



June 5-9, 2024
It's A Barnyard Mardi Gras
35th District Agricultural Association



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2024 Merced County Fair Draws Out Big Crowds During Its Five-Day Run

Diverse entertainment, great attractions and big savings brought out the community to enjoy this tradition

MERCED, CALIFORNIA – June 12, 2024: The Merced County Fair's Board of Directors, Management and staff want to thank the community for coming out to support the 2024 Merced County Fair presented by Valley Children's Healthcare, which ran June 5 - 9. While Fair Management is still auditing final attendance numbers, big crowds of smiling Fairgoers showed up to enjoy a fun and safe 2024 Merced County Fair featuring everything from dynamic attractions and shows to delicious Fair food, exhibits, carnival rides and more!

"We are blessed with a community that loves and supports its Fair – regardless of the temperatures outside," said Teresa Burrola, CEO, Merced County Fair. "Family and friends showed up to enjoy all that the Merced County Fair offers from live music and grandstand shows to exhibits, carnival rides, food and more! We are grateful to bring this tradition to the community year after year – and enjoy seeing each smiling face that passes through our gates!"

A special Opening Ceremonies kicked off the Fair, at which Merced County Sheriff Department's Honor Guard conducted the flag presentation, while Miss Merced County's Teen Hallie Billings sang the national anthem. The Merced School Employees Credit Union was named as the 2024 Sponsor of the Year, while a special tribute to the late Tony Rossi – a longtime Fair supporter and track announcer – was held, including a moment of silence.

Always focused on providing affordable family entertainment, the Fair offered a variety of ways for the community to save on their trip to the Fair! Fairgoers had these great pre-Fair savings, which were available through June 4 – a \$5 savings on Adult Admission and Unlimited Carnival Ride Wristbands when purchased at participating Save Mart and FoodMaxx locations and new in 2024, "buy one, get one free" Grandstand event tickets were available at O'Reilly Auto Parts stores. Plus, anyone who donated five cans of food from May 7 through June 5 at the Merced or Atwater MERCOCredit Unions received a free admission ticket good for Opening Day of the Fair as part of the "Feed Our Community" early food drive benefitting the Merced County Food Bank. A total of 3,789 pounds of food was collected to help fight hunger in Merced County.

For the third year in a row, thanks to presenting sponsor Valley Children's Healthcare, kids 12 and under were free into the Fair every day, providing an incredible savings for families. The savings continued as the Fair opened with the return of Dignity Health - Mercy Medical Center Seniors' Day on Opening Day, June 5, which welcomed seniors 62 and better for free all evening long, plus featured a special Seniors' Lifestyle Expo. Additionally, the community was able to enjoy free rides to the fairgrounds from the Downtown Transpo Center and North Transit Hub thanks to a partnership with The Bus; a total of 439 passengers took advantage of this service.



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During the five days of the Fair, the Grandstand was busy with excitement! The Merced Speedway Auto Racing kicked off the Fair with shows on Wednesday and Thursday, followed by Valley Tractor Pullers' Tractor Pull on June 7. Crowds packed the grandstands for the Destruction Derby (June 8) and Jaripeo Tremendo (June 9) to close out the Fair – all made possible thanks to sponsors Table Mountain Casino Resort, Coors Light, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Save Mart and FoodMaxx. Fairgoers also enjoyed free live music and entertainment on the Coors Light Stage and the Dignity Health – Mercy Medical Center Stage, not to mention packed shows in the Outdoor Theatre as part of the FREE Table Mountain Concert Series presented by Coors Light that featured George Strait Tribute (June 5), Garratt Wilkin and the Parrotheads: A Celebration of Jimmy Buffett's Music (June 6), Tyler Farr (June 7), The Whispers (June 8) and La Original Banda El Limon (June 9).

Fairgoers also enjoyed thrilling carnival rides provided by Butler Amusements, which had 34 rides in total. Favorites were the stomach-turning Mega Flip and Super Shot Drop rides, then of course the classic Fair-favorite Ferris wheel – and for the kids it was definitely the Rockin Tug and Frog Hopper rides. The Sunshine Lane Family Area was filled with families enjoying everything from the Pony Rides to the Petting Zoo, plus the popular Alaskan Racing Pigs and new Pedal Pullers sponsored by Valley Children's Healthcare and Joseph Farms Cheese. In the Arts Pavilion, there was a new Barnyard Mardi Gras Mask Making area, which was free for Fairgoers. Plus, given the warm temperatures, the new Blue Devils Tailgate Party Zone made possible by Merced Community College provided a cool place to hang out with misters, fans and of course, cornhole!

For the third year in a row, the Merced County Fair partnered with Valley Children's Healthcare, the Merced County Library and First 5 Merced County on the **Early Childhood Literacy Partnership** whose mission is to empower children to read, as well as foster a love for reading. As part of this partnership, the Merced County Fair hosted the Library Bookmobile on Saturday, June 8 and Sunday, June 9, where 1,500 free books donated by Valley Children's Healthcare were handed out to young Fairgoers. New this year, on Saturday, June 8 there was a special "Author Story Time" where Fairgoers could listen to local authors read their books.

The new Makers Marketplace, located across from the Grandstand, provided a place where Fairgoers could shop local supporting small businesses. This storefront-like marketplace featured 21 vendors from throughout the Central Valley selling everything from jewelry, plants, clothing, candles, food and more!

As always, livestock draws in the crowds and big support from the community, which is evident in this year's record-breaking livestock numbers. The Small Animal Auction on Friday, June 7 in the Les McCabe Arena saw the sale of 148 animals generating \$44,980 in sales. Also on Friday was the Dairy Replacement Heifer Sale in the Les McCabe Arena, which generated \$344,400 from heifers sold. Everything culminated on Saturday, June 8, with the Jr. Livestock Auction in the Hilmar Cheese Barn, which was a big success generating \$1,172,400.50 in sales from 613 animals exhibited and sold by 4-H, FFA and Independent Exhibitors, with add-ons still coming in. In total the 2024 Merced County Fair Livestock Auctions and Sales brought in a record-breaking \$1,561,780.50. The Merced County Fair Board of Directors served 650 dinners for the Jr. Livestock Auction buyers and their families in the



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Central Valley Concrete & Central Valley Trucking picnic area to show the Fair's appreciation for the buyers' continued support of the Fair's livestock program and the hardworking exhibitors.

During Saturday's Jr. Livestock Auction, Roger and ChiChi Wood were presented with the Blue Ribbon Award, created by the Western Fairs Association (WFA) to recognize those who support and contribute to the quality of fairs – and is one of the highest honors a Fair can give out. Roger was one of the owners of the old Wood Fruit Company established in 1919 in Atwater by his father Elmer Wood, then later J.R. Wood Inc. before it was sold to Dole Food Company in 2005. They were growers and packers of peaches, other stone fruit, strawberries, grapes and vegetables. In the late 1970s, Roger was a member of California Agricultural Leadership Foundation. Over the years, he's been on numerous councils related to the peach and farming industry and would visit Washington DC several times a year to lobby for frozen fruit cups in the USDA school lunch program. Nowadays, Roger hosts a local radio program on KYOS 1480 called Community Conversations and invites guests to speak about local items of interest, including promoting the Merced County Fair each year. ChiChi Wood was a Merced County Fair Board Director from 2000 – 2003. Following her time on the Fair Board, she was a Board Member on the Friends of the Merced County Fair for 10 years, from 2009 – 2019, and was part of the effort to raise funds for the construction of the Hilmar Cheese Barn, which is the largest construction project at the fairgrounds in the past three decades. Together Roger and ChiChi Wood are active supporters of the Merced County Fair. Every year since 2009, they have been purchasing 4-H and FFA large and small animal projects. Their grandchildren were and are members of Atwater FFA and St. Anthony's 4-H, and they are proud supporters of both clubs. But they also like to support kids who may not have a lot of bidding support in the auction audience. Roger and ChiChi are firm believers in giving back and the Fair was thrilled to name them as the 2024 Blue Ribbon Winner for all they do for the Fair, the exhibitors and the community.

"We are reflecting back on what a great Fair we had this year. Not only are we proud of the entertainment the Fair brings to our community, but also its financial impact with jobs and revenue for local businesses, which is estimated to be \$23 million each year!" said Burrola. "We look forward to serving the community year-round and welcoming everyone back in 2025 to kick-off the summer with us!"

The 2025 Merced County Fair will run June 4 - 8.

About The Merced County Fair:

The Merced County Fair, first founded in 1891, represents the 35th District Agricultural Association. The Fair's mission statement outlines that it "*promises to meet the needs of our community by providing a fun, safe venue to celebrate our area's agricultural heritage, discover new technology and be entertained.*" Roughly 70,000 people from throughout Merced County and beyond attend the five-day Merced County Fair each June. Members of the Board of Directors include: President, Luis Lara; First Vice President, Mark Erreca; Second Vice President, Emily Haden; Vicky Banaga, Lori Gallo; Mark N. Pazin; Kim Rogina; and Carol Sartori-Silva. Teresa Burrola heads up the daily operations in her role as CEO. The 2025 Merced County Fair, will be June 4 - 8. For more information about



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