

OCONTO COUNTY FAIR

AUGUST 27-30, 2026



OCONTO COUNTY **TIMES HERALD**

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The 2025-26 Oconto County Youth Fair board members are, from left, seated, Cliff Gerbers, treasurer; Cindy Arndt, secretary; and Dan Arndt, vice president. Standing, from left, Pete Vorpahl, member; Nicole Blaskowski, member; Jeff Dickson, member; Wendy Vorpahl, member; Jake Kasten, president; Roxann Arndt, member; Bob Schmacher, member; Bernie McCarthy, member; and Michelle Klimpke, member.

CONTRIBUTED

Fair going high-tech with new website

Construction will impact how visitors arrive at fairgrounds

By GREG SEUBERT
Correspondent

Looking for the latest information about the upcoming Oconto County Youth Fair?

Fair organizers have made finding details about the 85th annual event – set for Aug. 27-30 at the Oconto County Fairgrounds in Gillett – quick and easy by launching a new website, www.ocontocountyyouthfair.org.

Information is also available on the fair’s Facebook page, but Fair Secretary Cindy Arndt said visitors and exhibitors can find updated information on the website.

That information includes details on how to get to the fairgrounds because of the ongoing construction on state Highway 22. Fair visitors will run into the ongoing road construction work and detours in and around the city.

“It’s going to be a problem,” Arndt said. “You will not be able to come in from (Highway) 22 from the north at all. That’s still going to be closed. From the west, we hear rumors that it may be open to Main Street, but that remains to be seen. Everybody has an opinion and tells you a different story. If you come in from the east to Gillett, Washington Street

is accessible. If you’re coming from other directions, you may have to take the detour on Klaus Lake Road and come back on Washington.”

That’s where the improved website is a helpful tool, Arndt said.

“It’s brand new,” she said. “Our old website was very hard to use. We weren’t in charge of that one, so we scrapped it and took it over ourselves. It has all the directions on there. It’s very simple and easy to use with a lot of information. It’s very user-friendly. You go on and use the little click-downs on the top.”

Although the fair doesn’t officially get underway until Aug. 27, events will kick off Aug. 22 with the small animal, caged bird, cat dog and horse shows.

The day will begin with the small animal and caged bird show at 8:30 a.m., followed by the horse show at 9 a.m., the cat show at 9:30 a.m. and the dog show at approximately 10 a.m.

“We don’t have room for it at the fair,” Arndt said when asked why the shows are held early. “We don’t have room to house horses. Everything’s used up, and they’d like to have their small animal, cat, dog and caged bird shows inside. We just don’t have the room in any of the barns to do that. They do theirs the Saturday before (the fair opens), and we’re trying to get more people to come to that.”

“This year, we’re having some music. There will be a food truck and some vendors. We’re going to try to do an apple pie bakeoff

where they bring their pies to be judged. There are two age group categories. There’s a puzzle contest where they’ll come and put a puzzle together in a certain amount of time. We’re also doing a make-and-take patriotic craft for 5- to 10-year-olds.”

The fairgrounds will also be open Aug. 26 for the swine and sheep show.

As in the past, the fair’s four-day run will include junior and open class exhibits and shows; a midway with carnival rides; family entertainment; live music; truck and tractor pulls; and vendors in the Expo Hall.

Arndt said this year’s fair will have a few new additions.

“We have a new gentleman doing his magic act,” she said. “It’s called Bob Bohm’s Family Entertainment. That’ll be three shows a day Friday, Saturday and Sunday.”

Improvements have also been made to the track, which hosts truck and tractor pulls.

“On Saturday night, we’ll have what we’re calling Smoken at the Fair, which will be farm tractors and semis,” Arndt said. “The truck pull is big on the Fourth of July, but the antique ones are starting to wane a little bit. They want to see smoke, and they want to see power. We still want to keep the antiques in our shows, so on Sunday, we’re having an antique tractor show where they can come and just display their tractors.”

A major attraction at the fair each year are the animals that FFA and 4-H members and Scouts exhibit, but Arndt said other projects

are featured as well.

“We have an entire expo hall full of things kids bring, anything from produce, fruit, crops, house plants, clothing, crocheting, knitting, pictures are a big thing, anything to do with art,” she said. “We also have Junior, Open and Senior Citizens classes, so even if you’re not in anything, but you’re still in Oconto County and want to bring something to the fair, you can enter it in the Open class.”

Volunteers and the fair board help make the fair a reality each year, according to Arndt.

She is the secretary of the board, which also includes President Jake Kasten; Vice President Dan Arndt; Treasurer Cliff Gerbers; and members Michelle Klimpke, Nicole Blaskowski, Bob Schmacher, Wendy Vorpahl, Pete Vorpahl, Roxann Arndt, Bernie McCarthy and Jeff Dickson.

“There are a lot of hours spent by fair board people, the officers in particular,” Cindy Arndt said. “We’ll meet and run through ideas and bring them to the board for approval. A lot of that happens behind the scenes and that’s a whole year deal. We kind of start after the fair’s over working on the next year.”

Last year’s fair was Arndt’s first as fair secretary.

“It kind of showed me how I didn’t have everything organized,” she said. “On my end, it’s making sure I have things that the kids need and making sure that they have their paperwork that’s supposed to be there.”

The animal and project exhibits

are one of the reasons behind the fair’s success, Arndt said.

“I think that’s part of it,” she said. “People like to come see what the kids are doing. Getting other people from the county involved with their own stuff in the Open class also helps. People like to come and enjoy the sights and sounds and smells of a fair. A good carnival is a must, and Christman Amusements has been extremely good to us. They’re great to work with.”

The fair hasn’t changed much over the years, Arndt said.

“I don’t know that it really has, other than it’s maybe a little more glitzy, and it’s probably a little better organized than it used to be,” she said. “It’s so important to try to have things done ahead of time so when somebody’s asking for something, you can help them.”

“I can’t say enough about the people that sponsor the fair, that give monetary donations,” she added. “We can’t charge anyone to come into the fair, so we have to find other ways to generate money to run the fair. Without those people, it would be difficult.”

Weather will play a role in fair attendance, and Arndt said organizers lucked out last year with ideal conditions.

“Last year, we had four great days,” she said. “If we have an all-day rain, that really knocks down attendance. Sometimes the pulls get canceled, but the show ring is basically covered, and it can still go on if it’s raining.”

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Fair gives 4-H members chance to shine

Exhibits highlight variety of interests

By **KEVIN PASSON**
Editor-in-Chief

The Oconto County Youth Fair is a natural fit for the hundreds of students enrolled in Oconto County 4-H groups, but participation isn't required.

"The Oconto County Youth Fair provides 4-H members with an opportunity to showcase the skills, knowledge and projects they have worked on throughout the year," said Aimee Elkins, 4-H youth development educator with Oconto County's University of Wisconsin-Extension Unit. "As the nation's largest positive youth development organization, 4-H serves youths from kindergarten through one year beyond high school and offers opportunities for young people to explore their interests, develop life skills and build confidence through hands-on learning."

There's no limit to what they can learn, Elkins said.

"Whether a young person is interested in animal science, photography, art, foods, STEM, leadership, woodworking or countless other project areas, the fair provides an opportunity to celebrate their growth and accomplishments while sharing their learning with the community," she said.

Participating in the fair gives young people a chance to demonstrate what they have learned, receive feedback, build confidence and share their interests with others.

"Our goal is to provide a wide variety of opportunities that allow youths to explore

their interests and develop life skills in ways that are meaningful to them," Elkins said. "However, many of our members choose to participate, because the fair provides a unique opportunity to exhibit projects, connect with peers, receive recognition for their hard work and engage with the broader community."

While livestock projects are often the most visible, fair exhibits include everything from photography and visual arts to foods, STEM projects, natural sciences and more.

The success of youths at the fair is often made possible through the support of volunteers, club leaders, parents, grandparents and other adults who encourage, mentor and cheer them on throughout the year.

"The fair is as much a celebration of community support as it is a celebration of youth achievement," Elkins said.

Oconto County 4-H currently includes nine community clubs, several school-based clubs and about 275 youth members.

Elkins is busy enough throughout the year, but she steps it up during the fair as well as the weeks leading up to it.

"My role during the fair is educational in nature and focused on supporting youths, volunteers, families and fair visitors," she said. "Throughout the week, I work closely with volunteers and fair partners, answer questions, provide guidance related to 4-H projects and youth development, and help create positive learning experiences for participants and the public."

She also creates hands-on educational opportunities such as activity stations, educational displays, demonstrations and interactive scavenger hunts that help visitors learn more about youth development and the many project areas represented within 4-H.

The arts, food sciences and STEM projects continue to be a very popular area for many 4-H members, but Elkins has seen



Youth from all across Oconto County always have a good time at the fair showing animals and other exhibits.
GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

growing participation in animal science projects – particularly goats, poultry and rabbits.

"Livestock exhibitors often look forward not only to their traditional breed and showmanship classes but also to fun events such as costume and formalwear contests, which allow youths to showcase creativity while building confidence and sportsmanship," she said.

As far as Elkins' favorite part of the fair, she enjoys seeing young people shine.

"There is something incredibly rewarding about watching youths proudly share a

project they have worked hard on, explain what they learned, work through challenges and gain confidence through the experience," she said. "I also enjoy seeing the relationships behind those accomplishments – including the volunteers, parents, grandparents and mentors who have invested their time and encouragement throughout the year."

"Seeing those moments of pride, growth and accomplishment is what makes fair week so rewarding."

kpasson@newmedia-wi.com

FOOD COLUMNIST

The food column in NEW Media's publications has been a favorite as families have learned to make tasty treats, healthy dinners and breakfasts, warm soups for cold days and more. Our previous columnist has moved on, but we want to keep up efforts to help folks try new and delicious stuff.

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We pay a minimum of \$60 per column and \$10 per photo in print and/or online.



Contact City Editor Lee Pulaski at lpulaski@newmedia-wi.com if you'd like to be NEW Media's new food columnist!

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Tegan and Tanner Banike, of Abrams, hold two of the 18 chickens that Tanner exhibited at last year's Oconto County Youth Fair in Gillett. Both are members of the Morgan Badgers 4-H Club. Tanner was back at the fair exhibiting for the second year in a row, while Tegan plans to show animals for the first time at this year's fair.

GREG SEUBERT



ABOVE: Kathryn Raddatz, of Oconto Falls, gives her Jersey heifer, Glitterbug, a quick manicure with black spray paint before entering the show ring during the 2025 Oconto County Youth Fair. Glitterbug went on to place first in her class.

NATHAN BIRR

LEFT: Cullen Arndt, of Suring, keeps track of his hog, Antonella, at the 2025 Oconto County Youth Fair.

GREG SEUBERT

RIGHT: Ila Perlich, 9, of Underhill, stands in the show ring for the first time at the 2025 Oconto County Youth Fair. Her market lambs took fifth and seventh place.

NATHAN BIRR





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