



August 18-23, 2026

A Timeless Tradition

the 2026 Edition

October 2025

★ Kozelka's Korner ★

As I attend other county and state fairs, I am often asked how we do what we do in Steele County. The answer is simple. We have volunteers, sponsors, guests, and a community who love the fair! All of you are ambassadors of the Steele County Free Fair that I am fortunate to manage. This is a position that I do not take lightly. The Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors and I strive to continually make our fair better. In fact, we are already working on entertainment and lining up vendors for "A Timeless Tradition the 2026 Edition" August 18 – 23, 2026. Please stop in, call, or email your suggestions or ideas to us. We value your feedback. In fact, it was feedback from our community that brought "Big Daddy Weave" with special guest, Cochran and Co. to the grandstand stage on Wednesday night for an amazing show, the first Christian concert we've ever held in the grandstand.

Other firsts for "Good Vibes in 2025" included the debut of the Arctic Blast Rollercoaster, completion of the Steele Saloon, addition of the Master Gardener's Learning Garden, and new hog pens and horse stalls to name a few. Several new sponsors stepped up with creative ideas, too, while long standing sponsors continue to support what we do. This doesn't happen in every county in Minnesota, or the nation for that matter, and is something I hope we never take for granted. Whenever and however you can, please join me in supporting our sponsors as we couldn't provide what we do without their willingness to partner with us.

The grounds continued to be busy after the last food stand and carnival ride drove away. We are happy to host our community

whenever we can. The month of September alone saw sixteen (16) different events on the grounds from weddings, to bourbon tasting, corporate celebrations, homecoming float building and walks to support Alzheimer's and cancer research. We are proud to be a community partner and to help those who help us.

On behalf of the Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors, Associate Directors, and Staff, thank you! I am proud to be a fair manager, but not just any fair manager; manager of the best county fair in the state of Minnesota, the Steele County Free Fair!

See you at the fair!

Scott Kozelka

Steele County Free Fair Manager

★ SCFF Office Information ★

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If you would like to receive your Barker Newsletter by e-mail, please contact us and we will be happy to add you to the list.

Mick Ditlevson appointed as State Director, Minnesota Rural Development

Mick Ditlevson serves as State Director for Rural Development in Minnesota. Most recently, he served as Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations to Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins. Ditlevson holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Pepperdine University and is a fifth-generation Steele County farmer.

Mick is the son of Mark Ditlevson, Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors, and Renee Worke and is a Beer Garden Superintendent.

Congratulations, Mick!



Steele County Free Fair Manager, Scott Kozelka, Named Grand Marshal

Fair Manager Scott Kozelka wears many hats in the Owatonna community. Chamber Ambassador, United Way Board Member, member of the Eagles and Elks, to name a few. This fall, Kozelka added a new hat to his many

when he served as the Grand Marshal for the Owatonna High School Homecoming Parade. Kozelka was selected by the Owatonna High School Student Council in recognition of all he and the Steele County Free Fair do to support Owatonna High School. Kozelka spoke at coronation, rode in the parade and helped cheer our Owatonna Huskies Football team on to a homecoming victory in the last four seconds over New Prague. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition, Scott!



Rinehart Joins the Team

Zach Rinehart, Blue Earth County Fair Board Member and Minnesota Federation of County Fairs District 2 Director, has joined the Steele County Free Fair team as Assistant Manager.

Kozelka mentored Rinehart in the weeks leading up to "Good Vibes in 2025" and throughout this year's fair as Rinehart desired to expand his knowledge in how a large fair comes together and is managed day-to-day.

The Steele County Free Fair Board and Kozelka quickly learned that Rinehart's skill set and desire to learn were a match for our needs as the Steele County Free Fair continues to grow. Rinehart will assist in the day-to-day planning for "A Timeless Tradition the 2026 Edition" and the off-season operations on the grounds.

Welcome, Zach Rinehart, to the team!

SCFF and KDHL Southern Minnesota Ag Ambassador of the Year

The Steele County Free Fair and KDHL Radio were proud to recognize the Dale and Lori Stevermer Family, Easton, MN, as the Southern Minnesota Ag Ambassadors of the Year.

The Southern Minnesota Ag Ambassador of the Year program was started over twenty-five (25) years ago as a way to recognize and say thank you to families and individuals who are promoting and telling the story of agriculture.

The Stevermer Family raises corn, soybeans, sweet corn and pigs. The entire family has been involved in pork promotion. Dale and Lori have held leadership roles with the Minnesota Pork Producers, the National Pork Board and the National Pork Producers Association where Lori served as Past President.

The Stevermer Family, along with finalists Brent Fuchs, Rice County farmer and recent recipient of the Education Award from the Faribault Chamber of Commerce, and Julie Ketterling, Ag Instructor and FFA Advisor at Farmington High School, were recognized at the District 2 Holstein Show on Saturday evening of the Steele County Free Fair.



News, Notes and Fun Facts From the 2025 Fair



- ★ 3 wood carvers exhibited 129 carvings in this year's Wood Carving Exhibit.
- ★ 8,176 people visited the Fine Arts exhibit.
- ★ 111 people exhibited in more than one open class department.
- ★ There were 4,432 open class entries from 1,019 open class exhibitors.
- ★ Light horses topped the open class livestock entries with 478 entries.
- ★ Flower exhibits topped the non-livestock open class entries with 561 exhibits.
- ★ Culinary entries also topped 500 with 511 open class entries.
- ★ There were 441 more open class exhibits than in 2024.
- ★ Barry Benjamin from Happy Tails Pet Store, shared that 99,000 guests held an animal in the Great Outdoors Center during this year's fair!
- ★ 1,949 fairgoers enjoyed the Muckle Museum featuring Death Defying Stunts throughout the years. The Muckle Museum will feature animals at the fair in 2026 – livestock and exotic – over the years.
- ★ 139 youth participated in the 4-H Auction selling 6 different species of animals for a total of \$108,950.00
- ★ The Village of Yesteryear church service offering of \$488.00 was gifted equally to Oak Hill Community Connections and The Lighthouse of Southern Minnesota. The Fair Square Church Service was cancelled due to the rainy weather.
- ★ 12,892 fair guests enjoyed the display of Chryslers in the House Auto Group Auto Museum. The museum will feature Tri 5's...1955, 1956 and 1957 Chevy's and Ford's in 2026. Contact the fair office if you have a vehicle to display in 2026.
- ★ For the first time ever, Mega Ride Tickets SOLD OUT! 6,500 tickets were sold and entitled the rider to unlimited rides on the GoldStar Midway the entire fair.
- ★ The Courtesy Shuttle provided rides for 1,701 fairgoers.
- ★ Glenda Smith, Owatonna Chamber of Commerce & Tourism, shared that the Steele County Free Fair was one of the Top 5 events in MN for the month of August.



★ 2026 Theme Winner ★



Richard Rodriguez, Owatonna, MN, submitted the winning theme for the 2026 Steele County Free Fair, *"A Timeless Tradition the 2026 Edition"*. Rodriguez shared that this was a true "hometown kid makes good" moment that left him smiling. "As an Owatonna native, the Steele County Free Fair has been a huge part of my life. It's where I made so many of my favorite childhood memories and now it's where I get to see that same magic in my children's eyes. A huge thank you to the Steele County Free Fair for this honor. It means the world to give a little something back to the fair that means so much to me and my family."

2nd Annual "Best of the Fair" Food Competition

The 2nd Annual "Best of the Fair" Food Competition was held on the Wenger Stage in Fair Square Park on Wednesday, August 13, at 3:00 PM. Local celebrity judges had the task of choosing a champion from the seven finalists, narrowed down from 21 new food entries.

- Champion:** Cambodian Ribeye Steak Skewer by Shoo-Ga Cane Juice Bar & Eatery
Savory: Cambodian Ribeye Steak Skewer by Shoo-Ga Cane Juice Bar & Eatery
Sweetest: Snickers Salad Cheesecake by Lakes Company Eats
Finalists: BBQ Bourbon Bag by Bourbon Chicken
 Tater Keg by Greater Tater
 Beignets by Just Take the Cake Too
 Strawberry/Chocolate Churros by Mami Churros Creamery



October 2025

And the winner is...

Kids Pedal Pull Winners

The annual Kid's Pedal Pull, sponsored by Central Farm Service, was a huge success at this year's fair. 112 youth, ages 4 – 11, showed their strength in this year's pull. The following are the champions in each age group:

Age 4: Otto - Owatonna, MN

Age 5: Darby - Owatonna, MN

Age 6: Elle - Owatonna, MN

Age 7: Evelyn - Waterville, MN

Age 8: Avin - Blooming Prairie, MN

Age 9: Axel, Kasson, MN

Age 10: Andrew, Northfield, MN

Age 11: Rayfe, Zumbrota, MN

SCFF Evaluations Games & Rides Winners

Best Lit - Adult: Ring of Fire

Best Ride - Kids: Speedway

Best Ride - Adult: Arctic Blast

Best Lit - Kids: Water Gun Fun

Best Game - Kids: Claw Zone Park

Best Game - Adult: Break a Bottle



Bike Winners

8 bikes were given away as part of the Profinium, Inc. Saturday Ride Special during the fair. This year's winners were:

Piper from Rochester, MN

Benjamin from Kasson, MN

Malyeda from Owatonna, MN

Brycelinn from Geneva, MN

Alana from Arizona

Logan from Ellendale, MN

Millie from Chaska, MN

Ryder from Dodge Center, MN

SCFF Awards

★ Open Class Photography Results ★

Grand Champion – Adult:

“Eye of the Prize” by Bobby Duehring, Mankato, MN

Grand Champion – Youth:

“Ripley” by Paisley Wolf, Blooming Prairie, MN

Gladys Wavrin Award for Best Photo:

“A Carriage Ride” by Richard Carlson, Rochester, MN

People's Choice Award:

“Heaven Above” by Cheryl Miller, Owatonna, MN



★ Open Class Culinary Arts Department Results ★

Junior Ruler of the Kitchen: Leah Miller, Owatonna, MN

Adult Ruler of the Kitchen: Julie Schultz, Owatonna, MN

Monica Kruschke Culinary Arts Award: Betty Hager, Owatonna, MN

In memory of Karla Ihrke Special Award: Irene Standke, Geneva, MN

Superintendent Award: Kimberly Gwin, Owatonna, MN

★ Fine Arts ★

People's Choice Award: Beth DeCoux, Owatonna, MN

★ Youth Art ★

People's Choice Award: Adaline Pettet-Ulrich, Owatonna, MN & Olivia Hoffman, Owatonna, MN.

SCFF Evaluations Food Winners

Most Popular Food At The Fair:

Roasted & Mexican Street Corn at Blue House Corn Company

Most Unique Food:

Cheese Curd Tacos at Richie's Cheese Curd Tacos

Best Bargain:

Oof-da-Taco at Oof-da-Taco

Best Refreshments:

Dirty Floats at Just Take the Cake Too

Best Appearance Stand:

Shoo-Ga Cane Juice Bar & Eatery

Spiciest Food:

Kenyan Samosas at Sambusa Samosa

Rookie of the Year:

Shoo-Ga Cane Juice Bar & Eatery

Most Customer Friendly:

Mami Churros & Creamery

Best International Food:

Beef, Chicken & Veggie Koshari by Korarina Egyptian Cuisine

Best Service:

Sweet Clouds Cotton Candy

Best Dessert:

Snickers Salad Cheesecake at Lakes Company Eats

Best New Food:

Edible Taco Bowl by Lopez Concessions



"THANK YOU" TO EVERYONE INVOLVED IN MAKING THE 2025 STEELE COUNTY FREE FAIR A HUGE SUCCESS! WE ARE SO FORTUNATE TO HAVE PARTNERS WHO WORKED WITH US IN BRINGING "GOOD VIBES IN 2025" TO SO MANY. WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

- SCFF Board and Staff

A Family First Insurance Agency
AA Precision Tooling
ABC Siding
ABS Global
Active PT & Sports
Ag Partners
Albert Lea Seed
Al-Corn Clean Fuel
Alerus
Alexander Lumber
Allina Health-Owatonna Hospital
All The Details
Ameriprise Financial - Dean Velzke
Amy Swain Hearing Centers
Bahe Drywall & Taping
Baker Tech Services
Baymont by Wyndham Owatonna
Benedictine Living Community
Berkshire Hathaway Advantage Real Estate
Becky Hermanson-Hill and Darcy Ihrke
BetterLife
Big Top Rental
Bio Plastics Solutions
Birchwood Cottages
Bixby Feed Mill
Block Plumbing
Blooming Prairie Vet Clinic
Bosch
Bremer Bank
Brick - Meger Funeral Home
Bridge Water at Owatonna
BRN Lawn and Landscape
Broskoff Structures
Bulldog Coatings
C-4 Custom Cabinets
Cargill
Carr's Tree Service
CarTime of Owatonna
Casey's General Store
Cashwise Foods
CashWise Liquor
CCI Granite
Cemstone
Central Farm Service
Central Park Framing & Finds
Chad's Drywall & Taping
Christian Bros. Cabinets
City of Owatonna
City of Owatonna Park and Recreation
City of Owatonna Street Department
CliftonLarsonAllen LLP
Cole's Electric
College City Beverage
Comfort Inn-Owatonna
Commerce Bank-Geneva
Community Bank Owatonna
Community Resource Bank
Compeer Financial
Costas Candies
Costco Wholesale 1376
County Inn & Suites
Courtyard by Marriott-Owatonna
Crystal Valley Cooperative
Culligan Ultrapure of Owatonna
Culver's
Dahlheimer Beverage
DAIKIN Applied
Daltille
DeAnna's Concessions
Dean's Towing
Deerfield Ag Systems-Becks Hybrid Seed Dealer
Derm Heating and Air Conditioning
Depot Bar & Grill
Dwell Realty Group
Ecumen Brooks & Countryside Living

Edward Jones-Josh Cosens/Matt Edwards/Jeff Hall/John Havelka/Dan Mobley/Matt Stanislav
Ellingson Companies
Ellingson Tree Service
Robert Everett
Express Pressure Washers, Inc.
Fareway Meat and Grocery
Farmers Feed and Pet Supply
Fastenal
Federated Insurance Company
Fireplace Connection
Fleet Form
FoamCraft Packaging, Inc.
Four Seasons Electric
From the Ground Up
G & G Concessions
Gandy Company
GMI Insurance
Godfather's Pizza
Gold Star Amusements
Happy Tails Pet Store
Heartland Animal Hospital
Home 2 Suites by Hilton
Home Improvement Professionals
HomeTown Credit Union
Hugo Matejcek Post 3723 VFW & VFW Auxiliary
Horizon Eye Care
House Auto Group
Hy-Vee Grocery Store
Hy-Vee Wine & Spirits
International Steel Erectors
James Bros. Construction
Ron Janning-LG Seeds/AgroLiquid Fertilizer
Jensen Insurance Agency
Jensen Tree Moving
JJD Companies
JK Routh Contracting
LLC Kappy's Collision Center
Kek's Repair
Keen Bank
Kibble Equipment
Kid's Korner Educare Center
Knutson+Casey
Kotlke Jewelers
KOWZ/KRUE Country/KFAN
Legacy Signs
Let's Ride Boots and Apparel
Life Fitness/Hammer Strength
Life Style, Inc.
Little Sugar Designs
Loken Excavating and Drainage, Inc.
Lowe's
Ludewig Financial Group
Mages Insurance Group
Manke's Outdoor Equipment
Marathan Stables-Pat McCarthy
Marthaler Honda
Mayo Clinic Ambulance Service
Mayo Clinic Health Systems-Owatonna
Melbys Masonry
Metal Services of Blooming Prairie
MetroNet
Michaelson Funeral Home
Midwest Ag Advisors
Mike's Repair
Mineral Springs Brewery
Miner's Outdoor and Rec.
Minnesota Horse Breeders Assoc
Misgen's Auto Parts
Mohs Contracting

Mohs Homes
MSL Landscaping
NAPA Auto Parts
Casey and Amy Nelson
New York Life
North Risk Partners
Northern Beverage Distribution Co. LLC
Northland Farm Systems
O-town Auctions
Ocean Breeze
Olmsted Medical Center
Olympic Fire Protection
Ormic Concessions
Owatonna Area Christian Radio
Owatonna Bus Co.
Owatonna Collision & Glass
Owatonna County Club
Owatonna Eagles
Owatonna Fire and Safety
Owatonna Fire Department
Owatonna Floor Covering
Owatonna Foundation
Owatonna Glass
Owatonna Granite & Monument
Owatonna Heating & Cooling
Owatonna Motor Company
Owatonna People's Press
Owatonna Police Department
Owatonna Public Utilities
Owatonna RV Services
Piepho Roofing Inc.
Pirkil Gas
Plaza Morena Campestre Grill
Premier Bank - Minnesota
Prime Garage Doors & More
Profinium Financial
R & K Electric
RE/MAX Venture
Ringhofer Insurance Agency
Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers
Riverland Community College
Sanson
Enterprises
Schroder Concessions
Senator John Jasinski
Representative Tom Sexton
Seykora Asphalt Maintenance & Paving
Seykora Striping
Shorty Schroht Lawn Care
Sign Pro
Simple Moves
Sleep City
Snell Motors
Souba Greenhouse
Southern Mn Lawnworks
Spare Time Catering and Events
Spherion

Star Granite
State Farm Mutual Insurance Association
Steele County
Steele County American Dairy Association Steele
County Corn and Soybean Growers Assoc. Steele
County Farm Bureau Federation Board Steele
County Highway Department
Steele County Sheriff's Department
Steele County Sheriff's Mounted Posse & Auxiliary
Steele County Special Deputies
Steele County Times
Steele - Waseca Cooperative Electric
Steelhead Americas
Strese's Tree Service
Steve James Excavating
Stockwell Accounting
Stoyk's Plumbing
Syngenta
Thiele Trucking, LLC
Thompson Sanitation
Thrivent Financial-Nick Lewis
Timberdale Trace
Tom's Pro Glass
Tom Thumb Donuts
Tony's Flooring
Torey's Restaurant & Bar
Total Masonry
Townsquare Media
TraLo Companies
Travel Leaders
Tri-M Graphics
Triple J Concessions-Fresh Fries
Turtle Creek Nursery & Landscaping
Union Home Mortgage
United Prairie Bank
United Way of Steele County
US Bank
Venture Hydraulics
Vestis Uniforms
Viracon
Wanous Seeds
Waseca SnoBiz
Wencl Construction Inc.
Welker Custom Homes, Inc.
Wencl Plumbing
Wenger Corporation
West Bank
Wick Buildings
Wilbur-Ellis
Willie's Painting
Wireless World-Verizon
Wolff and Sons

Apologies to anyone we may have missed!

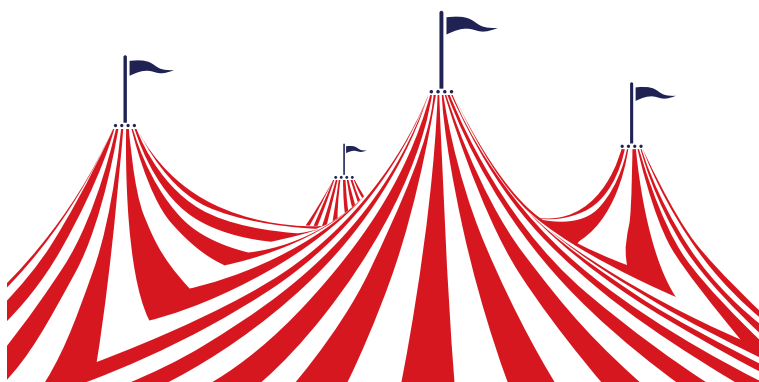


See You At The Fair! October 2025



Steele County Free Fair
PO Box 650
Owatonna, MN 55060

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OWATONNA MN
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Join Us Next Year
August 18-23, 2026

★ scff.org ★

Memorials and Donations

Donations Received:

B & D Greek Foods
Robert Everett
Jack & Darlene Noble

Memorials Received:

In memory of Dylan Lattery
Wayne & Janet Starman
In memory of Elmer Reseland -
Past Fair Manager
Brook & Erik Reseland
In memory of Richard Buan
Roland & Truelson
In memory of Merrill Jensen
David & Cindy Melby
In memory of Luverne Wanous -
Fair Entertainer
Glen & Cheryl Meger
In memory of Jim Hartle -
Board Member Emeritus
Doris Lea
Jerome Spindler
In memory of Jim Feuerstain
and Jim Klein
Mike, Karen, & Blake Klein

Thank you to our superintendents!

