



Illinois  
Association  
of  
Agricultural  
Fairs

October 2026

# TentTalk

## Sherry Repp Named Fair Person of Year

Each year at the County Fair Day Luncheon a person is recognized for their time and commitment to the Illinois County Fair Association.

This year was no exception, as Governor J.B. Pritzker announced the winner, Sherry Repp of the Martinsville Agricultural Fair. As Sherry came up on stage to join Governor Pritzker, Lieutenant Governor

Juliana Stratton, Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello, State Fair Manager Rebecca Clark, Bureau Chief of County Fairs and Horse Racing Scott Halpin and Miss Illinois County Fair Queen Krista Phillips the Governor made note that he actually had the incredible pleasure of talking with Sherry at the County Fair Luncheon last year,

which he was especially pleased to be able to recognize her for the lifetime of service to her community and the tradition of county fairs.

Sherry has served her local fair for more than six decades—starting when she was 13 years old. She has served as Secretary of the Martinsville Agricultural Fair since 1962, helping to keep the fair running year after year, along with preserving the traditions that make it so special.

She is more than an organizer, she has been a keeper of the fair's history, making sure its stories and traditions are passed down to future generations. Her commitment extends beyond Martinsville, as she has shared her time and expertise with fairs in Cumberland, Edgar, Coles, and Clark Counties, as well as the Illinois State Fair.

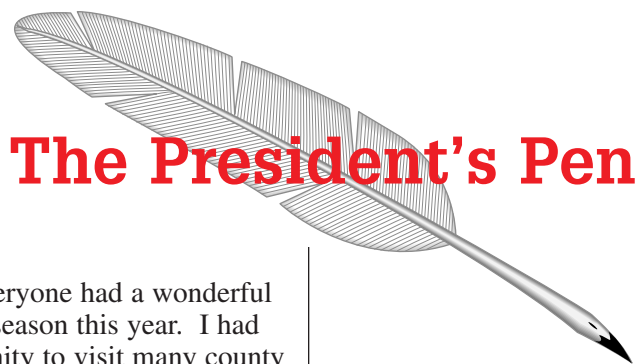
Governor Pritzker noted that for more than 60 years, Sherry has given her time, energy, and heart to county fairs, so on behalf of the people of Illinois, Thank You for all your incredible dedication to your community and for helping keep this tradition alive for generations to come.

In accepting the award, Sherry Thanked the Governor and everyone on stage along with her Fair Board, Family and Friends for coming to help in celebrating the honor she was presented.

In closing, before leaving the stage to have pictures taken with the Queens, Governor Pritzker gave a "Big Thank-You" to everyone in attendance for everything County Fair People do to keep our traditions and values strong and to carry them into the future.



*Sherry Repp of the Martinsville Agricultural Fair was honored during the Illinois State Fair as the County Fair Person of the Year in a ceremony with Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker presenting her with the award. The award is given annually by the Illinois Department of Agriculture to a volunteer fair worker who has provided their fair and community with a significant number of years of service.*



## The President's Pen

Hello,

I hope everyone had a wonderful county fair season this year. I had the opportunity to visit many county fairs, and one of the things I enjoyed most was watching young people showcase their livestock and other exhibits.

For many young people, the county fair is about much more than ribbons, trophies, and competition. It is often their first experience managing a long-term project from beginning to end. They learn the importance of responsibility, commitment, patience, and hard work. These experiences help build confidence and character in ways that can be difficult to replicate in the classroom alone.

Youth organizations such as **4-H and FFA are extremely important to the future of agriculture and our county fairs.** We must continue to encourage young people to become involved in agriculture and their county fairs as this will ensure that future generations understand the importance of where our food comes from and the people that produce it.

Agriculture touches everyone's life. We need to continue educating people of all generations about the crops grown in our communities and the livestock that helps put food on our tables. The need for food will



Gary Mielke

never go away.

I would like to extend a **big thank-you to everyone that helps make our county fairs possible.** From the volunteers and fair boards to the 4-H and FFA leaders,

parents, exhibitors, judges, superintendents, and countless others who give their time, these individuals play an important role in providing opportunities for our youth.

Your dedication does more than make a successful county fair. **You are helping keep agricultural education alive in our communities and helping prepare the next generation for the future.**

The future of agriculture depends on young people who are willing to learn, lead, and carry on these traditions forward. Our county fairs give them a place to begin.



*Representative Jason Bunting and Representative Amy Grant visiting about some County Fair concerns with IAAF Members at the Legislative Reception on May 5, 2026, in Springfield.*

## Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs

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**www.IllinoisCountyFairs.org**

IAAF Office  
15824 N 1650th St.  
Chrisman, IL 61924  
217-822-1896

## Zone Meetings

The arrival of Fall means all Illinois County Fairs have taken place along with harvest in full swing, and is officially IAAF County Fairs Zone Meeting Season. The dates and locations have been set. We hope everyone will be able to attend their respective zone meetings this fall:

**Northern Zone:** Nov. 1, 2026, at Senica's Oak Ridge Golf Club.

**Central Zone:** Nov. 7, 2026, at Macoupin County Fairgrounds.

**Southern Zone:** Nov. 8, 2026, at Marion County Fairgrounds.

These meetings are a sharing time between fairs, a time to visit with associate vendors, enjoy some entertainment along with the Queens who attend and help throughout the meetings.

# 'Country Pride, County Wide' Is Theme

Mark your calendar for the upcoming Annual IAAF Convention on January 15-17, 2027.

What better way to continue the Pride of the USA 250 Celebration than for Illinois County Fairs kicking off the next 250 years at our convention.

Our keynote speaker at the Saturday morning breakfast will be David Grindle, President and CEO of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions—"IAFE".

David brings a future look at the fair industry from a different view, from growing up on a dairy farm in the mountains of Georgia his career path took him into the Theatre and Stage Instruction and Management world. David enjoys meeting and visiting with fair people, not only hearing their stories, but also any concerns they have about our industry.

David will share some of his experiences with our IAAF members from his past along with the happenings of the IAFE. He is also going to highlight the reality from the results of the IAFE economic impact study produced that all our fairs play a big part in for our own local communities and state.

Along with speaking at the breakfast, David is also going to have a session on Sunday morning on "Board Relationships" that everyone will not want to miss.....this will be a great topic with lots of good thoughts and ideas for fairs to consider.

We are looking forward to having a great selection of associates for the trade show with lots of new ideas for our fairs to consider. The tradeshow will be open Friday and Saturday afternoons.

Friday evening returns with a fun

evening of entertainment with the Showcase of acts for fairs to consider booking. Saturday Jr. and Sr. Talent Show will once again showcase some very amazing, talented youth of our state.

The Queen Pageant is once again growing in numbers, it has not been confirmed, but it is rumored we could have some new county fairs with contestants.

All these young ladies will be busy all weekend practicing, being interviewed, and competing to claim the title of the 2027 Miss Illinois County Fair Queen that has been very well represented this year by Queen Krista Phillips.

Watch for the Registration and Hotel reservation forms as they will be sent out around the first part of October. We look forward to seeing everyone at the convention.

## Things to Consider Prior to Convention

Here are a couple of important things to consider doing as convention time nears.

**Nominating a person** associated with your fair for the "Friend of The County Fairs Award.

Each year a group of recipients are presented with this award for their dedication and service to an Illinois County Fair or Fairs.

The vision of this award came about during a get together of some county fair people along with Jeff & Patty Blomsness of North American Midway Entertainment (NAME) carnival owners while enjoying some ice cream during an IAAF Convention.

The award has provided the opportunity for more Illinois County Fair people to be recognized for their time, service, and dedication to their fair each year. Nominations are due by Nov. 1st.

More information along with a nomination form is available on the IAAF Website. Under the "About Us" tab, Click on "Friends of

IAAF". Marvin and Sharon Perzee were the original administrators of this award, then passed the torch onto Ron and Lois Meyer. The Meyers' contact information is included with the form on the website.

**Supporting the IAAF Advocacy Fund** that provides our association with funds to be able to hire a lobbyist that can keep a watchful eye in a timely manner on legislation activ-

ity in the General Assembly.

Having someone with close connections with day-to-day happenings in Springfield has benefited all our Illinois County Fairs with the funding all our Fairs receive each year.

Annual support from all our fairs for the Advocacy Fund is not only appreciated but needed and can be sent to the IAAF c/o Terri Quinn, 15824 N. 1650th St. Chrisman, IL 61924.



*Senator Terri Bryant and Illinois Bureau Chief of County Fairs and Horse Racing, Scott Halpin visiting with IAAF Members during the Legislative Reception on May 5, 2026, in Springfield.*

# Along the Fair Trail at Illinois County Fairs During the Summer of 2026



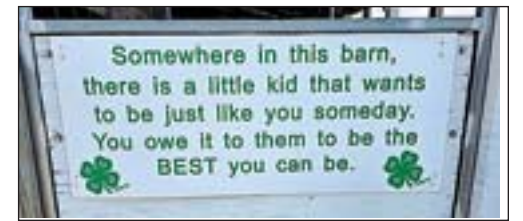
Ford Co. Fair recognized Dallas and Jane Meyer for all their years of being volunteers and serving on the fair board.



Fairbury Fair dedicated their new entrance gate in style. The ribbon cutting celebration included a 21-gun salute, a ribbon cutting, and cake for everyone to celebrate their 150th Fair.



Luke Davison, Manager of the Du Quoin State Fair welcomes the just under 20 County Fair Queens and their chaperones that attended the Luncheon and a Day at the Fair event on the first Saturday of the Fair.



Iroquois Co. Just one of many signs located outside of the barns with great messages.



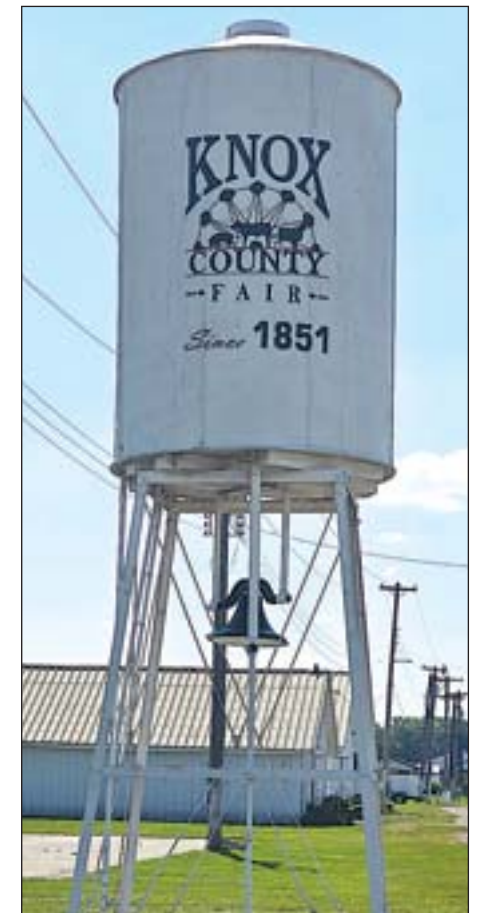
Warren Co. has a new multi-use building that houses their office, non-live-stock exhibits and event building for fair and community use they can be very proud of. And yes, there is a special room just for the Queens to use for the pageant and fair time.



Kelly Jo Preston and Jim Bohnert of the Rock Island Co. Fair setting up the new Full Action Milking Cow inside their Dairy Birthing Barn where fairgoers can try their skills of how to milk a cow along with watching a new dairy calf being born every day of the fair.



Candy Knight, Tammy Kitchell, Ruth McCaskill, Dawn Dunn, and Marilyn Seckman were able to take a minute for this picture from their office duties at the Brown Co. Fair.



Knox Co. water tower telling the story of the fair being 175 years in operation.



The sulky races at the Edgar Co. Fair proved to be a big hit.



Morgan Co. Swine Show had all sorts of watchful eyes from the Exhibitors to the Judge, to the Spectators.....the show had everyone's attention.



This Cass Co. Fair attendee has an idea besides just having the Mutton Busting event, which it looks to be a lot calmer ride!!



Welcome Sign at the entrance to the Fulton Co. Fair was ready to greet their guests in a few days.



Fairgoers at the Boone Co. Fair enjoying the Skinner Amusements Games and Rides.



Perry Co. Fairgrounds entrance welcomed large crowds.

## Dates to Remember

**For Department of Agriculture**  
Premium Fairs State Grand Summary Report—October 15, 2026  
Declaration of Intent for All Fairs—December 31, 2026  
F & E Fairs Grand Summary Report—December 31, 2026

**For IAAF**  
IAAF Fair Dues—October 1, 2026  
Queen Apps & Ad to Sandy Hoke—October 1, 2026  
Queen Sponsor Forms to Sandy Hoke—October 15, 2026  
Queen Banquet Ticket Order to Tom Schahrer—November 20, 2026

### IAAF Zone Meetings & Convention

Northern Zone, Nov. 1, 2026  
Central Zone, Nov. 7, 2026  
Southern Zone, Nov. 8, 2026

**IAAF Convention,**  
Springfield, IL  
Crowne Plaza Hotel,  
January 15-17, 2027

**IAFE Convention and Zone Meeting**  
IAFE Convention,  
Louisville Kentucky Convention Center, Nov. 29-Dec 3, 2026  
Zone 5 Conference, Branson, Missouri, Chateau on the Lake, March 5-7, 2027

## Updated Addresses

The IAAF office continues to update the TentTalk mailing list.

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.

If you have received this issue and no longer wish to receive future issues, please let us know.

The way the list is maintained makes it difficult to know who should be deleted and sometimes who should be added, so if you know of someone in either category, please send all updates to:

IAAF Office, 15824 1650th St.,  
Chrisman, IL 61924.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Paul Vock, 91**, of Morrison, Illinois passed on July 29th.

Paul was a lifetime farmer along with being a very dedicated member of the Whiteside County Fair Board. He was on the fair board for 49 years, serving as President the last 34 years.

He was the Draft Horse Superintendent for 15 years prior to becoming the President.

**Mike Kropp, 78**, of Mt. Sterling, Illinois passed unexpectedly on August 30th.

Mike was an area mechanic and if he wasn't busy working on some

type of vehicle or golf cart, he was known to have spent untold hours searching for lost golf balls at Rolling Greens.

Mike was a very devoted member of the Brown County Fair Board for the last 22 years. At home it was known that during Fair week.....it was best not to bother Mike with home things as he would be at the front gate of the fairgrounds making sure everything was going smoothly.

He was very proud of teaching his granddaughters how to fish along with them, knowing how to take the fish off the hook when they caught one.

## Administrator's Report

Happy Fall, Everyone!

As we reach the end of the 2026 fair season, I want to thank each and every one of you for dedicating countless hours to making this another successful County Fair year.

At the County Fair Day luncheon, 22 board members were recognized for an incredible 20 to 70 years of service and dedication to their County Fairs.

This is a true testament to the unwavering commitment and passion you have for agriculture and your communities. I am excited to see this tradition continue as the younger generation volunteer to serve as fair board members and carries this important work forward for generations to come.

If you have not yet submitted your 2027 Fair Contract, please do so as soon as possible. This year's deadline was extended to July 1 due to changes being made at the Department of Agriculture.

I am looking forward to seeing you at the 2027 IAAF Convention in January. If you have never attended an IAAF Convention, please make an effort to attend. The Secretary-Treasurer's Meeting held on Saturday morning with me and our Bureau Chief, Scott Halpin, is a

great opportunity to ask questions regarding your reports and receive important updates for the upcoming year.

### Remaining 2026 Important Report Dates

• **October 15** – Premium Fund Grand Summary Report and accompanying signatures, receipts, etc. are due from APFs. If possible, F&E Fairs, please email me a copy of the first two pages of your Premium Fund Summary Report so I can complete the Recapitulation Report.

• **December 31** – Declaration of Intention is due from APFs and F&E Fairs.

• **December 31** – F&E Fairs Premium Fund Grand Summary Report and accompanying signatures/receipts are due.

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

Thank you again for all you do to support Illinois County Fairs.

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

# IAAF Co-Hosts Legislative Reception

The IAAF and Illinois Wine Association hosted a Legislative Reception on May 5, 2026, in Springfield where several State Senators and Representatives stopped by to visit with our attending members.

Our IAAF members were able to visit and share concerns with the State Legislators in attendance.

It is nice to know the IAAF has some very caring representations at the capital that are looking out for our best interest.

Just a reminder, inviting your Senators and Representatives to your fair is a great idea. They only can know your concerns if you keep in contact with them.

## Governor Signs Bill Increasing Support

Hello Fair Leaders!

Congratulations on a successful and fun 2026 fair season.

The Illinois legislature completed the spring session in June and passed the fiscal year 2027 budget to Governor JB Pritzker, and he signed it into law soon thereafter.

We are pleased to report that for the second year in a row, there were increases in the line items that support county fairs. Most of these funds flow through the Department of Agriculture, and we again saw a moderate increase in several lines, including the "rehabilitation" line.

The rehabilitation line funds improvements to the physical buildings and grounds that you operate your fairs on. The Department of Agriculture will reimburse your expenditures on a percentage basis through the usual process, but the pot of money has grown larger for the second year in a row.

The IAAF held the annual County Fair Day on the opening day of the Illinois State Fair, August 13. Governor Pritzker addressed the crowd and all the county fair queens were in attendance.

The Illinois General Assembly goes into the Veto Session on November 17.



*On their travels to the IAAF reception Mary Lou Wright, Mary Liz Wright, and Terri Quinn of Edgar County were invited by Senator Chapin Rose to stop by for a visit. Senator Rose gave them a tour of the Senate Gallery, where Mary Lou Wright thought this chair was just perfect for her.*



*Representative Charlie Meier, Senator Chris Balkema, and Senator Steve McClure stopped by the reception to catch up with some IAAF Fair Members.*



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## **County Fair Queens Pose for Photo at Illinois State Fair**

*County Fair Day brought some clouds, sprinkles, along with sunshine and warmth.....in all regards the day was truly wonderful for a gathering on the Director's Lawn at the Illinois State Fair of just under 800 Illinois County Fair people to catch up with each other. This group of County Fair Queens had the opportunity to meet each other for the first time, along with having their first group pictures of what will only be the beginning over the next few months while attending the upcoming Zone Meetings and the January Convention. They also had individual county pictures taken with Governor J.B. Pritzker, Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, Director of Agriculture Jerry Costello, State Fair Manager Rebecca Clark, and Miss Illinois County Fair Queen Krista Phillips.*