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## SPECTRA REVS UP FAIR SPONSORSHIP DEALS

*Already in fair hospitality and food, Spectra now wants a bigger piece of the sponsorship pie*

Spectra is accelerating its division selling sponsorships to fairs. After getting their feet wet with two smaller fairs, Bangor (Maine) State Fairgrounds and Larimer County Fair and Rodeo, Loveland, Colo., they've now landed two larger fairs; State Fair of Virginia, Doswell, and York (Pa.) Fair.

"We've been managing and selling sponsorships at two smaller fairs in Colorado and Maine for the past few years," explained Nino Vanin, director of business development, Spectra sponsorships and partnerships. "In the last few months, we've taken a look at standalone fairs across the country that bring in 400,000 to 500,000 people over the course of the fair."

"Many fairs are looking to re-imagine and re-invigorate the 'story' of their respective fairs as well as the experience they provide their patrons," he said. "Our firm, which has experiences with large, high-level events, can bring the fresh perspective that fairs are looking for. We're sponsorship experts, and our experience with events will also help us sell the sponsorships."

"We've had a pretty significant presence in the fair space for a while now, particularly on the West Coast and we decided to concentrate on fairs on the East Coast that made sense, and were in geographical areas that were of interest to us," said Vanin.

The 150 year-old State Fair of Virginia, the birthplace and 1973's Triple Crown winner, + Secretariat, who is also buried there, and Pennsylvania's York Fair, fit the bill and both signed on. Spectra is now the exclusive sponsorship sales agency for the State Fair of Virginia park, fair, and all other events during the year including the Virginia Horse Show and Illuminate Light Show. In York, Spectra is the exclusive sponsorship sales agency for the fair and expo center.

"Both fairs were working with a previous rightsholder," said Vanin. "Now if you want to be a sponsor at either fair you come through us."

At York Fair, corporate partners include Coca-Cola, GEICO, Rutter's Farm Stores and UTZ Quality Foods. Virginia Lottery, First Bank and Trust, Coca-Cola and Fiat Chrysler are sponsors at State Fair of Virginia.

"Spectra called us at the end of last year and we started conversations," said Marlene Pierson-Jolliffe, VP of operations, Meadow Event Park, and executive director, State Fair of Virginia. "We thought they might be a good match and kept the conversation going. We asked them a lot of questions. When making the decision to have an outside salesperson representing you, it needs to be a good fit. We had a lot of discussions about growth and revenues and percentages and how the contract would remain mutually beneficial for both of us."

Pierson-Jolliffe said the State Fair of Virginia was also "looking for creativity that will give our events some spark."

There were "checkpoints along the way" to make sure if it was not working, they could tweak or call it quits. They sealed the deal in 2017, and the contract will run for no less than three years. "The goal is for long-term," she said.

Prior to hiring Spectra, the fair had a part-time in-house employee chasing sponsors as well as an outside sales firm. "We considered hiring a full-time staffer who was solely focused on sponsorships but, in the end, decided to go with Spectra because they understand how the facility runs," she said.

Sponsorship deals can range from on-site activations that can run as low as \$10,000 to mid-six figures for a naming rights contract. Vanin said that Spectra had a "number of prospects for future sponsors; we have a decent book of business."

Vanin believes Spectra is an expert in the medium of sponsorship and trusts the company can apply the experience and knowledge they have across the many varied properties they represent to the fair industry. "We understand the fair industry and know how to do business the right way," he said. "We also understand that agriculture, education and culture are important initiatives for fairs."

Spectra is a turnkey service. They hire the director of corporate partnerships, in conjunction with the fair, who then works out of the fair offices to become an extension of the fair staff.

"We design the sales collateral, provide a market analysis and comparison to similar properties in the region and across the country, providing an in-depth valuation of available sponsorship assets and provide weekly reporting," he said.

Spectra currently services 15 fairs/fairgrounds through its Food Services & Hospitality division, including Ford Midway at Ford Park Entertainment Complex, Beaumont, Texas; Curry County Fairgrounds, Clovis, N.M.; Orange County Fair & Event Center, Costa Mesa, Calif.; Chilhowee Park, Knoxville, Tenn.; Canada Western Fair District, London, Ontario; The Ranch-Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex, Loveland, Colo.; Lea County Fairgrounds, Lovington, N.M.; Memphis (Tenn.) Fairgrounds Complex; Los Angeles County Fairplex, Pomona, Calif.; Clark County Fairgrounds, Ridgefield, Wash.; Alameda County Fairgrounds, Pleasanton, Calif.; Richard M. Borchard Fairgrounds, Robstown, Texas; California Exposition & State Fairgrounds, Sacramento, Calif.; Sonoma County Fairgrounds, Santa Rosa, Calif. and Ventura County (Calif.) Fairgrounds at Seaside.

"There's a need and desire from the new wave of executive directors of fairs who are looking for new ways to drive revenue," said Vanin. "Having a group like Spectra that didn't necessarily grow up in the fair world, will bring a fresh perspective."