

# 2024 CONFERENCE & ANNUAL MEETING



*Serving Iowa Fairs Since 1907*

[www.iowafairs.com](http://www.iowafairs.com)

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The Holiday Inn Airport in Des Moines served as the host facility of the Association of Iowa Fairs 2024 Conference and Annual Meeting. The Conference was held on December 13 to 15. Representatives from the 106 fairs in Iowa and of the 134 associate members converged onto the Conference Center for a weekend of learning, sharing and fun.

As in past Conferences this year's event enjoyed strong involvement with final attendance for the Conference had 1,156 people registered for the event and again saw higher than normal meal reservations.

The Conference got underway on Friday morning with the opening business meeting of the Association, followed by several workshops and idea-sharing discussions.

Workshops that were featured on Friday afternoon included:

- *'Conference Newcomer'*, led by Tom Barnes (AIF)
- *'Food Service Guidelines'*, led by Julie Kraling  
(Food and Consumer Safety Bureau, Iowa Dept. of Inspections & Appeals)
- *'Alcohol Licensing & Sales'*, led by Nate Bayer, Tiffiney Brown, Annie Gobin and Dominique Charmant (Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division)
- *'Livestock Auctions at Your Fair'*, led by members of the Monroe County Fair
- *'Sales Tax Exempt Entity for County Fairs'*, led by Matt Bishop, Executive Officer, Kristin Garner, Taxpayer Service Specialist and Terry O'Neill, Taxpayer Service Specialist, all with the Iowa Department of Revenue
- *'Fundamentals of Bookkeeping'*, led by Jessica Buchheit, Director of Accounting, Iowa State Fair
- *'What's On Your Mind'*, led by Amanda Weber (AIF)



The 'Honky-Tonk Happy Hour' was held Friday late afternoon prior to the Awards Banquet. Three AIF associate members who hosted this fun event included Grandstand Concerts, Spectrum Weather Insurance and Thunder & Lightning Productions.

The annual Awards Banquet was held Friday evening for members of the Association. Honors presented at the Banquet included the "Fairman of the Year", the "Leo Overland Memorial Showman of the Year" and recognizing the Fairs that received the AIF's "Blue Ribbon Fair" award for 2024. In addition, the 2024 Hall of Fame inductees and recipients of the AIF's scholarship were also recognized at the Awards Banquet.

After the Awards Banquet Friday evening the popular live entertainment showcase was held. In addition, a reception was held for Jo Reynolds, immediate past Chair of the IAFE Board of Directors, and retiring Iowa State Fair Board members Gary McConnell and Gary VanAernam.



The Saturday morning keynote address featured Sara Kunz, an award-winning entrepreneur, 2x Discovery Channel Primitive Survivalist, and Trauma Survivor. Sara's moving personal story is about overcoming physical, mental, and emotional setbacks on her road to success. In her keynote, 'Joyful Resilience', Sara shared her life experiences and challenges, and how she was able to turn these into valuable learning lessons to promote a better life. She spoke to the struggles we all face in life, how to build the grit and grace needed to come through the other side. As in past Conferences, the keynote address was a Conference highlight presented to a standing room only crowd.

After the keynote, the Saturday schedule was filled with workshops and events.

The workshops on Saturday included:

- *'Livestock Updates'*, led by Dr. Jeff Kaisand, State Veterinarian.
- *'So, What Do Your Fairgoers Think'*, led by Todd McDonald, ATW Training Solutions, Urbandale
- *'Fair Secretary/Manager Workshop'*, led by Ashley Fitzgerald, Boone County Fair
- *'Make Your Fair a Venue Artists Want to Come Back To'*, led by Jason Brown & John Christie, Bobby Baker Entertainment
- *'Three In One'*, led by Dave Shinker (AIF)
- *'Big Strategies for Small Budgets'*, led by Jeff Cole with Fairs.com
- *All About the IAFE- What's In It for You'*, led by Anna Wilson, IAFE
- *'Insurance Basics'* panel discussion led by Andrew Vandepopulier with Haas & Wilkerson Insurance, and Robert Holmes with Spectrum Weather & Specialty Insurance
- *'Carnivals and County Fairs'* panel discussion led by Andrew Schoendienst with Luehrs' Ideal Rides, Rob Scott with Scott Amusements, and Greg Chiecko, OABA

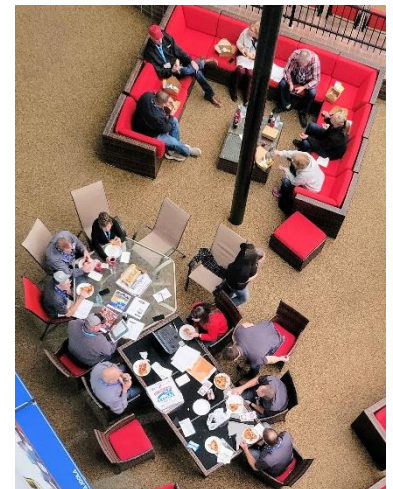
Jenn Dunn (Linn County Fair) hosted a social and networking event focused on IAFE's Young Professionals. The late Saturday afternoon social proved to be popular as a sizable number of younger fair board members were in attendance. All enjoyed refreshments and snacks, while networking with others.

Saturday evening featured the extremely popular "Social A'Fair and Auction". This event included a social and a Fair-food themed menu that was a big hit with the attendees. The Social and Auction was attended by over 700 Association members.

Following the Social A'Fair and Auction the 'President's Reception' was held, hosted by 2024 AIF Board President Jon Baltes and his family.

Sunday morning started out with a church service dedicated to deceased fair board members and fair volunteers in Iowa, followed by the popular "Fairman's Breakfast". The Sunday morning speaker featured Courtney Hinds, CEO of the Wyoming State Fair. Her presentation focused on the basics (and the importance) of developing a succession plan for fair board members and other key personnel. Courtney's address to the capacity crowd proved to be a great way to end the 2024 Conference.

Business meetings held during the Conference included the Association's Annual Meeting, the Iowa State Agricultural Society Annual Meeting, Carnival Owners' meeting, Iowa Horse Racing Association meeting, Iowa Foundation for Agriculture Advancement meeting and AIF Associate Members' meeting.





## Hall of Fame Inductee

### McDermott Family Shows

Anthon Iowa



## Fair Person of the Year

### Jenn Dunn (left)

Linn County Fair, Central City



2025 AIF Board President Mary Bolton (right) presents Jon Baltes (left) with a plaque recognizing his leadership as the AIF Board President in 2024.



## Leo Overland Memorial

### Showman of the Year

### Scott Amusements

Robert & Russell Scott and Family, Pilot Mount Iowa





## ANOTHER GREAT AUCTION!

The annual auction on Saturday evening featured 110 items donated from member fairs and associates. The proceeds from the auction are used for expenses that are incurred by the Association in its efforts to help grow and benefit the fair industry in Iowa.

*This year the auction raised \$39,452.00.*

*Thanks to all who supported the auction!!*



## AIF SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED



Trell Amoss (left) of Albia and Cody Messer (right) of New London were each awarded a \$1,000 college scholarship, courtesy of the Association of Iowa Fairs. The presentation of the scholarships was done at the Awards Banquet.

*Congratulations to Trell & Cody!*



## 2025 AIF District Directors



Steve Voss – NW



Amanda Weber – NW



Jon Baltes - NC



Ann Schuster - NE



Mark Troester - NE



Ashley Fitzgerald – NC



Mary Bolton – SW



Danny Olson – SW



Roger Iverson - SC



Sherry James – SC



Dave Shinker - SE



Kurt Dallmeyer - SE

## IAFE Consumer Protection Program Workshop Held

The AIF Board contracted with IAFE to offer its CPP Workshop to all member AIF fairs. The workshop was on Thursday of the Conference. Dr. Stephen Neel of Technical Solutions International, developed the Consumer Protection Program



workshop to help fairs understand enteric pathogens such as E. Coli and to provide information for risk management including identifying traffic flow in all animal areas (not just petting zoos), creating proper signage, installing hand-wash areas and other intervention or avoidance tactics.

Sixty-eight fair board members attended the 6-hour workshop.



## AIF LEGISLATIVE SOCIAL

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 – 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Iowa State Capitol, East Rotunda, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor.

This Social is a time to meet with our State Legislators to discuss state funding of our Fairs and other legislation that is beneficial to the fair industry in Iowa. All fair folks are invited to attend this special event. Your help is needed as you are asked to contact your legislators and ask their support on all the legislation the Association sponsors.

## FROM THE OFFICE ...

Thank you to all who made the effort to attend your 2024 AIF Conference. I hope everyone enjoyed your time at the Conference. It was good to see that many new fair board members attended the Conference. As we heard from Courtney Hinds' presentation on Sunday morning, all Fairs need to look at how they are going to replace key personnel within their Fair Board structure.

Everyone contributed to make the Conference a tremendous success. The Conference is of no benefit to you unless you take what you learned at the Conference and implement them at your Fair. Every year the AIF Board strives to bring new topics and ideas to our member Fairs to help them improve, grow, and prosper.

As I have said many times, both Sue and I are proud to be a part of this Association. We are both honored for the opportunity to serve in the leadership role of the AIF. It is evident that our Iowa Fair folks are hardworking, dedicated and welcoming. This is most certainly evident when we visit your Fairs.

Your 2025 spring district meetings are coming up rather quickly, and not too far down the road our 'Fair Tour 2025' will start in June. Sue and I really enjoy representing the AIF and we especially enjoy visiting Fairs. Thank you to all for your efforts in 2024 and best to you all for a successful 2025. Your dedication to your Fair and the AIF is greatly appreciated.

See you soon.... *Ann V. Barnes* Your AIF Executive Director

## The Basics of Succession Planning

We are grateful that Courtney Hinds, CEO of the Wyoming State Fair, took time out of her busy schedule to attend the Conference and share her thoughts and advise on succession planning for Fair Boards at the

Fairman's Breakfast on Sunday morning.

Courtney has a wealth of experience and a passion for creating memorable experiences and shaping the leaders of tomorrow. Beyond her role at the Wyoming State Fair, Courtney is a Certified Business Succession Planner, a qualification she pursued in response to the challenges she observed in the fair industry.

Her presentation was very well received by the capacity crowd.



## Thank-You Thank-You Thank-You

To the following for sponsoring snacks, refreshments & coffee breaks.

Action Theater/Impact Pro Wrestling – Artists & Attractions  
Bobby Baker Entertainment - Campbell Concessions  
ETIX - Evans United Shows - G.L. Berg & Associates  
Grandstand Concerts - Iowa Communities Assurance Pool (ICAP)  
Iowa Monster Arm Wrestling - Iowa Sound/Go Stagestruck  
Luehrs' Ideal Rides - Next Generation Shows  
Prairie Event Supply - Scott Amusements  
Spectrum Weather & Specialty Insurance  
Thunder & Lightning Productions  
Variety Attractions – Vortex Weather Insurance



## ASSOCIATION BOARD ELECTIONS

### Mary Bolton Elected AIF Board President

2025 Officers of the Association Board of Directors were elected at the Board's organizational meeting held on Sunday afternoon of the AIF Conference.

Mary Bolton of Emerson was elected as the 2025 President of the Board. Mark Troester is Elkader will serve as the Board's 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and Ann Schuster of Peosta will be the Board's 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. The immediate Past President of the Board is Jon Baltes of Hampton.

In addition to Board Officer elections, Tom & Sue Barnes of Cresco were retained by the Board as the AIF's Executive Director and Executive Secretary/Treasurer.

AIF District Director elections were held at the fall district meetings and ratified at the AIF's Annual Meeting held during the Conference. Elected to the AIF Board for a 2-year term include Steve Voss of Sibley in Osceola County (NW District), Jon Baltes of Hampton in Franklin County (NC District), Ann Schuster of Peosta in Dubuque County (NE District), Danny Olson of Red Oak in Montgomery County (SW District), Roger Iverson of Grinnell in Poweshiek County (SC District) and Kurt Dallmeyer of Wellman in Washington County (SE District).



### Iowa State Fair Board Elections

Iowa State Fair Board directors were elected during the State Agricultural Society meeting, held during the Conference.

Those elected as Directors to the Board include VerDon Schmidt of Everly (NW District), Tennie Carlson of Stratford (NC District), Deb Zumbach of Coggon (NE District), Danny Olson of Red Oak (SW District), Jo Reynolds of Indianola (SC District), and Jarrod Horning of Ainsworth (SE District). Curt Claeys was elected as President of the Iowa State Fair Board for 2025. Deb Zumbach will serve as Vice President and Jo Reynolds will be the Board Treasurer. Jeremy Parsons is the CEO/Manager of the Iowa State Fair.

## Future AIF Conference & Annual Meeting Dates

December 12 - 14, 2025

December 11 - 13, 2026

Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines





**2024  
Blue Ribbon Award**

*Northwest District*

**O'BRIEN  
COUNTY FAIR**

*Primghar*

**2024  
Blue Ribbon  
Award**

*North Central  
District*

**BUTLER  
COUNTY FAIR**  
*Allison*



**2024  
Blue Ribbon  
Award**

*Northeast District*

**CLAYTON  
COUNTY FAIR**

*National*





**2024  
Blue Ribbon Award**

*Southwest District*

**AUDUBON  
COUNTY FAIR**

*Audubon*



**2024  
Blue Ribbon Award**

*Southeast District*

**DES MOINES  
COUNTY FAIR**

*West Burlington*



**2024  
Blue Ribbon  
Award**

*South Central  
District*

**MONROE  
COUNTY FAIR**

*Albia*





