

A Closer Look at the

67th

Southeastern Youth Fair

by Erin Freel Best

Many stories have circulated around the history of the Southeastern Youth Fair. In 1941, it was known as the Southeastern Fat Stock Show and began with makeshift show tents and open pens adjacent to the Swift Meat Packing Company and the Central Florida Farmer's Market off of Northeast 14th Street in Ocala, Florida.

The Central Florida State Farmer's Market purchased the current site and ten acres of land. The original building has undergone several modifications over the years. With an operating budget of only \$10,000, Dave Bailie was hired as the first manager of the Southeastern. In 1950, a second building was added – a large arena with covered seating.



While the primary focus today is on youth, in the 1940s the first exhibitors at the Southeastern Fat Stock Show (adults) came from all over the southeastern U.S. to exhibit at this well-respected show of its time. In those days, cattle showstrings were popular: nearly 25-30 exhibitors or “strings” would come in for a week-long competition. Jimmy Glisson, who served as the seventh Southeastern Youth Fair President from 1978-95, said that companies like U.S. Sugar, A. Duda and Sons, and even the University of Florida brought large strings of cattle to

show. He added, “Winning prizes would help sell their cattle.” The well-known cow man and former steer judge, Don Wakeman was first hired to run the University of Florida showstring.

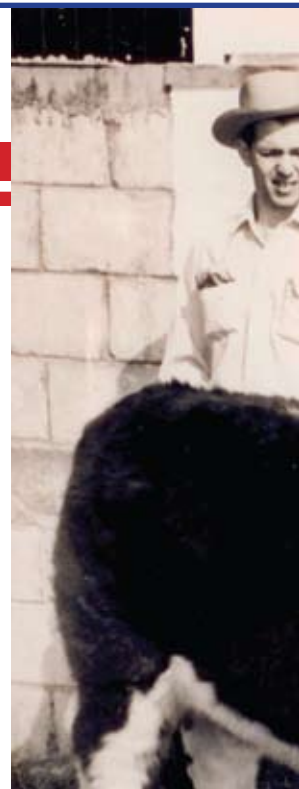
In 1964, an agricultural center was build on part of the fair property. Today it serves as the office for the Marion County Extension Service. The 1960s also saw a growing horse industry in need of a sales arena to replace the tents they had been using. Members of this important Florida industry joined the Southeastern show in renovating the exhibition area to add horse stalls.

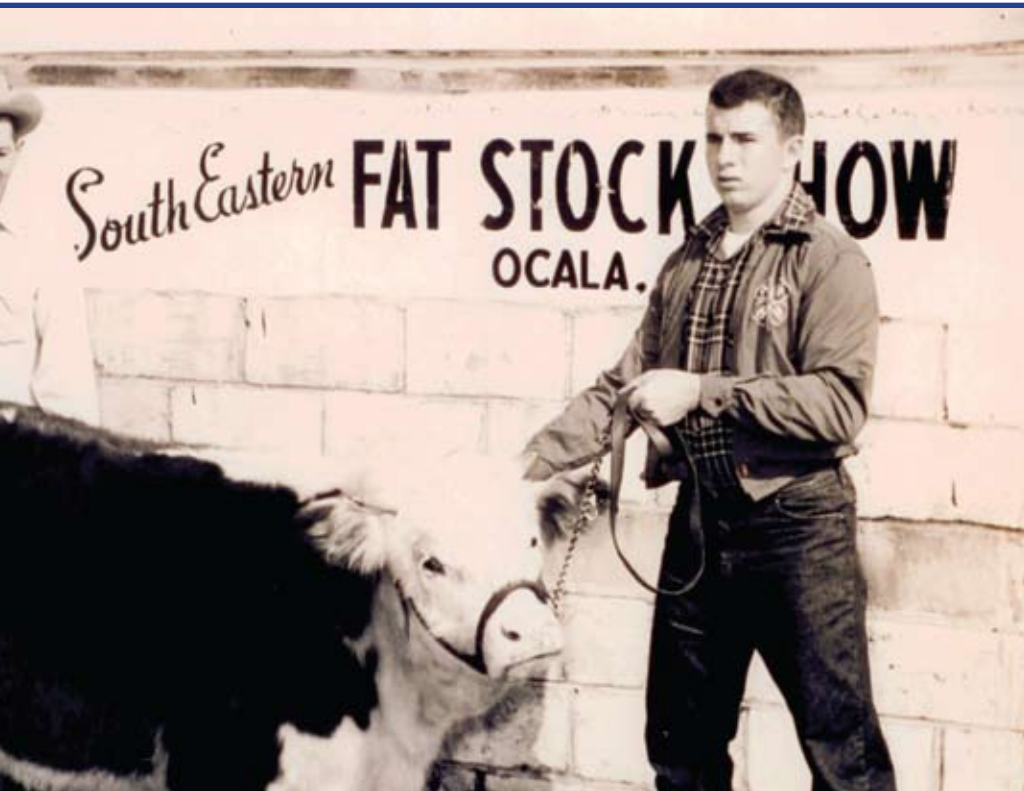
Community participants also helped the development of small animal exhibits. After a particularly wet show, where tent tops puddled to the point of danger, Wes Reynolds helped solicit dollars and volunteers to construct a small animal barn. Former mayor Ergle volunteered his contractor skills gratis.

As the Southeastern Fat Stock Show grew in popularity, a swine show was added in 1976, thanks to the new 4-H County Extension agent at the time, Bob Renner. (The first show had six hogs and no sale.) Renner comments, “We took old trophies from the back room and put pigs on top and had a show.”

The hog show at the Southeastern was one of the first in the state, alongside that of Madison, Florida. Lisa Ramsey had the first Grand Champion hog. The second year, FFA students were invited to participate and numbers rose to 17 entries. The rest, as they say, is history. The 2008 Hog Show now has over 393 swine exhibitors.

According to Jimmy Glisson's recollection, it was a state football championship and a prodding journalist who helped shift the show towards youth. In 1978, Dunnellon won the State Football championship and the Chamber of Commerce hosted a big dinner for everyone involved. Frances DeVore, a journalist for the Ocala Star Banner for nearly 60 years, also served on the Ocala/





Marion County Chamber agricultural committee at the time.

DeVore wanted to see an event that spotlighted the agricultural youth of Marion County. Glisson recalls, “She kept pushing and needling me to do something. From those conversations came the Farm-City Week Frolic.”

That event helped convince community leaders to lend their full support for a youth show. Glisson continues, “After the second Frolic, I got a phone call from Branard Grant who wanted to volunteer his time to make it a full-fledged youth fair. That night Branard became the Chairman and for a solid ten years, he and Marilyn worked tirelessly toward that effort.”

While Glisson is quick to list the many names of those who gave their time and energies in the early days, he doesn’t like taking credit for his many contributions, such as helping, along with Paul Kimbrough, to bring the high school rodeo to the Fair. Today’s rodeo competitors say the event during the Southeastern Youth Fair is one of their favorites of the entire year.

The Fair Today

Within the past ten years, major improvements have been made to the Southeastern Livestock facilities. A joint effort in 1997 by the County Commission, the Florida Department of Agriculture, the Florida Legislature, and the Ocala City Council funded over a half-million dollars to cover the outdoor arena. That same year, to oversee the large project, the Marion County Parks and Recreation Department assumed management responsibility, freeing the Southeastern Livestock Association of that duty for the first time in over 56 years.

Today the facility is undergoing yet another transformation. This summer the community can expect a new 8000 square foot reception hall seating 400 guests (the current capacity is 2700 square feet seating 180). It will include a full kitchen that can be used by caterers and will be available for public rental. Completion of the project is estimated at nine months to a year after groundbreaking.

Additionally, the livestock pavil-

Schedule of Events

Friday, Feb. 22

Florida High School Rodeo – 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 23

Florida High School Rodeo – 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, Feb 24

Dog Show – 9 a.m.

Horse Show – 9 a.m.

Beef Heifer Show – 4 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 25

Tractor Driving Contest – 10 a.m.

Dave Baillie BBQ Contest 1 – 4 p.m.

Steer Show – 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 26

Steer Showmanship – 9 a.m.

Beef Dinner 4:00 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Steer Sale – 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb 27

Dairy Goat Show – 10:30 a.m.

Meat Goat Show – 12 noon

Breed Lamb Show – 3 p.m.

Market Lamb Show – 4:30 p.m.

Market Lamb Sale – 7 p.m.

Friday, February 29

Swine Showmanship – 9 a.m.

Swine Show – 6 p.m.

Saturday, March 1

Swine Sale – 10 a.m.

Sunday, March 2

Dairy Heifer Show – 1 p.m.



2008 Southeastern Youth Fair Ambassadors

ion will get two new entry ways – one on the east and one on the west side of the building, each with bathrooms, a ticket booth, and concessions. The Extension Service is selling commemorative brick pavers that can be personalized for \$100 each. The pavers will line the entry to the new reception hall and the livestock auditorium. (More details are available at: www.marioncountyfl.org)

While the steer show was the first event of the Southeastern Youth Fair all those years ago, today there are a number of different shows and events that allow youth to hone specific agricultural skills. Perhaps more importantly, 4-H and FFA members learn valuable leadership lessons that can only come from raising animals and participating in the week-long fair.

For 67 years the Southeastern Livestock Association has developed a rich tradition rooted in agriculture. At the fair this year, while walking down the aisles or sitting in the arena, be sure to stop by to say hello or better yet, “thank you” to those people whose names are listed in the fair program: past presidents, current board members, exhibitors, and volunteers. It is their dedication, vision, and hard work that make the Southeastern Youth Fair possible.



Board of Directors

President – Craig Carpenter

President Elect – Sharon Seiler

Vice President – Lynn Nobles

Treasurer – Terri Kane

Secretary – Mark Shuffitt

Board Members: Wayne Brown, Mike Deen, David Holmes, Debbie Jenkins, Frank Markham, Rose Marzella, Jim Peebles, Russ Randall, Norma Samuel and Ty Springer

Fast Fair Facts...

21 FFA chapters

27 Shows and Events plus the Florida High School Rodeo

38 4-H Clubs

131 Steers

393 Swine

1,100 individuals showing in one or more events

Corporate Sponsors

Heritage Club – A special honor reserved for businesses that have met three qualifications:

1. volunteer time 2. sponsor events 3. market animal buyer

- Julian Grissom Realty
- Marion County Cattlemen’s Association
- Marion County Farm Bureau
- Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Commerce
- Publix Super Markets
- Seminole Feed
- SunTrust Bank

Diamond: Adrian Lucas Aluminum, Ocala Electric Utilities

Gold: Embarq, Good Time Printing, Florida Thoroughbred Breeders’ and Owners Assn, Florida Equine Publications

Silver: *In the Field* Magazine, Interstate Electric, Progress Energy and Sam’s Club of Ocala, Tractor Supply

Bronze: BB&T Bank, SECO Energy

Copper: 2nd Cup of Coffee, Eleanor Hancock Photographer, L&S Trailers, Rick’s Cleaners, Town and Country 4-H, Country Kids 4-H