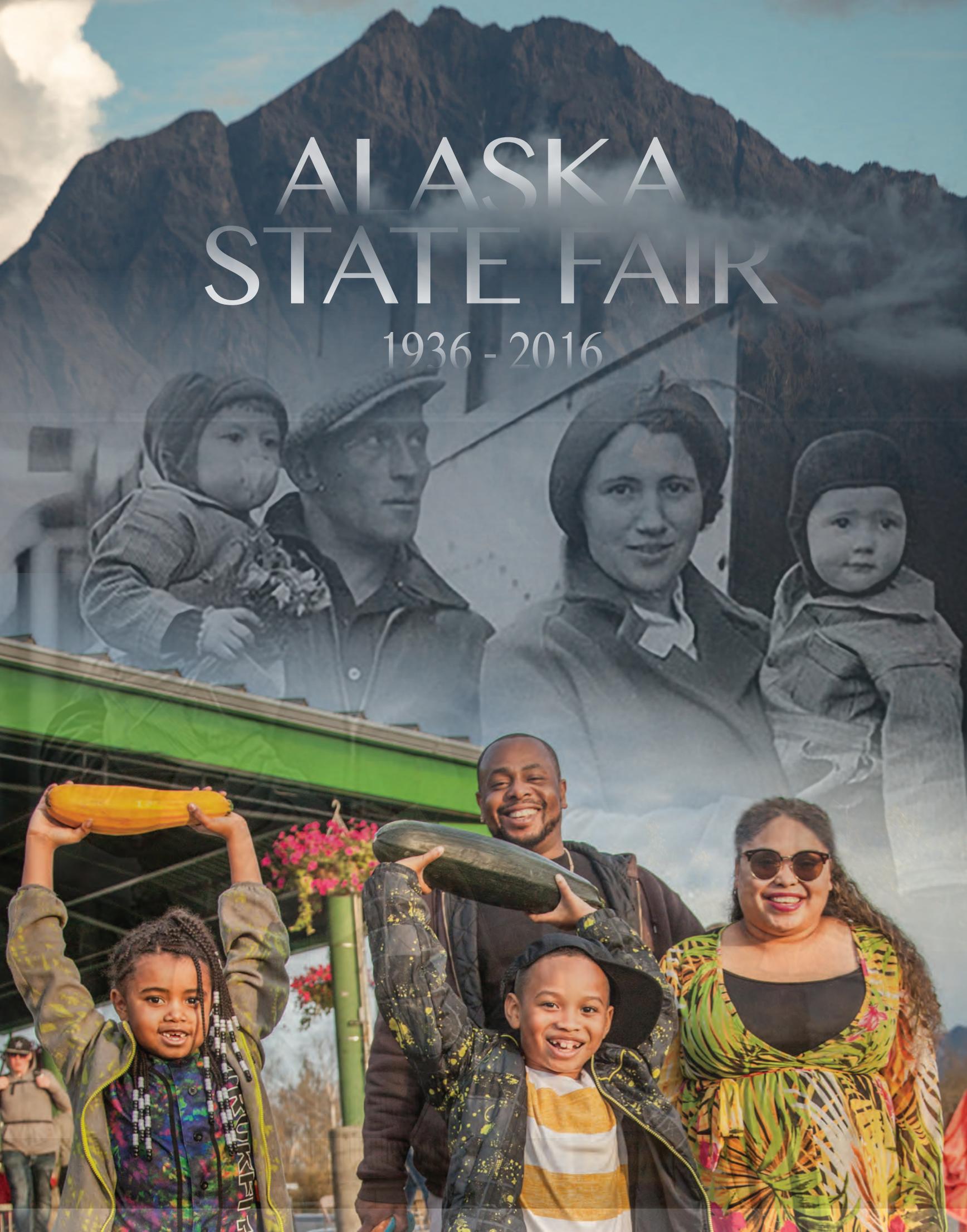


ALASKA STATE FAIR

1936 - 2016





COMMITMENT TO TRADITION

IMAGINE ...IT IS THE SUMMER OF 1936

The Matanuska Valley colonists, who arrived in Alaska in May 1935, have spent the past year building their homes, clearing their fields and creating a community. Now they are ready for a break from their hard work and a celebration of their accomplishments.

The colonists join a group of pre-colony settlers who are working to establish a Fair. The group forms the Matanuska Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair Assn., Inc., raises \$1,200 by selling stock, and holds the first Fair September 4 – 7, complete with the crowning of a Fair queen, a baby show, boxing matches, horse races, dances, a rodeo, baseball games, and hundreds of agricultural entries.

Little did those Fair founders know that their event would become the Alaska State Fair. Now 80 years old, the Fair has grown into Alaska's largest annual event, attracting 294,424 fairgoers to the 2016 event, which celebrated the Fair's 80th birthday.

Just as the settlers and colonists remained dedicated to their monumental task of carving a life for their families out of what had been the barren wilds of Alaska, the individuals who have led and served the Alaska State Fair over the past 80 years have remained committed to perpetuating the vision of an event where Alaskans can come together to connect, relax and celebrate the fruits of their labor.



“The growth and longevity of the Fair is only possible through our commitment to carrying forward the vision of the Fair’s founders, while adapting to serve our future fairgoers.”

Jerome Hertel
Fair General Manager



BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Standing from left to right:

Stephen Brown	Vice-President
Richard Stryken	Director
John Tracy	Director
John Harkey	Director

Seated from left to right:

Danny Consenstein	Treasurer
Kristy Bernier	Secretary
Carol Kenley	President

Our mission: *To produce a traditional State Fair which educates and entertains Fairgoers. Provide stable finances through good business practices, statewide outreach, partnerships and hosting a variety of community, cultural and business events.*



COMMITMENT

LONG-STANDING AGRICULTURAL ROOTS

The Fair’s 80th birthday provided the perfect opportunity to reflect on Fair history and especially the long-standing traditions that make the Fair the unique Alaska event that it is.

The giant cabbage contest began in 1941, when the manager of the Alaska Railroad offered a \$25 prize for the largest cabbage. The tradition continued at the 2016 Giant Cabbage Weigh-Off, which drew both seasoned growers and future farmers. Steve Hubacek took first place in the Giant Cabbage Weigh-Off with his 83.4-pound entry, while Daisy Christiansen claimed first place in the junior division with her 59.4-pound cabbage.

The Fair is committed to continuing those beloved traditions, while seeking to start new ones that meet the needs of the community. One such need is protection of Mat-Su farmland for future generations. The Fair demonstrated its support of “forever farmland” with the signing of an agreement in 2014 with Alaska Farmland Trust permanently protecting 36.5 acres of Fair-owned property as farmland.



“I get to share my love of plants and my knowledge, and hopefully inspire, teach and empower people to realize, ‘Oh, I can do this, I can grow this.’”
Becky Myrvold
Fair Head Gardener

But agriculture isn’t just something on display. Through contests and exhibits, the Fair works to involve those from all over Alaska – and beyond. In 2016, a total of 8,719 exhibit entries came in from across the state, as well as 33 from outside Alaska.

The entries resulted in six new state records, including the one set by Dale Marshall at the 2016 Midnight Sun Great Pumpkin Weigh-Off. After pursuing the state record for five years, Dale finally broke it with his 1,469-pound entry, beating the previous state pumpkin record by 180 pounds.

“The Fair was a tradition before we were vendors. It is absolutely part of our family. It’s what we do.”
Marian Romano
Potato Palace vendor for 32 years

Plants and flowers tended by the Fair’s talented grounds and garden crew abound: tens of thousands of individual plants and hundreds of different varieties

Without the hard work and vision of the Fair founders 80 years ago, the Alaska State Fair – and the Mat-Su community it serves – never would have come to be. Recognizing the importance of agricultural families past, present and future, the Fair presents the Farm Family of the Year award each year to show appreciation for all the hard-working Alaskans committed to agriculture. The 2016 award was presented to the Plagerman family of Delta Junction.



ENTERTAINMENT FOR EVERYONE

From music to magic, and dancing to demolition derby, the Fair strives to offer an entertainment line-up that includes something for everyone. This year, the Fair offered a mix of old favorites as well as fresh new acts.

A total of 26,294 music-lovers attended the AT&T Concert Series this year. Of those, 5,150 fairgoers attended the rapper G-Eazy concert, making it the most popular performance, followed by The Band Perry and Volbeat.

After a 16-year hiatus, monster trucks returned to the Fair, drawing sell-out crowds to the Grandstand. The All Star Monster Truck Tour made its debut at the 2016 Fair, with 5,327 fairgoers attending. Alaska's best cowboys and cowgirls also competed for the champion title in the Rodeo Alaska Champions Tour at the Grandstand.

Meanwhile, the France Equestrian Center has reached a new level, with plans to host the largest rodeo in the state and welcome barns from Russia and Canada to compete at the Fair this year.

In addition to ticketed events, the Fair is committed to providing high-quality entertainment free with Fair admission. In 2016, there were dozens of these opportunities, including performances by Redhead Express, the four-sister act originally from Palmer.

The Fair is equally committed to showcasing Alaska talent, with 3,500 local entertainers taking the stage at the 2016 Fair.

“*This homespun attitude and atmosphere is what makes our Alaska Fair such a unique event.*”

Hobo Jim
Entertaining at the Fair for 35 years

Driven by its mission to both entertain and educate fairgoers, the Fair presented exhibits such as After the Dinosaurs: The Age of Mammals and Ice, featuring lifelike Ice Age animals presented in realistic natural habitats, as well as Brad's World Reptiles, which allowed fairgoers to interact with amazing live reptiles, amphibians and other exotic species from around the world.





COMMITMENT

EDUCATING OUR YOUTH

Care of the Fair – just like the world – is handed down generation to generation. The Fair founders passed the reins to their children, who in turn trained the next generation of Fair leaders, and so it continues.

Involving and educating Alaskans – and especially youth – is at the heart of the Fair’s mission. That commitment can be seen in a variety of ways. For example, during the 2016 event, a total of 2,335 students in grades kindergarten to fifth grade participated in Fair educational programs. More than 700 students were on the waiting list for this popular program.

The Fair also continued its support of the 4-H Junior Market Livestock Auction, which brought in \$214,312.50 this year, setting a new record for the 41-year-old event. The 4-H youth, many of whom raised their animals from birth, receive the majority of the proceeds, which they often pour back into raising an animal for the next year’s auction.



The Fair also undertook several creative fundraising efforts benefiting the Fair scholarship fund. These efforts included the raffle of an 80th birthday commemorative Fair quilt, which featured artwork designed by Alaska artist Ruth Hulbert and was sewn by local quilter Kathy Rockey. The raffle, won by Lorraine Stotts, brought in \$3,990 for Fair scholarships.

The Concert Kick-Off Party, a fundraising event held in April, raised another \$4,000 for Fair scholarships. This year’s Cabbage Classic, a 50/50 Split the Pot lottery held in partnership with Palmer Rotary Club, brought in an additional \$390 for Fair scholarships.

Congratulations 2016 Fair scholarship recipients:

- First place, \$1,500: Victoria Cizek of Soldotna
- Second place, \$1,000: Michelle Eliassen of Eagle River
- Third place, \$750: Nathaniel Savel of Palmer
- Fourth place, \$500: Catherine Currier of Wasilla
- Fifth place, \$500: Kimberly Pikok of Barrow

“Many young people have used the 4-H experience as a stepping stone into a lifetime of work with animals. Even those not pursuing agricultural-related careers learn about responsibility, work ethic, financial management, and health and nutrition.”

Kelee Eklund
Livestock committee president



DEVOTED TO ALASKA NATIVE CULTURES

Alaska has rich, diverse cultures, and involving those has long been an important part of the Fair's mission.

The Gathering Place opened at the Fair in 2014 as part of the Fair's renewed commitment to sharing Alaska Native history, culture, arts and entertainment, while offering performance and business opportunities to Alaska Native performers and artists from across the state.

“Facilitating the transfer of Alaska Native knowledge, heritage and tradition improves understanding among all Alaskans and encourages appreciation of Alaska Native people and their traditions, history and contributions to Alaska.”

Stephen Blanchett, Pamyua

Dena' – People's Stage, the latest feature of The Gathering Place, opened at the 2016 Fair after years of fundraising, planning and construction. A dedication took place on opening weekend.

The 1,000-square-foot permanent stage features several amenities not previously available at The Gathering Place, including a dressing room and stage lighting. The venue now offers a dedicated performance area for Alaska Native entertainment at the Fair.

At the 2016 Fair, the stage hosted a wide variety of music, drumming and dancing, as well as World Eskimo-Indian Olympics traditional games, Alaska Native humor and storytelling, and the Inupiaq blanket toss, among others.

Thank you to the The Gathering Place Funders:

Rasmuson Foundation, Spenard Builders Supply, Alyeska Pipeline, Hall Quality Homes, Combs Insurance Agency Inc., Stan Hall Drafting, Rick Dwight, Tew's, Inc., Ken Walch Engineering, Inc., RIM Architects, Mat-Su Health Foundation, MTA and Builders Millwork Supply.





COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Fourth-generation Alaskan and artist Ruth Hulbert designed the Fair’s 80th birthday poster, which took first place at the 2016 International Association of Fairs and Expositions convention. The artwork, unofficially titled “The Work of Many Hands,” features eight squares representing significant moments in each decade of the Fair, plus one square depicting the Fair as an ongoing work in progress. The poster artwork was later transformed into an actual quilt by local quilter Kathy Rockey.

“A phrase I had in mind while working on this piece was ‘the work of many hands.’ Just as I had help from a lot of people in making this, the Fair came out of a cooperative effort and today runs on the joint efforts of many different people.”

Ruth Hulbert
Fair poster artist

The poster and quilt – and the sentiment behind them – is an appropriate depiction of the Fair’s commitment to building partnerships and collaborating on efforts to improve both the Fair and the community it serves.

Golden Wheel Amusements, the Fair carnival provider, is another long-term partner. Golden Wheel celebrated its 50th anniversary in Alaska at the 2016 Fair, when it debuted four new rides, including Zombie Mansion, Warhawk, Kiddie Swing, and The Rock. Carnival rides have been a popular Fair attraction since they first debuted in 1950.



COMMITMENT

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

While the Fair is most well known for hosting the annual event, the commitment to community extends far beyond those 12 days to encompass the health, safety and overall well-being of its neighbors.

For example, in a landmark move, the Alaska State Fair became the very first state fair in the United States to go smoke-free for the entire run of the event. With support from numerous community partners, the Fair adopted and implemented a fairground-wide no-smoking policy during the 2016 event. The Fair received the American Lung Association's 2016 Breathe Easy Champion Award in recognition of this leadership.

With its 300 acres, multi-use venues and central location, the Fair is uniquely positioned to play host to diverse community events, ranging from emergency response trainings and beer festivals to international competitions and holiday light displays. After outgrowing its previous location, the Alaska Scottish Highland Games selected the Alaska State Fairgrounds as the new home of its annual competition in 2014. The Fair was honored to host the International Highland Games Foundation World Heavy Events Championships in 2016.

“Smoke-free environments do more than protect the health of everyone who experiences them – they also change social norms about smoking, which leads to improved health for all.”

Elizabeth Ripley
Mat-Su Health Foundation
Executive Director

The Fair also continues to do its part to protect Alaska's environment through its award-winning recycling program. Established in 2002 through multiple partnerships, the program has diverted hundreds of thousands of pounds of recyclable materials from the landfill. This year alone volunteers collected 34,829 pounds of plastics, cardboard, mixed/office and newspaper, aluminum and steel cans.



COMMITMENT

THANK YOU EVERYONE!

As a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, the Fair relies on generous sponsors to help put on a successful Fair. Nearly 50 sponsors, plus grant funders, other donors and volunteers support everything from Fair events and programs to infrastructure projects. We would like to thank all of our sponsors and partners.



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