

MINNESOTA STATE FAIR

NEWS RELEASE

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\$11.1 Million in Fairgrounds Improvements approved for 2018

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MINNESOTA STATE FAIRGROUNDS – The Minnesota State Fairgrounds will get \$11.1 million in improvements prior to the 2018 Great Minnesota Get-Together. The State Fair’s board of managers on Sunday approved \$7.2 million in capital work and \$3.8 million in maintenance projects for the coming year.

Included is the construction of a new restroom and a new pet exhibition and demonstration area on the north end of the grounds, significant improvements to the livestock complex including upgraded ventilation to the Sheep & Poultry Barn, scores of miscellaneous upkeep projects across the fairgrounds and more than \$3 million in improvements to the State Fair’s utilities and transportation infrastructure. All projects are funded through State Fair operating revenue and grants from the Minnesota State Fair Foundation. The fair is financially self-supporting and receives no government aid of any kind.

Additionally for 2018, the oldest attraction at the Minnesota State Fair, Ye Old Mill, has been sold to the fair, which will now operate the ride. “For 102 years and five generations, our family has owned and operated Ye Old Mill,” John H. Keenan, Sr. said. “It has been an incredible experience sharing this tradition at the Great Minnesota Get-Together. We are so pleased the State Fair will continue this tradition for future generations.”

“Ye Old Mill is a living connection to the State Fair’s storied past,” said General Manager Jerry Hammer. “We’re grateful to the Keenan family for creating and maintaining this gem, and we will carry on their century-long tradition of making memories for millions of Minnesotans.”

The State Fair board met as part of the annual joint conventions of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society (governing body of the State Fair), Minnesota Federation of County Fairs and Midwest Showmen’s Association Jan. 11-14 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Bloomington.

The fair’s board of managers also approved admission prices for the 2018 fair, Aug. 23 through Labor Day, Sept. 3, which will remain the same as last year. Admission for adults 13-64 will be \$14; kids 5-12 and seniors 65+ will be admitted for \$12; children under 5 are admitted free. Pre-fair discount admission tickets for all ages are \$11.

In other business conducted during the meeting, **Paul Merkins of Stewart** was elected president of the Society. Merkins has served on the State Fair board of managers since 2009. He has also served in various roles for the McLeod County Fair since 1975, is a crop farmer north of Stewart, serves as chairman of the Lynn Township Board in McLeod County and has served on the board of the Minnesota State Poultry Association since 1996 where he is currently the president. He was awarded the 2015 Minnesota Federation of County Fairs’ District 2 Fair Person of the Year, the 2016 International Association of Fairs and Expositions’ Heritage Award for outstanding community service and the 2017 Hutchinson Area Chamber of Commerce Ag Person of the Year.

Jeff Hawkins of Inver Grove Heights was elected to fill Merkins’ one-year unexpired term as second district manager. **D.J. Leary of Minneapolis** was re-elected to a two-year term as State Fair board vice president, representing the Society’s fifth regional district. **Wally Wichmann of Balaton** and **Dan Grunhoyd of Gary** were each re-elected to three-year terms representing the Society’s seventh and ninth districts respectively.

Sharon Wessel of Hamel, the retiring president of the board, was elected to honorary life membership in the Society. She was first elected to the State Fair board of managers in 2006 and served as president from 2016-18. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota, works for Hennepin County Transportation, has served on the Hennepin County Fair Board for 33 years and was active in 4-H for 37 years as a youth participant and adult leader. She is also active with the Ceremonial Unit of the Zuhrah Shrine, Excelsior Order of the Eastern Star and Hennepin County Farm Bureau.

The State Agricultural Society is made up of delegates from each of the state’s 87 county fairs, plus representatives of 43 statewide associations involved in agriculture, horticulture and education. The Society is a quasi-state agency charged exclusively with the production of the annual Minnesota State Fair and management of the historic 320-acre State Fairgrounds.

The Minnesota State Fair is one of the largest and best-attended expositions in the world, attracting nearly 2 million visitors annually. Showcasing Minnesota’s finest agriculture, art and industry, the Great Minnesota Get-Together is always 12 Days of Fun Ending Labor Day. Visit mnstatefair.org for more information. The 2018 Minnesota State Fair runs Aug. 23 - Labor Day, Sept. 3.