

Pennsylvania Farm Show Receives National Special Events Honor

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Also reviewing for the award was the editorial staff of the magazine.

He explained that out of the 38,000 special events listed with the Alliance, the awards program recognizes 15 different categories, of which the "rodeo/livestock show" was one.

He said that it is a large category among those considered for awards, with about 1,800 shows falling within the same category as the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

Davis said that Grumbine will receive an official award plaque in about three weeks, but that he hopes the Farm Show event will be able to benefit from the recognition the award provides.

"It helps with future sponsors, exhibitors, government agencies," he said. "In this category, many times the events are run by the state ag department or some other governmental agency, and something like (Pennsylvania Farm Show receiving the award) shows (the sponsors and exhibitors and government officials) that (the Farm Show organizers) are right on target."

Davis said that the awards program is intended to help outstanding shows benefit from increasing their recognition and reputation.

"(Commercial exhibitors) want to be associated with good events ... the award gives some credibility," he said.

Grumbine has been directly involved with the Farm Show for more than 17 years, having served for 15 years as a member of the Farm Show Commission, prior to

being selected to be director.

While perhaps not widely known, the Farm Show Commission is an independent authority from state government, although the secretary of the Pa. Department of Agriculture is automatically chairman of the commission.

The state, through annual legislation, has been providing some support funds, primarily aimed at helping defray the costs of operating the livestock and agricultural shows, but for the most part the state Farm Show has been operating on its own income.

Except for the summer months (the facility is not air conditioned), the complex has a full schedule.

It is estimated that events held at the Farm Show Complex generates \$171 million each year, 90 percent of which is taxable, representing about \$10 million in taxes for state and local governments.

The state support for the Farm Show Commission has declined from more than \$1 million to its present \$800,000, over the past 15 years.

At the same time, efforts were made to increase the use of the facility to generate operational funds.

In the meantime, there has been more than \$5 million in capital expenditures from the Legislature and state executive government over the past six years for such things as a new roof, new and greatly improved lighting in the Large Arena, a two-story addition, and reflooring of the Main Exhibition Hall (a non-skid and cushioned surface has been put down on the floor to provide better safety and health for animals and people.)

Several years ago, a traffic light had been installed at the intersection of the Farm Show Complex parking lot main entrance and Cameron Street to create a better traffic flow situation.

Since taking over as director, Grumbine has implemented several additional improvements, such as murals, better signage, fresh paint, changes and expansion in parking and landscaping, and last year the brass marquees of the complex were refurbished by the same company that refurbished the Statue of Liberty.

The funds to pay for the work came out of operational funds, which of course, are limited. The Farm Show Complex operates with a \$5 million annual budget.

The Farm Show Complex operates 365 days a year with its own security, serves as a host facility for 211 days each year, and employs 350 full-time workers, and 900 temporary workers.

It also is the home playing arena for the professional indoor soccer team, the Harrisburg Heat.

An analysis report issued last year on the financial and competitive effectiveness of the Farm Show Complex suggested that perhaps it could be privatized.

That analysis was made at the request of the state House of Representatives, and was done only to investigate the possibilities of having private business take over the Farm Show.

However, in reviewing the report, it was apparent that it was comparing the Farm Show Complex (16 acres under one roof) to convention centers and more recently constructed events venues

designed for such events.

While that report acknowledged that the existing Farm Show facility makes money on some shows, it suggests that it could make more.

What didn't weigh as heavily in the analysis, as perhaps it should have, is the fact that the facilities were built (began construction in 1929, when the Stock Market crashed) to be used for the once-per-year Pennsylvania Farm Show, and that all the other shows held throughout the year — auto, homebuilders, dog, computer, etc., — help to pay for maintaining the facility for the Farm Show.

In fact, the report missed the fact that despite the Farm Show Commission receiving at least \$200,000 less today in state support than it did 15 years ago, the Farm Show Commission has been able to eliminate rental fees that used to be charged to the groups holding livestock shows.

The fees for commercial exhibitors are a little more than \$300 for the week of the Farm Show, which is one of the lowest rates charges at any special event for commercial space. In fact, some of the other special events held at the facility charge more than \$900 for the same size commercial spot with many fewer patrons attending.

In effect, what the award recognizes and the evidence shows is that the Pennsylvania Farm Show has been one of the most inexpensive and effective promotional and educational tools available to the agricultural industry.

More farmers attend the Farm Show as exhibitors than attend farmer-only events in the region.

Davis said the award has been

given out by the special events organization and magazine since 1980.

He said that when he took over as publisher in 1991, the events database held by the organization listed 12,000 special events. That has grown to its current listing of 38,000 special events. "It's definitely a growth industry," Davis said.

In fact, since there are no established college curriculums that prepare people specifically to organize and operate special events, the alliance now provides some limited courses at New York University and Northwestern University.

"Every time we turn around, a new event is popping up," Davis said.

He said that, on average, 11.3 million people per week attend special events.

"More people attend just fairs than attend the games of all of the major league sports combined, for their entire seasons."

The difference is that television and advertising revenues make sports seem to attract more people. The truth, Davis said, is that many more people pay out of pocket to attend special events.

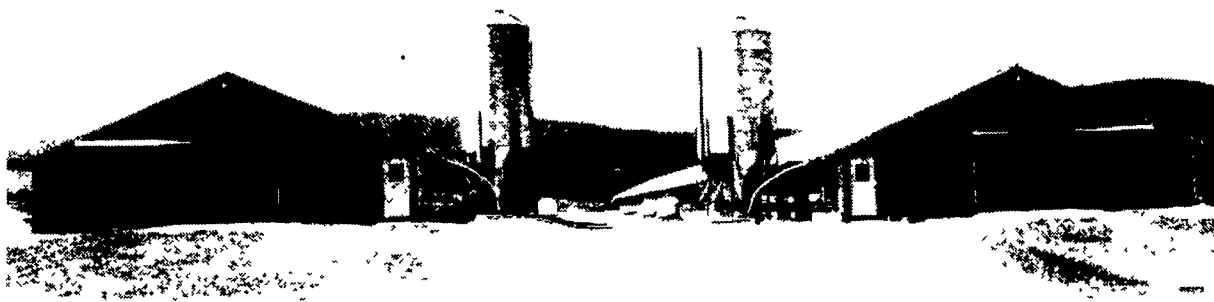
He said he knows that those who purchase commercial exhibitor space at special events such as the Farm Show make good money, or else they wouldn't be there, and the special events industry wouldn't be growing so strongly.

"People can reach people face-to-face (at special events) where they couldn't in the past. People like Levi Strauss got started work-

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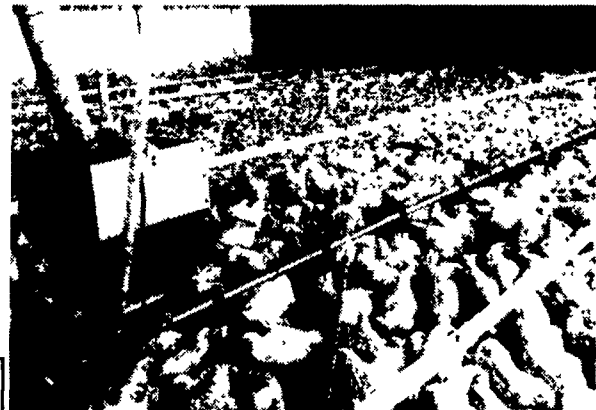
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