



Illinois
Association
of
Agricultural
Fairs

May 2024

TentTalk

Natalie Evans Chosen 2024 IAAF Queen



Last year's Queen Paige Van Dyke, left, did the honors of presenting the 2024 Miss Illinois Fair Queen Natalie Evans, 19, of Jacksonville, to the attentive audience during this year's annual IAAF Convention. Natalie represented Morgan County and will represent the IAAF at a series of official functions during the coming year.

The 2024 IAAF convention theme, "Do More in '24" in January at the Crowne Plaza, spurred attendees to action.

From the Trade and Talent shows to the Showcase and queen competition, participants learned what they could do to add extra pizzazz and fun to their fairs this summer – from a scavenger hunt in the Trade Show to a Corn Hole game in the lobby to

shooting basketballs, the convention was designed to help those attending take their fairs to the next level.

Natalie Evans of Jacksonville, IL, 19, was crowned 2024 Miss Illinois County Fair Queen.

Natalie represented Morgan County at the 113th Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs Convention on Sunday, Jan. 14, 2024. Evans is the daughter of Sean

and Amy Evans and is currently attending Murray State University majoring in pre-veterinarian with a minor in chemistry. She hopes to complete her education at the University of Illinois and become a large animal vet.

Evans will be a summer employee of the Department of Agriculture. She will travel to about 30 county fairs and will be the official hostess of the Illinois State Fair in Springfield and the DuQuoin State Fair. As queen, Evans' main duty is to emphasize the importance of agriculture and county fairs in Illinois.

Tessa Sargeant of Hancock County was named the first runner up, Audrey Moran of Clinton County was named second runner up, Elaina Kessler of Clay County was named third runner up, and Maci Kingren of Ford County was named fourth runner up.

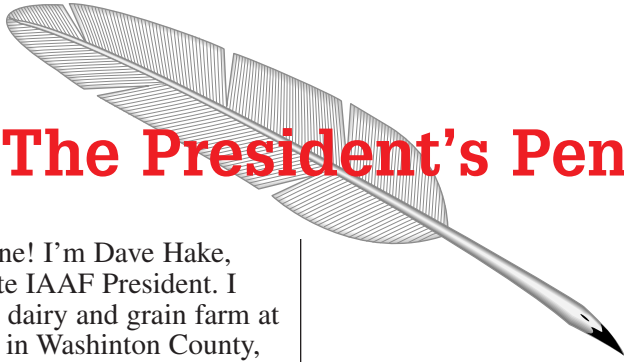
"I'm a passionate girl," said Evans. "I love cows, my family, the Lord. I hope I can follow in Paige's (Van Dyke, her predecessor) footsteps and continue to show cattle while I'm queen."

When Evans isn't showing Red Angus cattle, you can find her boating, swimming, going to concerts, Bible studies, spending time with family or playing with her four dogs. She also is self-employed at Natalie's Pet Services. She's also an 11-year 4-H member and attended Routt Catholic High School.

"I'm the first state queen from Morgan County – I'm proud to represent Morgan County," she said. "I was so surprised when they called my number. I thought I did well, but I was honestly surprised.

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The President's Pen



Hello everyone! I'm Dave Hake, your new state IAAF President. I grew up on a dairy and grain farm at Hoyleton, IL in Washinton County, 50 miles east of St. Louis, Mo.

My wife, Laura, and I live on the farm where I grew up. My family showed dairy cattle at county and state fairs for 75 years until 2016. I literally grew up on the county fair circuit in southern Illinois.

The 2024 convention was great! We tried many new things this year, and we hope you noticed the changes right off the bat at the registration desk. Our goal was to make things easier and quicker.

The Friday night Showcase shined with headliner Mark Wills performing. The Saturday morning speaker, Aaron Alejandro wowed those of us in attendance with his story of being raised on a boy's ranch in Texas to become the man he is today, head of the Texas FFA Foundation.

The weather may not have treated us too well for our northern fairs, but the trade show was well attended all weekend and there was not a lack of talent at the Talent Show on Saturday. The queen pageant contestants visited the trade show Friday afternoon. What a wonderful weekend they had. I personally want to thank everyone who helped make the weekend successful.

One of the new things this year was streaming the pageant Sunday evening, thanks to the hard work of Tom Schahrer, and it was a hit. It takes a team to coordinate conven-



David Hake

tion weekend and we had some of the best who always rise to the occasion. Congratulations to our new 2024 Illinois County Fair Queen Natalie Evans from Morgan County.

Coming up is the IAAF Legislative reception on May 7 at the Inn at 835 (835 S. Second Street in Springfield). Please invite your legislators. You can talk to them one-on-one and help us talk to them for additional funding for county fairs and horse racing. Our legislative committee and legislative correspondent Bridget Dougherty are constantly looking for bills that are submitted that could affect our fairs. Bridget is our eyes and ears. Thank you Bridget!

In closing, I'm looking forward to a wonderful two-year term as your state President and as Roy Rogers always said, "until we meet again" friends...

Dave

President

Dates to Remember

- **Fair Contracts** due to IDOA June 1, 2024; Rehabilitation Reports due to IDOA by June 30, 2024
- **County Fair Day, Illinois State Fair** (moved to Thursday), August 8, 2024
- **Grand Summary Report** due by October 15, 2024
- **Zone Meetings:**
 - Central Zone (moved to Saturday evening) Nov. 2 2024
 - Northern Zone, Nov. 3, 2024
 - Southern Zone, Nov. 10, 2024
- **IAAF Dues Paid by Fairs**, Dec. 15, 2024
- **Queen Ads to Sandy Hoke**, Dec 15, 2024

Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs

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www.IllinoisCountyFairs.org

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Springfield, IL 62711

Email Updates and Save the Dates

Please update your email address with Charlyn Fargo Ware (iaafsecretary@gmail.com). In an effort to save money, we will be emailing information about next year's convention (Jan. 17-19, 2025) rather than sending out packets. Note the 2025 convention is back on Martin Luther King weekend.

We also plan on emailing information about County Fair Day (Aug. 8, 2024) rather than mailing out forms. The State Fair has moved County Fair Day to Thursday, Aug 8 rather than our usual first Friday of the fair.

SAVE THE DATE: The 2025 convention will be Jan. 17-19, 2025.



Ed Dame with NAME, sponsors of the Friends of Illinois County Fairs Award, is with Gary Mielke, president of Stephenson County, who is accepting the award for Kate Boyer of Stephenson County. On the right is Ruth Blasingame of the Boone County Fair. Senator Tom Bennett was unable to make the award presentation.

Honor Friends of Illinois County Fairs

This year's Friends of Illinois County Fairs were honored at the Saturday morning breakfast at the Convention.

Receiving the award were Sen. Tom Bennett of Gibson City, Ruth Blasingame of Boone County and Kate Boyer of Stephenson County.

Senator Tom Bennett was raised on a family farm. He has served as a high school and junior high science teacher. He then spent 30 years at State Farm Insurance managing his computer software development and training division. He served as State Representative for the 106th District for eight years and now serves parts of 13 counties in the 53rd Senate District.

Sen. Bennett has worked diligently with Agriculture and Education as two of his top priorities in the Illinois General Assembly. He has championed appropriations for county fairs across the state. He sponsored legislation supporting the hours earned from 4-H, FFA and agricultural education work be credited to the scholastic record of each

member. In addition, legislation was passed to assist volunteer fire departments and police employees in their volunteer efforts.

Sen. Bennett has effectively served, not only his elected districts in the state of Illinois but the state in total. He has served with leadership skills, sets a high standard for a work ethic, is principled, shows the courage of his convictions and sets high standards for his colleagues to follow. The IAAF commends Sen. Bennett for his many accomplishments and his ever ready support. We wish him and his wife, Kathy, a happy and healthy retirement. We are thankful for your support.

Ruth Blasingame has been a Boone County Fair Board member, Ticket Office Chairperson, Pomona Grange Master and initiated the Boone County Youth Fair Board.

The Boone County Fair is owned and operated by the Granges of Boone County, and Grange members volunteer and make sure the fair runs smoothly. Ruth joined the Grange in 1996. She is currently the

Master of the Pomona Grange – the Grange that umbrellas the seven local Boone County Granges and oversees the election of the Fair Board Officers. She and her family participate in the Grange at all levels – local, state and national.

Ruth became a Fair Board member in 2000 and has served for the last 24 years. She has a strong presence and offers her ideas and opinions freely, always looking out for what is best for the fair and fairgrounds.

It was just a few years after joining the Fair Board, in 2004, that Ruth took on the position of Ticket Office Chairperson. Under Ruth's direction, the Ticket Office operation has been streamlined into a well-oiled machine. Ruth recently stepped down as Chairperson but has spent the last year mentoring the new Chairperson and continues to help in the office.

In order to encourage young people to get involved with the fair, Ruth spearheaded the organization

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Poise, talent, intellect and beauty were among the challenges facing the judges who chose the 2024 Miss Illinois Fair Queen from among the 73 contestants representing their home county fairs from throughout Illinois. 19-year-old Natalie Evans of Jacksonville, representing Morgan County, captured the honors during the 113th Illinois Association of Agricul-

tral Fairs Convention on Sunday, January 14, 2024, at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield. Tessa Sargeant of Hancock County was named first runner up, Audrey Moran of Clinton County was named second runner up, Elaina Kessler of Clay County was named third runner up and Maci Kingren of Ford County was named fourth runner up.

—Annual IAAF Convention Drew Crowd

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The top 16 finalists were: Morgan Binder of Macon County; Ella Luna Drone of Fisher Fair in Champaign County; Addisyn Switzer of Warren County; Cayla Krueger of Washington County; Maggie Goodson of Bond County; Natalie Evans of Morgan County; Londen Fulks of Henry County; Tessa Sargeant of Hancock County; Klare Flynn of Brown County; Belle Carlock of Cass County; Railan Clark of Williamson County; Reggan Smith of Moultrie-Douglas County; Lily

Troyan of Lake County; Brook Stuebs of Sangamon County; Maci Kingren of Ford County and Audrey Moran of Clinton County.

Non-finalist awards went to: Kaitlyn Banning of Marion County, Ruby Crum Memorial Award; Ella Sievers of Calhoun County, Best Personal Interview; Ava Leitze of Heart of Illinois Fair in Peoria County, Best in Communication Skills; Hailey Durham of Pana Tri-County, Best in Stage Presence; Lillian Russell of Mercer County, Best in Beauty and Physique competition. Kait-

lyn Banning of Marion County also was the People's Choice Award Winner.

Earlier at the IAAF annual convention, Friends of Illinois County Fairs were chosen. Receiving the award was Ruth Blasingame of Boone County, Sen. Tom Bennett of Gibson City and Kate Boyer of Stephenson County.

Dave Hake of Hoyle in Washington County was elected president of the IAAF, Gary Mielke of Ridott in Stephenson County was elected vice president. In total, this year's convention had more than 2,500 in attendance.

Lots of Activity Kept Everyone Involved



IAAF Board Member Mary Liz Wright of Edgar County took time out from the Registration Desk to have some fun at this year's Trade Show.



Radio announcer Kent Casson and his family took a brief moment from their fun to pose for this photo.

IN MEMORIAM

James Anderson, 86, died February 20, 2024. He was born in Pecatonica on December 18, 1937, the son of Floyd and Ruth (Rafferty) Anderson. Jim was educated in Pecatonica schools and graduated from high school in 1955. Shortly after graduation he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Germany. Jim married Marilyn J. Kilmer on February 7, 1959 at St. Mary Catholic Church in Pecatonica. Jim farmed the family homestead for many years. Jim was a very social person and

made friends wherever he went. He was active in the community serving on the fair board for 42 years, served as trustee and township supervisor, and also served on the school board for many years. He was a faithful and active member of St. Mary Catholic Church in Pecatonica and was an usher, reader, CCD teacher and could always be found in the kitchen doing dishes at church dinners. Jim loved his wife and children and regardless of his schedule would always make time if he could to

help and be available for them. Survivors include daughters, Denise (Curt) Nelson and Brenda (Ray) McCoy; son Brian (Mallery Patterson) Anderson; daughter Renee Blasingham and son Ryan Anderson; 11 grandchildren; 15 great grandchildren, sisters Jean Ann Oppgaard, Deb (Dean) Runte, and Darla (Jason) Stram, several nieces and nephews and many friends. Jim was preceded in death by his parents, wife Marilyn, daughter Christina, son Gregory and sister-in-law Rhonda Ogburn.

—Honor Friends of Illinois County Fairs

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of the Boone County Youth Fair Board. She teaches the youth how to run meetings, providing the opportunity to learn different aspects of running the fair, including setting them up with Fair Board members to assist with set up and operation at fair time. With Ruth's enthusiasm for the youth and the fair, the next generation of Boone County Fair Board members and volunteers are well on their way.

Ruth is truly deserving of this honor of the Friends of the Fair Award.

Kate Boyer of Stephenson County is a take-charge person who has aggressively taken on improving the Stephenson County fair. One of her goals this year was to bring in \$100,000 in sponsorship and she exceeded her goal. Kate has improved advertising and made the fair more family friendly with free on-ground events for kids.

She consistently demonstrates her passion for learning and eagerness to stay at the forefront of county fairs. Her ability to grasp complex concepts quickly and translate them into actionable strategies is truly impressive. She has taken many IAFE online courses to achieve her Certification as Fair Manager, which has helped the growth and advancement of the Stephenson County Fair.

Kate is a well-deserving candidate for the Friend of the Fair Award.

'Invest in Those Who Follow Our Footsteps'

Saturday morning breakfast speaker Aaron Alejandro, head of the Texas FFA Foundation, encouraged us to be grateful.

"When we appreciate, we elevate," he said.

We all have a purpose to invest in those who follow in our footsteps. Alejandro said he is the result of someone taking time to invest and believe in him. He grew up hearing his mother pray that God would provide food for them. He ended up living and working on a farm for troubled youth. Because the owner believed in him, he ended up showing cattle and graduated from college.

"What you do at your fair is create opportunities," said Alejandro. "We get kids there to give them a chance."

He acknowledged none of us saw Covid coming.

"Zig Ziglar would tell us to expect the best and prepare for the worst. Maximize what comes. Don't quit. Expect that disruption is coming – in life and at your fairs. Can you look at your fairs and expositions from a different perspective?"

He added, "Let's get back to the 3 Rs – not reading, writing and arithmetic, but respect, responsibility and resiliency. Not everybody gets a trophy but everybody can participate. What is it that you all do better than anyone else? The 3Rs. We teach responsibility – that animals get thirsty and have to have water even when it's cold, that if we don't do our job taking care of them, some-



Aaron Alejandro, head of the Texas FFA Foundation, gave the keynote address on Saturday morning and urged the members to invest in those who follow in our footsteps.

thing dies. That's what agriculture does."

He encouraged fairs to look at technology as a tool to help draw in the 50 percent of the world's population that is under the age of 30.

"Fairs and expositions, what are you doing to compete for the minds of kids, for the values you promote? Get in the game and compete or surrender and lose."

He considers social media the #1 source of food information. A check of social media finds 73 percent of posts are about a cat or dog.

"What about cows or pigs?," says

Alejandro. "We're playing into the hands of the enemy. We need to talk about what it takes to care for an animal, not just show a picture of taking home a ribbon."

His 10 virtues to lead by:

- Be Kind
- Be Selfless
- Be Positive
- Be Respectful
- Be Humble
- Be Self-Controlled
- Be the Light
- Never Give Up
- Look for the Best
- Stand Firm

Update on State Government Affairs

Hello IAAF Members! Here's a state government affairs update.

Senate Bill 2876

Senate Bill 2876 mandates recycling and composting at "large event facilities" that are licensed for occupancy for 3,500 persons or more. We are

watching the progress of this bill very closely. The intention of this bill is to cover very large facilities such as the United Center and ballparks in Chicago. However, we were concerned that it may impact county fairs so the sponsor has agreed to state for

the record that the measure does not apply to county fairs.

The bill will be heard on Third Reading in the Senate during the week of April 8; if it passes, it will go to the House for consideration. We are making the same request of the House sponsor as statements of "legislative intent" during Third Readings on the House and Senate Floor have legal weight.

Legislative Meet and Greet

The Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs will host a meet and greet reception for legislators in Springfield on May 7 at the Inn at 835 from 5:30 – 7:30. Last year's event was a big success and we hope to continue the tradition. It is an opportunity for legislators to meet with county fairs and learn more about their successes and concerns. All members of the Illinois General Assembly have been invited and we hope to see you there as well.

IAAF Representative on Women in Agriculture Advisory Committee

IAAF was asked by House Minority Leader Tony McCombie to participate in the first ever Women in Agriculture Advisory Committee. The first meeting was held in March and was organizational. Leader McCombie said that she formed the group in order to hear from female voices in the industry. The Advisory Committee will continue to meet during the year, and Leader McCombie hopes that the group will weigh in on legislation affecting agriculture issues in Illinois.

Update on New Rules Initiative with the Illinois Department of Agriculture

We continue to work with the Illinois Department of Agriculture to amend the Department's administrative rules to authorize fairs to submit their premium books to the Department via email instead of sending the printed book through the US mail to the Department. This change would reduce paper waste, and more importantly, costs to fairs in producing and printing the books. Some fairs are doing this already and it is acceptable to the Department. We are monitoring the JCAR (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules) process and will indicate IAAF's support of the change to the Committee.

Best wishes to all for a fun and safe fair season!



Macy Waters and Avery Wyatt of Calhoun County won the IAAF 2024 Senior Talent Contest with a jazz dance duet..



Jaycee Bates of Sangamon County was the winner of the Junior Division Talent Show with a contemporary dance solo.

2024 Winners Show Off Talent

What a talented group of young men and women who competed in the 2024 Talent Show at the IAAF convention.

Winner in the senior division went to Macy Waters and Avery Wyatt of Calhoun County with a jazz dance duet; second place went to Lexi Willms of Fairbury Fair (Livingston County) with a piano solo; third place went to Katie Stiedinger and Lucas Clinton of Ford County with a vocal duet; fourth place went to Julia Hilgeman of Iroquois County with a vocal solo.

In the Junior Division Talent Show, Jaycee Bates of Sangamon

County was the winner with a contemporary dance solo; second place went to a dance group from Morgan County. Members included Jayden Batty, Paislee Gear, Maddy Klendworth, Eady Brickey, Hadley Gray, Parker Geer, Aubrey Kunzemen, Malina VanMatter. Third place went to Parker Silverman of Boone County with an instrumental violin; fourth place went to Laila Smith of Clay County with a vocal guitar.

In addition, both Macy Waters & Avery Wyatt and Jaycee Bates delighted the audience during the Miss Illinois County Fair queen competition.

Reimbursements Should Be End of May

Happy Spring!

I hope everyone is doing well as you gear up for the 2024 Fair Season. I am looking forward to seeing what the 2024 fair season brings, and I wish you all great success!

I am glad to announce that the Premium Reports have been completed as of April 1st. My hope is that you will see your reimbursements no later than the end of May.

Reminder: the next important due date is June 1st for contracts. All fairs are required to submit a signed FY25 contract, and they are subject to a \$25/day late fee. The late fees will be deducted from your premium reimbursement or your F&E payment.

The contracts are available on the Department of Agriculture website. Please make sure you are submitting the correct type of contract for your type of fair, either F&E Reimbursement Agreement or Premium and Rehabilitation Reimbursement Agreement. Without a contract, I am unable to process your reimbursements for FY25.

Fairs participating in the Rehabilitation Fund must have their Rehab Reports postmarked by June 15th. Please make sure that you submit all supporting receipts. I will no longer be sending emails or making calls to fairs for missing sup-

porting documents starting with this report and moving forward. A \$25 per day late fee will be deducted from the total rehabilitation claim if it is not postmarked by June 15th. Late reports must be postmarked no later than August 15 to qualify for rehabilitation funds.

Lastly, I'm excited to announce that I am working closely with IAAF and the State Fair office so your County Fairs will be represent-

ed on County Fair Day at the 2024 Illinois State Fair. More details will be announced in the near future.

Please feel free to contact me at 217-524-0666 or Jeannette.M.Watkins@illinois.gov with any questions.

Wishing everyone a safe and successful 2024 Fair!

Jeannette Watkins
County Fair Administrator
Illinois Department of Agriculture

Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs Advocacy Fund Appeal

IAAF needs your continued financial support to help our advocacy efforts in Springfield!

Our lobbyist Bridget Dougherty has fought successfully to insure that county fairs funding was not cut and that funding was sent to fairs in a timely manner. Although the FY24 budget that the General Assembly passed recently, included funding for fairs, we are hoping it comes through. There is much work to be done to keep county fair funding going.

Please help us fight for your fair by donating to our advocacy fund.

Name of Fair or Organization: _____

Individual contact Name: _____

Email/Phone: _____

Amount of for IAAF Advocacy Fund Donation: _____

***Please make check payable to "IAAF" and mail to:
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT & GENEROSITY

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