

“OUT AT THE FAIR” ADDS CALIFORNIA STATE FAIR

San Diego’s highly successful LGBTQ day at the fair expands to Cal State Fair

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Out at the Fair, San Diego County Fair, Del Mar, Calif.

Out at the Fair (OATF), a family-friendly celebration of the LGBTQ community, that’s been held at the San Diego County Fair, Del Mar, Calif., for the past five years, is set to expand to the California State Fair (CSF), Sacramento, Calif., on Sunday, July 30.

Launched unofficially in 2013 in Del Mar, OATF became an official fair event in 2014.

Through the years, it has gained the support of local LGBTQ community organizations, such as San Diego Pride, North County Pride, South Bay Pride, The San Diego LGBT Community Center, and TransFamily Support Services, as well as local elected officials and businesses.

After five years of increased success, OATF will be making the jump to the state capital, Sacramento, as part of an expansion plan that intends to spread a message of diversity and inclusiveness to fairs nationwide and abroad.

“We just wanted to have fun at the fair, and decided to check in on Facebook as an unofficial Gay Day,” said William Zakrajshek, co-founder of OATF. “It’s grown bigger and bigger each year. Now we have a full day of entertainment at two stages, featuring local LGBTQ performers, nonprofit organizations exhibiting, the “Newly Married Game,” Diva Drop, Dunk a Hunk, an art exhibition and two multistall all-gender restrooms.”

Part of the plan has always been to expand to other fairs, explained Zakrajshek. “We’re part of International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) and Western Fairs Association (WFA) and did panels to explain the concept to fair professionals.”

“Making the jump to the Cal State Fair is going to provide validity to the concept,” said Luis Valdivia, multicultural marketing specialist, San Diego County Fair, who has been involved in the OATF project since its inception.

“This year’s OATF in San Diego was our biggest yet,” said Valdivia. “It was a packed house. We saw a dramatic increase from last year’s event.” Valdivia said the new art exhibit was well received.

OATF is not a ticketed event, but Valdivia did share that 68,042 people attended the San Diego County Fair that day. Food per caps were \$14.09.

In January, at WFA, the OATF group met Jess Durfee, a Cal State Fair board member.

“We caught his attention, we clicked, he came to our presentation, had a few more conversations and we brainstormed a plan for bringing OATF to Cal State Fair. We decided to follow the San Diego County Fair road map. No planned entertainment for the first year, just people getting together.”

Going back to its roots, this year’s event at Cal State will be unofficial. We are staging the event around (out gay entertainer) Melissa Etheridge’s concert at Cal State Fair,” said Zakrajshek. The Etheridge concert is a free event.

As was the case in San Diego in 2011, the plan is to start with a friendly gathering, and grow the event year after year. “We want people to come out to the fair and meet-up for a group photo,” he said. “It’s all about people showing their LGBTQ community support.”

To get the word out, OATF has a partnership with Outword magazine as well as a partnership with the Sacramento LGBT Community Center, which Zakrajshek said was “an important component for the success of this new fair event.” All advertising will include a special promo code, ‘Out At the Fair,’ and one dollar from every ticket sold will be donated to the Sacramento LGBT Community Center.

“Partnering with Out at the Fair to create the first unofficial LGBTQ day at the California State Fair provides an opportunity for LGBTQ friends, families and allies to build community, increase visibility, and have a lot of fun, said David Heitstuman, executive director at the center. “We’re excited to help promote the event’s inaugural year and hope it will become a highlight of the summer in the State Capitol.”

All of the OATF staff work as volunteers, just as they do at San Diego County Fair.

“We’ll see how it goes this year and hopefully we’ll get a few time slots on some of the stages for next year. We do this in tiny steps,” said Zakrajshek.

Valdivia said that in addition to the Cal State Fair, he’s been contacted by Washington State Fair Association, Vancouver, Wash., Rodeo Austin and New Mexico State Fair about multicultural marketing and OATF.

“We’d love to see every fair in the country embrace this event and participate,” he said.
