

**Kent County Youth Fair Board
Strategic Planning Session Summary
October 22, 2005**

Passion

Passion for the Kent County Youth Fair, now going into its 72nd season, centers around family, on providing young people with an opportunity to experience the joy of working with animals, to give families and opportunity to work together and camp together and to develop young people into responsible citizens who, someday soon, will give back to the community that gave them so much.

The Fair touches thousands of children and their families each year and would be greatly missed if it disappeared. In addition, the City of Lowell would lose revenue the Fair brings to town. The Kent County Youth Fair Board provides for the *only* youth fair in Kent County on the county's *only* designated fairgrounds. For Kent County children interested in animal husbandry, agri-business, meat production, and horsemanship, this Fair is "the only game in town."

Values

The group named some of its core values and included: Fair Play, Honesty, Courtesy, Respect and Communication as primary.

Mission

The group decided the organization's Mission Statement may be re-phrased to include a broader scope of youth than just those in Kent County and to make the Fair the organization's singular vehicle by which it accomplishes that mission rather than as "one of the..."

Vision

Vision is the organization's "mission accomplished." If youth in Kent County and beyond were "developed" through the Fair, the future would give us more volunteerism, in the form of good citizens who "give back." More children and of a wider *age* and interest range would be influenced through the Fair.

Finances

Currently, the Fair has a budget of \$750,000, but more than \$350,000 of this is returned to the children who show and the remainder spent on managing the grounds and conducting Fair business. In most years, the Fairs "clears" less than \$1,500. The summer of 2005 was a banner year, with a \$3,000 profit. The Kent County Youth Fair is about "in the middle" when it comes to Michigan fairs, doing better than some and worse than others, financially.

In the past, this Fair was able to net \$12,000 or more annually, but the cost of running the fair and maintaining an aging infrastructure has eaten into that. Fairs that are more

financially successful own their own grounds, whereas Kent County Fairgrounds are leased from the City of Lowell. However, without conviction and energy to become more "profitable," the continued success and growth of the Kent County Youth Fair will be seriously endangered.

Goals (Financial)

To accomplish it's mission, the KCYFB decided it requires additional dollars and a smoother running operation, where Board and Volunteers were equally valued and equally willing to participate in the sustainability of the Fair.

The group decided that attempting to double the profit to \$6,000 during the 2006 Fair was a reasonable "reach." The doubling of these revenues would assist the organization in being able to:

- Build new and/or upgrade current facilities
- Develop programs that would reach a wider group of children
- Expand the camping site
- Increase Fair attendance

Tactics (Financial)

Eliminating fundraisers that have waned, are costly or ineffective was discussed. The group decided to omit the Raffle in 2006. In addition the group will:

- Develop, plan and execute a Signature Fundraising Event such as an auction;
- Develop a consistent plan for grant writing and seek foundation funds;
- Develop and execute a plan to identify and engage people of means;
- Review existing revenue sources and develop individual plans to increase those incrementally in 2006 and beyond;

Governance & Policy

Organizational infrastructure appears to be in perilous condition. There was much discussion around a lack of communication, lack of regular committee reports, lack of courtesy in attending meetings, showing up on time, meetings starting on time, meetings being conducted in a courteous and professional fashion, lack of adherence to policies regarding meeting attendance and participation, micromanagement of committee decisions, lack of camaraderie and helpfulness between committees (to many small empires), lack of history-keeping and lack of information-sharing.

All of this is much more than niggling as the transfer of information, the generous spirit of knowledge-sharing, a serious commitment to fulfill one's assignments (even if those are "just paperwork"), hampers progress and eats at the soul of the Fair, which is meant to represent -- and be -- one of kinship and shared values.

Goals (Political)

To assist in developing a smoother-running operation, one that will be around another 72 years and where all participants are equally willing to do their part to sustain the Fair as well as their individual programs, the group decided to:

- Communicate more effectively and personally with leaders
- Trust committees and the board person represented therein to make good decisions
- Abide by established policies in the conducting of meetings and operations
- Seek outside help/support where needed (for board and leadership representation)

Tactics (Political)

Among many suggestions on this front, the group decided to pursue these four, at least:

- Organize an "orientation", "coffee" or other event (or even one-to-one meetings) with leaders to inform and educate them about the Fair's financial status, history, and current goals;
- Re-state Courtesy and Communication as a core value and discuss ways to implement these values in correspondence, meetings, minutes, walkie-talkie communication and all other contexts;
- Review and discuss the Policies and implement strategies whereby those are adhered to, up to and including asking people to forfeit their committee and board seats if necessary;
- Gather committee data and begin to develop "history books" for each Fair segment for general reference and future guideline; Insist that these be kept up to date and clear enough to "pass down" to the next volunteer.