



Illinois  
Association  
of  
Agricultural  
Fairs

October 2024

# TentTalk

## George Pollock Named Fair Person of Year

There was no one more surprised to be named 2024 County Fair Person of the Year than this year's winner, George Pollock of Rushville.

Pollock, 84, is a farmer and former president of the Schuyler County Fair. As he listened to Gov. J.B. Pritzker make the announcement about this year's winner, he thought to himself, "They're talking about me!"

"Every county fair's success is owed to dedicated volunteers with skills they offer year after year," said Pritzker. "We recognize the unique power of the county fair to benefit our local economies. Thank you all for continuing to serve our communities. I am presenting the outstanding county fair person of the year who is unmatched in spirt and selflessness to his county fair."

Pritzker added that Pollock has spent 54 years on the local county fair board, 12 years as president, Speed Superintendent, Track Superintendent and Grounds Superintendent. He has also served as a member of the Illinois Racing Board.

"He has been steadfast in promoting the local county fair and state fair. He has also been involved in harness racing," said Pritzker.

It was at Pritzker's mention of harness racing that George Pollock had a clue the governor might be talking about him. Suddenly, he realized why his daughter, Nancy Wright, had asked to attend with him.

"Halfway through I knew," said Pollock. "I was totally surprised."

He has been relentless in talking to legislators to get changes he



*It was a very surprised George Pollock of Rushville who was honored at the Illinois State Fair as the 2024 County Fair Person of the Year.*

believes are needed.

"Things didn't happen by just a few people talking to legislators," said Pollock. "If you sit on your rear, nothing happens. It takes many of us talking to legislators to get change.

"All I have to say is thank you."

Pollock grew up on a farm and learned the value of hard work. Even while battling chemo, Pollock continued to help bale hay.

"I started at the county fair while  
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# From the President's Chair:

Hi Everyone,

Spring is gone, Summer disappeared, and we will be into Fall shortly. Hope everyone had a great Fair Season. We all battled weather elements, except snow this summer. It got very stressful replanning how to do things! We're fair people and we know how to improvise to make it work. You all deserve a hand for all your work!!

I attended many fairs this summer and all were quite well attended. This is because of your help that makes it possible. It takes a community to make a fair.

It's time for the Fall Zone Meetings: November 2nd is Central at the Morgan County Fairgrounds; November 3rd is Northern at Pitsticks Pavilion in Ottawa; and November 10th is Southern at the Marion County Fairgrounds. I hope to be able to attend all 3 of these events. Hope everyone can make it too.

Queen Natalie Evans represented the IAAF and fairs very well this summer. She attended 28 county fairs plus the Illinois State Fair and DuQuoin State Fair. Great job Natalie!



David Hake

It won't be long before it is cold. When it's cold that means it's time for the IAAF convention. This year's convention will be January 17-19, 2025 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield. The

theme for this year's convention is "Rockin' it Forward". Hope to see everyone, and good luck to all the fair queens in the pageant.

In closing, I would like to thank all the fairs for their hospitality to Queen Natalie and her guests.

Until we meet again.

Yours truly,

President

## Dates to Remember

- **Grand Summary Report** due by October 15, 2024
- **Zone Meetings:**
  - Central Zone, Nov. 2, 2024
  - Northern Zone, Nov. 3, 2024
  - Southern Zone, Nov. 10, 2024

**IAAF Dues** paid by fairs, December 15, 2024

**Queen Ads to Sandy Hoke** December 15, 2024

**Queen Banquet Ticket Orders to Tom Schahrer**, December 15, 2024

• **IAAF Convention, Springfield, IL** Crowne Plaza January 17-19, 2025

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Springfield, IL 62711

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## New Deadlines in Place

In an effort to be more efficient at meeting deadlines, we are asking fairs to keep December 15, 2024 as an important one.

It's the time to make sure all queen ads are in to Sandy Hoke so the queen book can get printed on time.

It's the time to make sure your IAAF dues are paid so your queen and talent show winner can compete in the 2025 convention activities.

It's the time to make sure you have your ticket requests for the queen banquet into Tom Schahrer. This year, both the fair president and the queen pageant director will need to sign the form so both know how many tickets are being ordered.

It's also the deadline for you to save money. If you get your Registration in by Dec. 15, the price is the same as last year — \$25. After that it increases to \$50.

# Speaker Has Four Decades of Experience

You won't want to miss our keynote speaker for the 2025 IAAF Convention.

Mike Bradley, who hails from California, brings expertise as a fair manager and from speaking at many state conventions as well as IAFE. He operates MHB Productions, a fairs and events management consulting business and is an active keynote speaker addressing a wide range of subjects including Visionary Fair Programming, fundraising, leadership, youth development, agriculture awareness and education and current issues related to fairs and festivals throughout North America. He has represented the IAFE and their Speakers Bureau for more than 20 years.

In addition, he has traveled to Hong Kong, South Korea, and mainland China on behalf of several Universities and the IAFE to develop training programs for exposition professionals in Asia. In North America, he has provided keynote addresses in more than 30 US states and four Canadian Provinces. Bradley currently provides management consulting services for more than a dozen fairs in North America.

Representing more than four decades of fair industry experience, He is the immediate past director of the Fairs and Expositions Management Program at Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo, CA. Michael served as the Chief Executive Officer of the California Mid State Fair and Paso Robles Event Center. He was the Executive Director for the Arizona National Livestock Show, Inc.; served as Division Manager at the California Farm Bureau Federation; and served as a member of the Executive Team with the California Exposition and State Fair for 28 years. Bradley is a past chair for the California FFA Foundation (representing 100,000 members). He has served as a Board Member of the Western Fairs Association, is a 35-year member of the Advisory Committee for the Animal Science Department at California Polytechnic State University and a founding Board Member of the Kautz Ironstone Concours Founda-



*Michael Bradley*

tion. He is a Board Member of the Golden State Agricultural Foundation, and Vice Chair of the San Luis Obispo County YMCA. He is a recipient of the WFA Blue Ribbon award, The Ag in the Classroom Outstanding Service award, and the Livestock Market Digest Top 25 Individuals in the livestock Business award. He and his wife Kimberly live in Paso Robles, CA

For the 2025 IAAF Convention, Bradley will speak on the future. His topic is, "Imagine Tomorrow 2035! The Exciting Future of Showcasing "Agriculture" at Fairs!" He will share his insights into what our agriculture and livestock programs will resemble in 2030, 2035 or 2040, looking at future technologies, innovations and new options available. He will challenge us as to how we can reinvent ourselves and create

effective, dramatic agricultural programming at fairs that engages our guests and inspires them to better understand how food is grown and delivered. Come hear about the current and future cutting-edge opportunities and real solutions that will reinvent your agricultural showcase targeted at fair guests. Learn how we can create impact and implement an effective and honest approach to communicating effectively with consumers and provide them with an unexpected "experience" that will provide a lasting and positive impression. Learn how to apply the trends, the solutions, the Technologies and the best management practices for these fair programs that define who we are.

He will also be speaking at our Friday afternoon get-together on creating positive first impressions. Your parking lot may just be the most important part of your fair. He believes first impressions can make or break an event as do last impressions. They are of measurable importance and can establish a guest's entire experience. Come learn how to be intentional about creating positive impressions. You will hear the top 10 methods for inspiring your guest, how important creature comforts are and what we can do as fairs to keep customers coming back year after year for generations.

Breakfast tickets are available in advance for \$20. Please make plans to attend the Saturday morning breakfast and Friday afternoon get-together.

## Zone Meetings Are Scheduled

The annual Fall Zone Meetings are here!

We hope you plan to attend. Here are the dates for your respective IAAF Zone Meetings this fall:

Central Zone – Saturday, November 2 at the Morgan County Fairgrounds in Jacksonville.

Northern Zone – Sunday, November 3 at the Pitstick Pavilion

in Ottawa.

Southern Zone – Sunday, November 10 at the Marion County Fairgrounds in Salem.

Come learn from your fellow fair leaders at these events. Everyone is welcome to attend. Come and meet your queens, some vendors on site and some awesome entertainment available to book for your 2025 fair.

# Nothing Beats the Incredible Sights, Sounds and Smells of Illinois County Fairs



Riders could see "forever" from the Ferris wheel at this year's McLean County Fair.



Swine judging is always a challenge and it was no exception at the McLean County Fair.



Jacob Schrader shows his chicken at the Fairbury Fair in August.



Kenadee Casson, left, helps her little sister, Kaislee, at the Pee-Wee Showmanship event at Fairbury.



Prairie Central FFA member Ellie Ellis displayed her horse during one of the education days held at the annual Fairbury Fair in August.



These flowers were chosen Best of Class during stromg competition at the McLean County Fair.



Michael Kilgus of Prairie Central Cooperative shows children how a grain elevator works during an educational event at the Fairbury Fair.



The crew that helped make the queen's Meet and Greet at the Illinois State Fair included State Fair staff, Pam Schahrer, summer intern Christopher Leatherwood, Terri Quinn, Mary Liz Wight and Tom Schahrer.



Queen Natalie Evans was photographed at the Illinois State Fair with this prize-winning cow, one of the many livestock entries that featured Illinois' prowess in raising top quality animals and other products.



Miss Illinois Fair Queen Natalie Evans welcomed Evelyin Brandt to the Illinois State Fair in Springfield during August's perfect fair weather.



Desiree DeWeese poses with her painting that captured Grand Champion honors at the Fairbury Fair this past August.

# 'Rockin' It Forward' Is Convention Theme

Great things are planned for the 2025 IAAF Convention. Dates are January 17-19, 2025.

Your attendance at the 2025 IAAF Convention is the first step toward helping your fair head to the future.

Our keynote speaker, Mike Bradley, is set to help you "Imagine Tomorrow 2035 and the Exciting Future of Showcasing Agriculture at Fairs." Ever thought about what our agriculture and livestock programs will look like in 2030, 2035 or 2040? Fasten your seat belt as Mike helps us navigate new territories. Mike is from California and is a frequent speaker at IAFE and state conventions. You won't want to miss his presentation.

In addition to the Saturday morn-

ing breakfast, Mike will speak about "First Impressions" of your fair, starting at the parking lot at the Friday afternoon session.

Remember last year's Showcase with Mark Wills. Like last year's look for another big name to close out the Friday night entertainment. There will be two stages again and plans for more entertainment. As always, we will have plenty of beer, wine and ice cream, thanks to our own Tom and Pam Schahrer – to go along with the extra music.

On Saturday afternoon, you won't want to miss the Junior and Senior Talent Shows.

New Roundtable topics are planned for Sunday morning. And Sunday

evening, we will crown a new Miss Illinois County Fair Queen. So far, there are 74 queens vying for the coveted crown.

Dates for the 2025 convention are Jan. 17-19.

IAAF Membership and Convention packets have been emailed to a contact person at your fair or your associate business. Included are renewal membership information and basic convention registration materials, including breakfast ticket requests and hotel reservation forms.

Association packets also include sponsorship opportunities as well as trade show and Showcase opportunities. When returning the materials, please make sure all contact information relating to names, addresses, email and website information is included. This year, they will be mailed to Terri Quinn, 15824 N. 1650th St., Chrisman, IL 61924. You can also pay online at [www.illinois-countyfairs.org](http://www.illinois-countyfairs.org).

Thank you for your continued support of Illinois fairs. If you have questions, email at [iaafsecretary@gmail.com](mailto:iaafsecretary@gmail.com) or call 217-553-1120.

## Keep Up the Great Work!

Happy Fall Everyone!

Another fair season has come and gone, and I want to thank all of you for your endless hard work and dedication showcasing Illinois agriculture. The countless hours that go into preparing for a fair are not unnoticed by the hundreds of thousands of people who come out to enjoy the fairs with their families and friends, making memories that last a lifetime.

This year, we unveiled a few new activities on County Fair Day. The Queen Meet and Greet was a HUGE success and brought lots of smiles to children's faces. The public also enjoyed the impromptu flash mob dance by the County Fair Queens. Great job, girls! The County Fair Queens even got to greet the crowd in the Illinois State Fair parade. I hope everyone enjoyed the new activities as a great addition to County Fair Day!

I also want to thank all of you who prepared and submitted the required reports this year. Your attention to detail and respect for the deadline is greatly appreciated and has proven to be very beneficial in improving the turnaround time in processing Rehab and Premium Reimbursement payments for your fairs. Keep up the great work!

Thanks again for your contribution to the fairs. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at the Fall Zone Meetings!

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 FY25 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:  
71 West Fairview Lane, Springfield, IL 62711***

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT & GENEROSITY**

# —Pollock Served His Fair for 54 Years

(Continued on Page 7)

in 4-H in the 1950s, showing Registered Holstein dairy calves,” said Pollock, who remembers receiving showmanship three years in a row. “The fourth year my dad loaded the stock and we were headed to the (Schuyler County) fairgrounds and he said, ‘George, I’m not going to let you show in showmanship this year.’ I must have been 13 or 14 at the time.” He said, ‘I want you to give someone else a chance.’ That was hard but I understood it later.”

His life goal was to farm. He had a side plumbing, heating and electric

business for 25 years. In his spare time, he began raising and racing standardbred horses.

“I loved doing that. I raced horses at the county fairs from 1970 to 1984, then got out, than got back in 2012. Dad helped me and I raced the horses myself. At one time, we had 20 head of racehorses, 14 at home and 6 at the mutual track. That was my life. If it wouldn’t have been for county fairs, I wouldn’t have been able to do that.

“County fairs have seen a lot of changes, but they’re still a wonderful place.”

Pollock’s nominator wrote,

“George has worked tirelessly for many decades to enhance his local Schuyler County Fair as well as state individual including many elected officials. With his vast knowledge, George has educated countless individuals across the state as to the needs, and more importantly, the benefits of county fairs.

George advocates in many ways to bring back the harness racing program within the state of Illinois. You would be hard pressed to find someone that believes more in the true meaning of a county fair than George. He is well deserving of this award.”

## Dougherty Gives Legislative Update

by **Bridget Dougherty**

Hello Fair Leaders:

Congratulations on another successful fair season. Hope everyone had a lot of fun and enjoyed this special time.

### **County Fair Day at the State Fair:**

County Fair Day at the State Fair was held on August 8, the opening day of the State Fair. We had a great turnout. Governor Pritzker and Lieutenant Governor Stratton attended and spoke about the importance of county fairs and agriculture to the State of Illinois.

**2024 Veto Session:** The Illinois General Assembly will convene for two weeks in November for the 2024 Veto Session. The dates are November 12 through 14 and November 19 through 21. The full calendar for the 2025 legislative session will be released at this time and we will provide it to the IAAF Board.

### **Administrative Rule Change:**

We continue to work with the Illinois Department of Agriculture to improve and update the rules that govern the operations of county fairs. We are currently working on an initiative which would remove the requirement that fair books, when submitted to the Department, be notarized. A second and related change would provide that fair books be submitted electronically rather

than through the US mail. This proposal has to go through the lengthy Joint Committee on Administrative Rules process. We will let you know when it is finalized, and hopefully it will simplify your operations.

**General Election:** The General Election is Tuesday, November 5, 2024. All members of the Illinois House of Representatives are on the

ballot, as are one – third of the Illinois Senate, and of course the race for President of the United States. Please get out there and vote!

**Fair Funding:** We continue to promote ways to improve fair funding and make it more equitable. In 2025 we will advocate for increases to line items that support fair operations.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Melvin Everette Kimmel**, 81, of Olney, Illinois, passed away on Monday, May 6, 2024, at Good Samaritan Hospital in Vincennes, Indiana.

Melvin was born August 7, 1942, in Parkersburg, Illinois, the son of



*Melvin Everette Kimmel*

Robert V. and Lois (Brewer) Kimmel. He married Mary Lou (Lathrop) on October 27, 1962 in Olney, and she survives. Melvin was a farmer for several years, worked for Bauman Oil Well Cementing, was a commodity broker for Delta Commodities, and worked several

other jobs throughout his life.

Melvin was a 4-H member and past president of the Olney FFA. He was also a member of the Richland County Fair Board and a charter member of the Richland County 4-H Foundation. He was also a member of Ebenezer United Methodist Church. Melvin enjoyed many activities including bee keeping, gardening, drag racing, and sharing coffee with friends.

Melvin is survived by his wife of 61 years, Mary Lou Kimmel of Olney; son, Mark Kimmel and wife Janet of Noblesville, IN; son, Murl Kimmel and wife Rhonda of Weldon, IL; grandsons, Jared (Monica Richards) Kimmel and Cole (Alexis) Kimmel, great grandson, Lincoln Kimmel; brother, Wayne (Bridget) Kimmel of Vincennes, IN; and several nieces and nephews.



*Great weather greeted this bevy of candidates for the IAAF Miss Illinois County Fair Queen Contest during the Illinois State Fair's County Fair Day. The Queen Contest will be held in January during the Annual*

*IAAF Convention in Springfield at the Crowne Plaza where the winner will be chosen to represent IAAF at a host of fair related activities during 2025 including a presentation to the Illinois General Assembly.*

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