

## OC FAIR EMPHASIZES DESTINATIONS

*A new, highly themed layout helps draw 1,344,996 attendees to the California event*

Pacific Amphitheater was packed for 27 nights, four before fairtime, with The Toyota Summer Concert Series featuring nine sold-out shows by Boston, Chris Young / Ruthie Collins, Earth, Wind & Fire, Jim Gaffigan, Styx, The B-52s / The Aquabats, Train/ Midnight Hour, UB40 featuring Ali Campbell, Astro & Mickey/ The English Beat / Jo Mersa Marley and Ziggy Marley & Steel Pulse / The Simpkin Project.

REPORTING FROM COSTA MESA, CALIF. — Changes to the fairgrounds layout which resulted in eight “destinations” within the footprint of the OC Fair created just the right vibe at this year's July 15-Aug. 14 event, said Kathy Kramer, OC Fair & Event Center CEO. That strategy helped the fair post a final attendance of 1,344,996, up more than three percent from 1,301,775 last year and the fourth highest attendance in history.

Overall, the 23-day fair (plus four days of prefair amphitheater concerts) generated unaudited revenues of \$58 million, up from \$55 million last year, she said. All figures are unaudited at this point and Kramer cautioned they have a new auditing and accounting team, so final and accurate numbers will not be released for two weeks.

However, she is certain concessions sales were up and there was a “pretty good uptick in carnival rides [2016 unaudited: \$9.1 million; 2015: \$8.3 million] and carnival games [2016 unaudited: \$6.3 million; 2015: \$6 million],” Kramer said. The carnival is provided by Ray Cammack Shows.

Improvements this year were about changing the layout to make the fairgrounds more user friendly. Kramer's favorite was Country Meadows, a destination outside Centennial Farm, which featured a lot of signage that told agricultural stories and statistics and programming with Americana and folk music. It was a destination for ag education. Spectra Food Services added The Trough, which sold draft beer, sodas and water, to enhance the Country Meadows theme.

“That area, to me, just didn't have the same vibe last year. We had the energy this year. In a fair layout, you don't want tall exhibits or barriers where they can't see a lot of the layout and the fair,” Kramer explained. The OC Fair staff worked hard to improve the traffic flow and layout of this year's fair with more to see around every corner.

“Our patron survey showed a higher number of fairgoers saying they learned something about agriculture they did not know before,” Kramer said.

Plaza Pacifica, a destination area which includes the Pacific Amphitheater, Plaza Stage and Heritage Stage was also reprogrammed. This year, the Plaza Stage featured live karaoke, complete with a live band, every evening. Karaoke rock stars signed up for a timeslot and reservations were consistent.

The popularity of live karaoke was a boon to Spectra Food Services, which is a concessionaire at the fair. This year, the firm combined what had been two bars at Plaza Pacifica into one large Karaoke Live

Bar, featuring 48 craft beers. “We had a lot of foot traffic,” said Adela Generally, assistant GM for Spectra at the fair.

Also new for Spectra was catering for Club OC, a new area set aside for corporate group sales. Generally said about 2,000 meals were served there, mostly featuring barbecue, which was consistent with the fair theme. Spectra added staff but no equipment to handle Club OC catering.

Club OC bookings included seven large parties plus 18 group ticket sales parties of 25-plus, which is all new business.

Kramer explained that Club OC was introduced to increase group sales. It was marketed to corporations as a chance for an employee or customer appreciation day, an all-day event with a meal included. Tickets to the fair were half price for the group. “It’s the first time we’ve been aggressive and organized to go after this market,” Kramer said. “I knew from Canada [she worked at Rexall Place and K-Days in Edmonton, Alberta, before coming to the OC Fair] that that market was there. It will be a real focus for next year.”

Overall, concessions sales for 2016, unaudited, totalled \$28.3 million, up from \$25.7 million in 2015.

Talent buying for Pacific Amphitheater was consistent with years past. “We seem to have a pulse on what our audience wants,” Kramer said. They always strive for diversification during the 23-day run. Overall total ticket sales for Pacific Amphitheater, also unaudited, were 172,329 paid tickets for gross ticket sales of \$6,782,515.

This year, the fair added four concerts before the fair opened. Ticket buyers were granted admission to the fair at a later date by presenting their concert ticket stub. “So we had a concert run of 27 days. Last year, we did two before the fair, the year before one,” Kramer said. Adding prefair concerts will be a trend for the OC Fair. “When we have the infrastructure set up, we might as well maximize the infrastructure. If we can catch the right act as far as the routing and our lineup goes, I see it growing,” Kramer said.

The mission is to keep the right mix of concerts that are affordable to everyone. “It’s part of our mandate to keep the fair affordable,” Kramer said.

The price of admission was held at \$12; \$7 for seniors and children 6-12; five and under free every day. There were plenty of discount promotions and, the last week of the fair, two new promotions were rolled out to drive attendance.

“It’s important to finish strong,” Kramer said. “The last week, we did a big push on Groupon, pushing out 20,000 fair gate admission tickets at half price. They sold within hours with almost 100 percent redemption.”

The second promotion went directly to law enforcement agencies and first responders, offering free admission to the agent member, with up to four more tickets at half price per taker the entire last week. It was very well received by that community, Kramer said. Both were new promotions created during the fair to boost attendance the last week.

“I’m a firm believer in the phrase that ‘you can change the tire when you’re driving down the road.’ There are so many exterior factors that can change things – weather, other events, the market — all of which impacts our numbers,” Kramer said. “We have a long fair – we watch those numbers, identify trends and are able to have something in our back pocket to change the tire as we’re driving down the road.”

Overall, unaudited gate admissions income totaled \$6.6 million, compared to \$6.4 million in 2015.

Next year, Kramer promised a real focus on analytics. “We’ll look at all our promotions on a five-year window — What’s working, what’s not, what can we change. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, what are our need days? Anybody who has a commodity is looking at how to maximize the use of it,” Kramer said.

OC Fair also added magnetometers this year, purchasing 21 metal detectors by fair’s end, for a total price of \$80,000. It is a necessity in today’s world. Kramer is also working with law enforcement about hardening the fair’s perimeter before next year’s fair, which runs July 14-Aug. 13, 2017.

Plans for next year include a continued emphasis on agriculture. Kramer plans to focus on culinary, including healthy lifestyles and cooking lessons. She will involve some commodity groups to have a presence at the fair and talk about California agriculture and how important it is to the state’s economy.

OC Fair currently has a Request For Proposals out for a master planning firm. Many prospective firms toured the grounds during the fair. A selection will be made in mid-September, Kramer added.