



Illinois
Association
of
Agricultural
Fairs

May 2025

TentTalk

Johnna Fulcher Named 2025 IAAF Queen

The Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs held its 114th annual convention at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield, Illinois January 17-19, 2025.

One of the highlights of the annual event is the Miss Illinois County Fair Queen Pageant, held January 19.

Johnna Fulcher, 20, of Geneseo was crowned the 67th Miss Illinois County Fair Queen. Johnna represented Henry County at the 114th Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs Convention on Sunday. Johnna is the daughter of Margo and David Hohe. She is currently attending Blackhawk College and will graduate this spring with an associate degree in art. She plans to continue her education at Carl Sandburg College to pursue a degree in dental hygiene.

Fulcher 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 in DuQuoin. As queen, Fulcher's main duty is to emphasize the importance of agriculture and county fairs to Illinois.

Delaney Epley of Christian County was named the first runner up, Claire Oliver of Sangamon County was named second runner up, Kaylee Ford of Western Illinois Fair was named third runner up, and Paris Van Dyke of Clay County was named fourth runner up.

Dressed in a sparkling purple gown, Fulcher described the moment her name was announced as



Newly crowned 2025 IAAF Queen Johnna Fulcher of Geneseo waves to the crowd following her coronation during the 2025 Annual IAAF Convention held January 17 to 19 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

Miss Illinois County Fair Queen as "surreal"

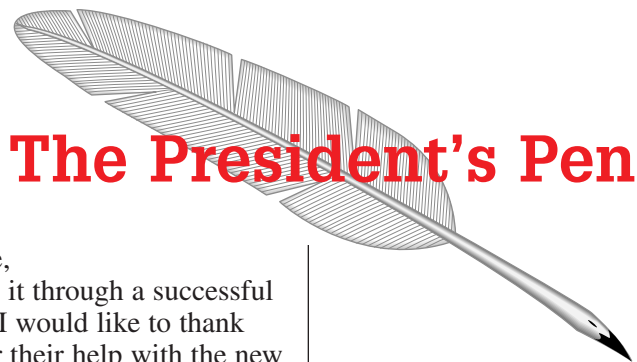
"I nearly blacked out," she said. "It was an amazing moment. I thought everyone on that stage could have been chosen. The fact it was me, I feel so honored. I'm so grateful. I'm overjoyed with emotion and really happy right now."

In addition to being employed by the Geneseo Park District, Fulcher enjoys playing soccer the past 16 years, hanging out with her three younger brothers, reading in her spare time and going on coffee runs

with friends. She also enjoys coaching youth basketball, cooking with her grandmother and playing the baritone ukulele.

The top 15 finalists were: Ella Horn of Williamson County, Claire Oliver of Sangamon County, Olivia Shike of Champaign County, Kyan-dra Zerrusen of Effingham County, Colleen Schumann of Calhoun County, Haley Bode of Monroe County, McKinley Rexroast of Warren County, Paili Davis of Georgetown Fair, Paris Van Dyke of Clay

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The President's Pen

Hi Everyone,

We made it through a successful convention. I would like to thank everyone for their help with the new badge change and the scanners. Everyone did a great job. We were up in trade show vendors as well. Everything was well attended.

The Queen Pageant had 73 young women competing for the title. They were all winners to make it this far. I would like to congratulate our new Queen, Johnna Fulcher. Johnna will represent us very well.

Winter is almost over, and spring is in the air. Today as I am writing this, it is 76 degrees in Southern Illinois. Spring brings our early fairs that are just months away. It is hard to believe it's almost fair time again. I hope everyone has the best fair yet in 2025. There is nothing like the excitement and food at the fair. It always reminds me of my childhood.

We had a successful legislative reception on March 18. There were several fairs in attendance and numerous legislators that evening. I would like to thank all who attended.

I'm hoping to be able to visit more fairs this year. I always enjoy seeing how everyone does things differently but ends up with the same results – successful fairs. It



David Hake

takes a team to prepare everything to be ready for the opening day of the fair. Fair people are the best at multi-tasking! That's a good thing.

I am saddened to let you

know that Bill Jennings, IAAF southern director at large, has passed away. Bill will be greatly missed. I know personally, if I didn't have the answer to a question, Bill would know the answer. Please keep his family in your prayers.

In closing, I wish you all great weather, great attendance and a great fair this year. I hope to see some of you this summer at your fair. Don't forget County Fair Day at the Illinois State Fair on Aug. 7.

Until we meet again,

Dave Hake

President

Address Updates Are Needed

The IAAF office continues to update the TentTalk mailing list.

If you have received this issue and no longer wish to receive future issues, please let us know. If you are responsible for your fair directors' listings, please forward any new address changes, and new board members or current directors who do not currently receive the issues of TentTalk.

The way the list is maintained

makes it difficult to know who should be deleted. Therefore, please forward any names that should be, or should have been, removed over the past several years.

We will check and if they still are on the list, they will be removed.

Please send all updates to: IAAFsecretary@gmail.com or to IAAF Office, 71 West Fairview Lane, Springfield, IL 62711.

Dates to Remember

- **IAAF Dues Paid by Fairs,**
Oct. 1, 2025
- **Queen Ads to Sandy Hoke,**
Oct. 1, 2025
- **Queen Banquet Ticket Orders**
to Tom Schahreer
Nov. 20, 2025
- **Declaration of Intent**
December 31, 2025
- **F & E Premium Fund Grand Summary & Accompanying Reports/Receipts**
December 31
- **4-H Report & Justification:**
Due in State 4-H Office prior to
County Fair Office Due Date
December 31, 2025

Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs

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www.IllinoisCountyFairs.org

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217-553-1120



The 2025 Friends of Illinois County Fairs were recognized during the 114th Annual IAAF Convention. From left to right are: Lyle Lee standing in for Deb White of the Boone County Fair, Rhonda Mueller of the

Washington County Fair, Sponsor Ed Dame, Susie Dvorak of the Stephenson County Fair, and Craig Gebhardt of the Carroll County Fair. Deb White of the Boone County Fair is shown at the far right.



Honor Friends of Illinois County Fairs

Four individuals were selected for the 2025 Friends of Illinois Fairs award: Rhonda Mueller of Washington County, Craig Gebhardt of Carroll County, Deb White of Boone County and Susie Dvorak of Stephenson County.

Rhonda Mueller is a long-time fair board member who has served as President of the Washington County fair. She is known for her work to improve the fair including obtaining top rated music entertainment. Under her leadership, fair attendance has increased greatly. She also brought people together in the county by including Jaycees, Lions Club and the school district to participate in the fair. Her nominator said Rhonda is at the fair “24/7 tackling any task needed big or small.”

Craig Gebhardt started at the Carroll County Fair as a volunteer doing repairs and maintenance and cleaning up the grounds after a tornado. He later became a director for vendors. His nominator said Craig is skilled in recruiting businesses to

organize extra entertainment and refreshments. Since then, Craig has served almost every office on the Carroll County fair board. He has passed his knowledge down to his grandchildren, convincing them to be in charge of “garbage management”.

Deb White is a part-time employee of the Boone County Fair who works overtime every week. She is not only in charge of the office during the fair but all year long for off-season rentals. Her nominator said the Boone County fair would be a “mess without her.”

Susie Dvorak has been a volunteer at the Stephenson County Fair for 37 years. She “lives and breathes” the county fair year-round. The fair was a favorite pastime of hers as a child and she now shares those same experiences with her grandchildren. She has served as co-director of the queen pageant and non-livestock superintendent. She also is successful at obtaining sponsorships, supporting superintendents and volunteers with her husband.

She currently serves as historian for the 170-year fair. Even her email reflects her love for the fair – it’s susielovesthefair.

—Top Finalists

(Continued from Page 1)

County, Annalyse Richter of Madison County, Johnna Fulcher of Henry County, Claire Meyer of Moultrie-Douglas County, Kaylee Ford of Western Illinois Fair, Elizabeth Corrie of Schuyler County, Delaney Epley of Christian County and Gracie Lindley of Bond County.

Non-finalist awards went to: Ella King of Mercer County, Ruby Crum Award; Addison Earley of Macoupin County, Best in Stage Presence; Bella Welch of Okawville, Best in Communications Skills Competition; Olivia Pawlak of McHenry County, Best in Beauty and Physique competition. Emersyn Fleisher of Knox County was the People’s Choice Award Winner.

2025 Talent Show Winners Are Amazing



The dance performance in the Junior Division of the 2025 IAAF Convention Talent Show was won by the trio of Izzy Cllaudius, Serena Graham-Martinez and Anlee Jones of Schuyler County. 2024 IAAF Queen Natalie Evans of Morgan County presented the award for their Hip Hop Dance.



Mia Ward, left, of Mercer County, is presented the first place award by 2024 IAAF Queen Natalie Evans of Morgan County for her vocal solo performance in the Senior Division of the 2025 IAAF Convention Talent Show.

Talent Show winners were chosen on Saturday afternoon.

Winner in the senior division went to Mia Ward of Mercer County with a vocal solo; second place went to Nalani Day of Georgetown County Fair with a piano solo; third place went to Seth White of Boone County with a vocal solo; fourth place went to Taylor DeWeese of Morgan County with a dance solo.

In the Junior Division Talent Show, Izzy Claudius, Serena Graham-Martinez and Anlee Jones of Schuyler County were the winners with a dance performance.

Second place went to Chloe Buhlig of Scott County with a dance solo; third place went to Tatum Bonjean of Sangamon County with a dance solo; and fourth place went to Audrey Neukomm of Ford County with a piano solo.

IAFE Zone 5 conference

by Jill Hardesty, Fisher Fair
IAAF Past State President

A group of 20 from Illinois traveled to the "Land of Oz", Wichita, Kansas, for a weekend of fun and fair education February 28th, March 1st and March 2nd for the IAFE Zone 5 conference.

The wind literally blew us all to Kansas. A hospitality room met us when we got there, and we enjoyed an evening of catching up with friends and even meeting new ones.

Saturday was an educational morning, then we loaded buses after lunch to Hutchison where you could take one of 2 tours in the Hutchison area. 1) Strataca, a salt mine or the 2) Cosmosphere, a space museum affiliated with the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. The group then headed to the Kansas State Fairgrounds for a wonderful steak supper, Music Bingo and Trivia, held in their newest building on the fairgrounds. We were bused back to Wichita to the hotel, then finished the evening with more hospitality.

Sunday, we started the day with a great Gospel group, "The Girls Next Door" and ended the festivities with the Zone 5 meeting. Then we were on our way home. Door prizes were provided by the 5 state fairs. Rick Hardesty from Fisher Fair won the Illinois basket. Thank you Illinois State Fair for that donation!

Illinois was well represented with DuPage County bringing the most fair board members from Illinois. Other Illinois fairs represented were Illinois State Fair, Heart of Illinois, Washington County/Nashville, Fisher Fair, Fairbury Fair, Iroquois County Fair and Macoupin County Fair.

In his comments to the group, IAFE President/CEO David Grindle told the Zone 5 attendees that the November IAFE convention will be held in Denver in 2025. The 2026 IAFE convention will be held in Louisville, KY and in 2027, we will go back to Las Vegas, NV. So put those dates on your calendars!

Zone 5 Director Brian Schutz from the Kansas State Fair introduced Jeremy Parsons from the Iowa State Fair. Jeremy said the 2026 Zone 5 will be held in downtown Des Moines, Iowa, March 6-8, 2026.



IAAF Secretary Charlyn Ware convinced these queen candidates to take a time out from their schedule to pose for this group photo on the escalator at the Crowne Plaza during the annual convention.



Jared the Juggler shows his skill at balancing objects on his rather pointed top; oh, for a flat spot on the pate.



Robot Ace Justice took over the trade show during the 2025 Annual Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs held January 17-19 at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield. He can be encouraged to attend Illinois Fairs and wow spectators of all ages who always look for the latest.

New Deadlines

Watch your emails for communication from the IAAF as to new deadlines this year for the convention.

IAAF Dues paid by fairs: Oct. 1, 2025

Queen Ads to Sandy Hoke: Oct. 1, 2025

Queen Banquet Ticket Orders to Tom Schahrer: Nov. 20, 2025

Important Report Dates for IDOA

Happy Spring Everyone!

Good news! If you haven't already received it, premium reimbursements are on its way, just in time for the 2025 Fair Season.

I'm looking forward to getting out to visit as many fairs as I possibly can. Prayers that Mother Nature is kind to us this year, and all of your fairs are a great success!

If your fair has a change on its board, I'm asking the president of your fair to please send me an email with the new contacts and who

should be eliminated from any future emails.

Here is a list of the remaining 2025 important report dates:

May 1st: Track improvement receipts are due

June 1st: All annual contracts are due (please make sure you select the correct type of contract from the website). Please feel free to email them to me.

June 30th: Rehabilitation Reports and receipts are due.

Please make sure all supporting

receipts are included and have a calculator tape attached.

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

Sincerely,
Jeannette Watkins
County Fair Administrator
Department of Agriculture
Bureau of County Fairs & Horse Racing



The top five 2025 IAAF Queen Candidates are pictured above. In the front center is Miss Illinois Fair Queen Johnna Fulcher of Geneseo. She is pictured with the other four finalists in back, left to right: third runner

up Kayilee Ford of Western Illinois Fair; first runner up Delaney Epley of Christian County; second runner up Claire Oliver of Sangamon County and fourth runner up Paris Van Dyke of Clay County.

Recap of 2025 Annual IAAF Convention

What an amazing 2025 Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs convention.

Some 73 queens competed for the title of 2025 Miss Illinois County Fair Queen with Johnna Fulcher of Henry County being named, four individuals were awarded Friends of Illinois County Fairs, some 80 vendors participated in the Trade Show, the Showcase had standing-room only crowds and two young students were named the Junior and Senior Talent Show winners.

Attendance was the highest in recent years.

Keynote speaker Mike Bradley shared with Saturday morning breakfast attendees how fairs can adapt to change in the future.

Be a big thinker. Daniel Burnam, who led the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, said "Make no little plans." He

was a big thinker.

Tell a new story. There are opportunities to tell a new story and educate fairgoers. He suggests exhibits on aquaponics, AI, insects, solar power, drones, seaweed or robots. All will be popular in the future.

Embrace technology. Everyone carries a phone. Use technology to stay in touch with your fairgoers and get them excited about coming to the fair and seeing what is there.

Dream big. He encouraged fair boards to ask fairgoers what they might be interested in and to try new exhibits and events.

On Friday evening, 7 bands performed to a standing-room only crowd at the Showcase, including the final premier presentation by Dirty Grass Soul band. While the bands played, attendees could sample Illinois wine and snacks, provid-

ed by Tom and Pam Schahrer.

Meanwhile, the Trade Show offered more than 80 booths for fairs to choose a carnival, magician, entertainer, motor sport, tractor pull, rodeo or concessionaire. It remains the very best place to bring live events to your fair.

On Saturday afternoon, a hip hop dance team from Schuyler County won first place in the Junior Division Talent Show. The team was made up of Izzy Claudius, Serena Graham-Martinez and Anless Jones. Winner of the senior division went to Mia Ward of Mercer County with a vocal solo.

Selected for The Friends of the Illinois Fairs Award were: Rhonda Mueller of Washington County, Craig Gebhardt of Carroll County, Deb White of Boone County and Susie Dvorak of Stephenson County.

IN MEMORIAM

William Neil Jennings

Bill Jennings made an appointment to see me the first week I was named Bureau Chief of County Fairs and Horse Racing at the Illinois Department of Agriculture. He wanted to make sure this girl knew the basics of county fair funding and how important they were to the state's economy.

That meeting turned out to be one of many that Bill and I would have.

Several years later, after I had left the department to pursue my passion of working as a dietitian full time at Hy-Vee, it was Bill who asked me to consider the job of secretary-treasurer of the IAAF.

And it was Bill who always had my back – patiently explaining what county fairs needed or just being a friend to listen.

On New Year's Eve, 2024, Bill called from his hospital room and shared with me that he had been diagnosed with an inoperable cancer. We both cried and prayed God would touch him.

I, like, many of you, know we have lost a great friend of the IAAF. He was the first to share how important legislative matters were and how important it was that we all talk to our legislators. He was the emcee at County Fair day and the queen pageant banquet. At IAAF board meetings, he was a leader and voice of wisdom.

May we all strive to carry the torch he has passed on to us.

Charlyn Fargo Ware

Bill Jennings, 78, of Olney, IL, passed peacefully at his home surrounded by his loving family on March 7, 2025 in Olney, IL.

Bill Jennings was born November 15, 1946 in Olney, IL to parents, Herman Jennings and Ruby Jennings (Waggoner). He married Barbara (Caudell) Jennings on March 17, 1973.



William Jennings

Bill graduated from East Richland

High School in 1964 and then earned a degree in animal science from the University of Illinois. He later became an RN and served over 30 years in the Emergency Department at Richland Memorial Hospital. He was also a Dale Carnegie instructor for many years.

Bill was a lifelong grain and livestock farmer and showed Ayrshire Cattle for many years. He was very active in County Fairs at the local and state level and was President of the Richland County Farm & Fair Association for the majority of his adult life, and past President of Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs, and was currently serving on the Board of Directors as Southern Zone Director at Large.

Bill served as the Dairy Cattle Superintendent at the Springfield State Fair and the Duquoin State Fair.

Bill was an active member of the Masonic Lodge, the Shriners, and a Jester. He also supported the Shriners Children's Hospital.

Bill was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed hunting, fishing, canoeing, and helping his sons with their gardening and landscaping endeavors. He took pleasure in golfing and served on the grounds and greens committee at the Richland Golf Club.

Bill played the role of mentor and father figure to many through the years. His influence will continue through the example he set.

Bill is survived by his wife, Barb Jennings of Olney; son, Greg Runyon and wife Cheryl of Olney; son, Pat Jennings and wife, Jess, of Olney; grandchildren, Owen Jennings, Ruby Jennings, and Evan Jennings; sister, Glenda Berry of Paris, IL; and nieces, Diane, Darcy, and Lori.

Scott Wayne Dunham, age 63, of Griggsville, IL passed away at the Halifax Medical Center in Daytona Beach, FL on Tuesday February 18, 2025. He was born on May 8, 1961, in Pittsfield, IL to Leo and Hilda (Williams) Dunham. Scott married the love of his life Alicia Craig on March 28, 1981, at the Griggsville Church of Christ and she survives.

Scott graduated from Griggsville High School with the class of 1980.

He started his working career at the early age of 9, helping his broth-

ers on the farm after the untimely death of their father. He learned to drive the farm trucks, barely able to see over the wheel.

During high school he worked for Delford

Richter and then for D.B.

Chamberlain hauling anhydrous. Scott and his brothers Dwight and Steve worked for Art Crowder Trucking and went on to buy out Crowder Trucking and LSSD was formed in February 1985.

3-D Trucking was formed in May 2000 as a leasing company which later became the trucking company as we know it today, where everyone area wide could find him leading his crew in "THE SHOP". The brothers added Pike County Concrete in 2010 and later bought out the Morgan-Scott Redi-Mix in 2015.

Scott was a 42-year Western Illinois Fair board member and has been the president since 2008. He put his heart and soul into the fair, helping to keep it alive and thriving. He was currently a Griggsville City Alderman, where he was serving a second term.

Scott had been a longtime Moose Lodge member and was the current governor. Scott was an extremely hard worker, always ready to help where needed, never needing recognition. He was a fixer for his family, friends, and employees and one of the most generous humans on this earth.

Scott was known for building his own Scottie-Built creations. He enjoyed vacationing with his friends and family in Daytona Beach, Florida and always made it to the Daytona 500.

Scott is survived by his loving wife Alicia; one daughter, Tasha (Justin) Poggemiller of Griggsville, IL, one son, Preston (Bethany) Dunham of Griggsville, IL; four grandchildren; and two brothers, Dwight (Judi) Dunham, Steve (Trella) Dunham.



Scott Dunham

Dougherty Gives IL Legislative Report

by **Bridget Dougherty**
IAAF Legislative Consultant

Hello IAAF Leaders! Hope is well.

This is your spring 2025 state legislative affairs update. We are about halfway through the 2025 spring legislative session. The session is scheduled to adjourn on May 31, 2025.

Fair Funding for County Fairs

We continue to advocate for equitable funding for county fairs statewide.

There is good news: Governor Pritzker's proposed budget contains a small increase for county fairs within the rehabilitation budget line.

This line item contains funds to reimburse fairs for improvements made on the physical structures on fair property and other purposes. We are grateful to see this in the

Governor's budget and have been working hard for the last few years to achieve it.

Please note that the Governor's budget is not the final budget document; it is only a blueprint or roadmap that must still go through the regular appropriations process in the legislature.

The key is to keep this small increase in the final budget that is sent to the Governor and we are working hard to do just that.

Spring Legislative Meet and Greet

The Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs held the 2025 spring Legislative Meet and Greet on Tuesday, March 18 in Springfield.

Thank you to all that attended. We have partnered with the Illinois Grape Growers and Vintners Alliance for a number of years now.

Next year, we will hold the event later in the session and will be sure to let you know the date.

Administrative Rules Changes

As you know, we have been working closely with the Illinois Department of Agriculture for some time to implement changes to the Illinois Administrative Rules that govern county fairs.

These changes are intended to update, simplify and streamline the requirements surrounding your interactions with the Department.

The Department is currently developing draft changes to remove all remaining references to notarization of documents by fairs and clarifying that fairs may send their premium books to the department electronically rather than by US mail.

Wishing everyone a fun and safe fair season!

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