

A perfect weekend at the Coe Hill Fair



By Jim Eadie

“It was a perfect weekend for a fall fair,” said Gordon Wood, secretary-treasurer of the Coe Hill Agricultural Society referring to the Coe Hill Fair held this past weekend Aug 28 to Aug. 29. “It was a great weekend, and the weather held off. We had great crowds both nights, and there were lots of horses, cattle, sheep, and goats brought for show.”

The Coe Hill Fair is known as one of the best small agricultural fairs in Ontario, and this year's participation and attendance was notably up over last year.

Conversations with people on the grounds over the two days and nights revealed a fair that brings families together, and builds neighbourhoods and communities in a remarkable way.

Extreme Productions demolition derby on Friday night was jammed; there was nowhere to park in the hamlet, let alone on the grounds. Grand stands were jammed so tightly with kids, parents, grandparents and friends, late comers were left to crawl under the stands and look through peoples legs, or stand on the roof of their vehicles. According to Extreme Productions, who operate demolition derbies across Ontario all summer, Coe Hill has the third largest derby for them. 25 vehicles were entered into the three-hour show.

Jeff Chambers from Coe Hill entered a 1992 Hyundai that he and his two young daughters, Rachel and Savannah had worked for weeks to get ready. “The car was painted by the kids,” he said. “They know all the rules too, what you have to do to get the car ready.”

Chambers was knocked out early in the show, but the family had a blast.

Pete Marshall and his wife came from Madoc with their ponies for the draw. “I have them to do logging,” he said. “They are used to working like this.” Marshall brought two of his teams to the fair.

Katie, Ciara, and Darragh O'Carroll have been staying with grandma and grandpa, Jim and Bev Miller, at the cottage on Wollaston Lake after just moving back to Ontario from Saskatchewan, and claimed more than one first prize each for artwork, flower arrangements and vegetable entries in the Agricultural Hall. Their mom looked on proudly as they got their picture taken.

Ron and Pat Hadley from L'Amable quietly sat beside their newly restored antique tractor, a Massey Harris Pony. Hadley's have retired from the family agricultural implement business in Belleville and moved north.

“I am from this area originally,” said Pat Hadley, “and Ron likes to fish and hunt.”

About to turn 80 years old next week, Hadley long had a dream to acquire a “Pony” to restore as a personal project. Recently locating one, his work was completed in time for this year's fair.

Veronica and Ron Hart from Campbellford for many years have operated a successful family farm (Laventosa Farm), and recently their son Michael and his family are continuing the operation, converting a dairy operation to Simmental cattle beef cattle. Winning prizes as they did during the judging comes as a result of a lot of work. After months and years of care, and moments before being

shown, Michael and his wife Pam were busy vacuuming, washing and blow drying and combing Kelly and Cally, the two young heifers they had brought to the show. During this time, Pam was still wearing a helmet watching and awaiting the call for her turn to ride her horse in the western games in the venue beside the cattle judging.

Even the "strut your mutt" show revealed children, parents, grandparents, friends, and every size and shape of mutts fluffed up and dressed for judging. Some of the preparations and costumes had taken weeks of collaboration to get ready.

It was a perfect weekend for the fair, and what a perfect reason to have a fair, and maybe good evidence why the Coe Hill Fair remains vibrant and relevant in 2015.

The original fair was held in 1882 at Salem, a community that was located just north of Coe Hill. The next year the fair was moved to Coe Hill, and in 2007 celebrated its 125th anniversary. Even before cars were numerous, and roads were sometimes not passable, special trains arrived full from Trenton, having traveled along the Central Ontario Railroad through Marmora, Eldorado and north, bringing people to the Coe Hill Fair for the day.