

Wilberforce Agricultural Fair pulls off virtual event



By Chris Drost

When the 2020 Wilberforce Agricultural Fair had to be completely cancelled because of COVID-19, organizers were determined that the 2021 would go ahead, even if it had to be in a different format. In the late winter the decision was made to proceed with a virtual event on Aug. 6 and 7, one that would still include participation by all ages, but with everything presented online.

As it turns out, "the virtual event was very well received," says organizer Joanne Vanier. They have always had good support from the business community but never really thought about asking for sponsors for the virtual event. Finally, they decided to simply send out one email and to their surprise there was overwhelming support from the business community. "Those sponsors meant we were able to give out a lot of prize money. We can't thank them enough," says Vanier.

The list of sponsors includes Agnew's General Store, Big Ass Garlic, Century 21-Darlene Reil, Cottage Care Rentals and Property Management, Dreamweaver Country Boutique, Emmerson Lumber Ltd., Highland Creek Builders, Highland Timber Mart, Lifestyle Services ? Joan McCausland, Lions Club, Masonic Lodge ? North Entrance, Pine Grove Point, REMAX- Rick Forget, TJ Welding and Enterprises, Todd's Your Independent Grocer, Walker's Home Heating, Wilson Timber Mart, Youngdale Fuels and the Municipality of Highlands East, Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies and the Government of Ontario. The organizers of the fair cleverly transformed previously in-person categories into virtual ones. Kids and adults alike sent in homecrafts and artistic creations in a range of age categories. Children submitted photos of their colouring, finger painting, dressing of a stuffed toy for a day at the fair, marshmallow creations, toilet paper roll creations, decorated pencil, photography, cupcake decorating, soup can creatures and more.

It wouldn't be an agricultural fair without a field and garden produce category, pie contest, decorated cupcakes, floral and produce displays, quilts, knitting, creative arts and photography. New this year, and fitting with the times, was a face mask making category. And just for fun, there was a guess the number of gum balls and a "find Milky, the stuffed cow, out in the community" contest.

All categories and the corresponding winner names and photos of their entries are included on the fair website <http://wilberforcefair.com>

When the planning was underway earlier in the year, it was unknown at that time whether they would be able to host any events in-person. As it turns out, they were able to offer a selection of the yard games traditionally included at the fairgrounds, things such as giant Jenga, ladder ball, ducks in a row and more. Kids who came down to the fairgrounds were also given free swag bags to take home.

The one thing for certain is that ?we are definitely going ahead with a live fair next year,? says Vanier.