



On The Earie

by Tom Powell, OABA News Ambassador

Attendance at the July 25-Aug. 5 **Ohio State Fair**, Columbus, was 908,306, up by 13 per cent over that of 2017, according to General Manager Virgil Strickler, who added that those numbers were attained despite rain that fell on Tuesday and Wednesday during the run.

Amusements of America, in its 26th year of presenting the carnival midway, doubled its gross from last year. Luis Perez, assistant general manager who is in charge of rental services and maintenance, said, "they did a good job, exceeding our expectations." He pointed out that due to a fatality on one of the rides in 2017, the midway was closed for several days. "We budget conservatively, and we figured they would come in at 60 per cent of their average gross. They wound up at 73 per cent of the average."

Perez, who started with the fair in 1977, completed his 42nd year. He confirmed that a request for proposals for future contracts had been sent out. "The three finalists are **Amusements of America**, **Reithoffer Shows**, and **Talley Amusements**. Our board will decide on that in the next month." Perez said that those on hand, and in charge from **AOA** were Dominic Vivona Sr., Dominic Vivona Jr., Robbie Vivona, and Marco Vivona.

Among those booking equipment with **AOA** were Zach Panacek of **Belle City Amusements**, with 11 rides; Mike Bray, with monster trucks; Steve Ianni, Doug Dills, **D&J Amusements**, with a Pharaoh's Fury, Crazy Sub, and Zero Gravity; Jeremy Floyd, with the Space Roller, Elephant, Wiggle Worm Roller Coaster, and Frog Hopper; Rio Cristiani, Bumper Boats, and Kiddie Boats; and Gary Bohlander of **Poor Jack's Amusements**, with a Black Widow Spider. "We had 71 rides set up," said Perez.

Among those booking food were Charles Cox of **Concessions By Cox**, **Otterbachers**, and **Harvells**. Gary McNeal was on hand with his novelty stand from **L&G Concessions**.

Brett Chance, entertainment director, said he was pleased with the entertainment lineup. Acts appearing in the **Celeste Center** included The Beach Boys, Reba McEntire, who sold out on Thursday, July 26; TLC/En Vogue, The Commodores, Trevor Noah, Casting Crowns, The Rat Pack is Back, KIDZ Bop Live, Brothers Osborne, Jeff Dunham, Lee Brice, and Styx/Cheap Trick. Free concerts on the **Main Street Stage** included Sister Hazel, Welshly Arms, and Love & Theft.

Chance, who has been with the fair for 29 years, said all the acts did well. Besides a sellout of 9,500 by McEntire, Styx and Cheap Trick drew 7,000. KIDS Bop Live, appearing for the second straight year, drew a crowd of 6,000, as did Jeff Dunham, "in his fourth or fifth year here," said Chance. "Casting Crowns was right up there, as was TLC/En Vogue." Chance booked the acts through various agencies, including what is now called WME (William Morris Endeavor), and Creative Artists Agency.

"It was another good year for the grandstand, as it was for attendance, midway, food and beverage grosses," said Chance, who recalled that his dad, Dean Chance, a hero of mine, died three years ago. Dean, of course, was a well-known games concessionaire who once won the **Cy Young Award** as the best pitcher in Major League Baseball. It was in a year when he recorded an unbelievable 11 shutouts.

Concerning the booking of talent, Brett admitted it has become more challenging than ever. "Even though the number of festivals seems to be shrinking, we have to work with high prices, radius clauses, and competition from sports teams and especially casinos." I pointed out that Old Dominion will be working after a home game by the **Philadelphia Phillies**, and more teams are booking acts. "Jeff Dunham performed in Columbus at another venue in January, but he still did very well."

Charlie Cox said, "We had a very good fair. We were way up. It was probably our best in the last five years. After the ride incident last year, we didn't know what to expect, but the people came out." Cox has had an imposing presence at the **Ohio State Fair** for 57 years. "I've cut back on the fairs we work, concentrating on three (where he has the year-round contracts)." Besides Columbus, the other two are the **Florida State Fair**, Tampa, and **Georgia National Fair**, Perry.

Cox has also been spending a lot of time in California with Tommy Hopkins, his partner in **Storm Service**, where they have two camps up, helping the firefighters in Redding. One of Cox's daughters, Terri, is in charge there, and she tells people she'll stay until the Perry Fair.

Cox also has the food and beverage contract at the **Kentucky Motor Speedway**, Whitesville, and works with **Levy's** at the **Indianapolis 500** in Indianapolis, Kentucky Derby in Louisville, and festivals and parties preceding the Derby. At Columbus, his company had about 20 stands set up, did all the catering back stage, while feeding the bands and VIPs, and hosting private parties. He has never had to worry about obtaining help. "I have never used foreign labor. We work deals with volunteers, civic groups and retired people. A club can bring in a bunch of its members to staff certain stands, and they take a percentage of the gross. It's a tried and true formula that works." Cox is very proud of another daughter Debbie, who is Director of Senior Affairs for President Donald Trump.

The July 18-29 California **Mid-State Fair**, Paso Robles, "was great, sizzling hot," according to Michael Bradley, in his third year as chief executive officer. He said attendance was flat at 428,376, which was remarkable since there were three days where the temperature reached 106, 107, and 108 degrees.

Sold out concerts of 14,000 plus fans were recorded by Eric Church and Luke Bryan. It was the first time two different artists sold out in the same year of the **Bud Light Concert Series**. Nearing a sellout was Florida Georgia Line. Other acts were Tim McGraw & Faith Hill, Pitbull, ZZ Top, Demi Lovato, Dwight Yoakam, Gabriel (Fluffy) Iglesias, and KC & The Sunshine Band. Bradley said acts were booked through Jam Productions of Chicago, and Live Nation. More than 78,000 tickets were sold.

Free shows included Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Crystal Gayle, Cassadee Pope, Kris Kristofferson, Los Lonely Boys, Saul El Jaguar, Devin Dawson, For King and Country, Loc Yonics, Southern Accents, Gary Pickett & The Union Gap, Blood, Sweat & Tears, Ricky Montijo, Monte Mills and The Lucky Horseshoe Band, Proxima Parada, Bear Market Riot, Natalie Haskins, Shawn Clark, Mark Adams, The Noach Tangeras Band, BJ The Hive, Kenny Taylor, The Turkey Buzzards, and Code Blue.

Fielding the carnival midway for the second year was Dave Helm and Sons **Amusements of Colton**, California. They generated \$1.2 million in total revenue, a five per cent increase from 2017. WOW pass coupons saw a 6.5 per cent increase. The advance sale for the Pay-One-Price unlimited ride wristband was \$25, with it costing \$35 on the grounds. "Davey is now the president of the company," said Bradley, adding that this was the second year of a five-year contract, with two-year options.

A sold out concert by Toby Keith and Jimmie Allen on opening day of the 99th annual **Delaware State Fair**, Harrington, held July 19-28, helped boost attendance by two per cent over 2017, to 291,316.

Frank Zaitshik's **Wade Shows** again provided the carnival midway, bringing in 56 rides that included The Big Wheel, RC-48 steel roller coaster, and Delusion. A record single day crowd was recorded on July 28, as well, with 48,653 on the grounds. Wade also had its best single day receipts that day.

Danny Aguilar, assistant general manager to Bill DiMondi, said 45,000 fans attended the concerts provided by Brett Eldridge, Jeff Dunham, Chris Young, Lauren Daigle, a Southern Rock package of The Outlaws, Marshall Tucker Band, Charlie Daniels Band, and Travis Tritt, FMX Show, and sold out Demolition Derby. "We did great, despite six days of rain," said Aguilar.

Grounds attractions included Redhead Express, Vocal Trash, Serge Coronas's Circus Hollywood, racing pigs, a new Camel Show, a menagerie of exotic animals including Twiggs the giraffe, and Yoga with Goats. That prompted DiMondi to quip, "With this year's record rainfall coupled with the huge animal population, we almost had to develop our own version of Noah's Ark."

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