

Marin Voice: Healthy fare at the Marin County Fair goes national

July 3, 2015

By Cío Hernández and Teri Rockas

The Marin County Fair has celebrated over a decade of being the healthiest fair on Earth and these efforts are now being shared in a national arena.

Some of these changes may have gone unnoticed or are now an expectation.

For example, the Marin County Fair was the first to become smoke-free, redirecting smokers to tents in areas outside the fairgrounds.

Our vendors take their safety responsibilities seriously, too.

Each one of our alcohol vendors has received training in Responsible Beverage Service. This program teaches people how to evaluate the age of the customer, to assure no alcohol is provided to minors, as well as how to know when it is not safe to sell to someone.

Every year, families with small children come looking for the Baby Sanctuary. They know it is a welcoming place for babies and toddlers with diaper changing supplies, rocking chairs for mothers to breastfeed or for when parents just need a little rest.

Toddlers giggle in delight in the play area. The Baby Sanctuary makes it easier for families to stay at the fair longer and enjoy more of the festivities.

Food vendors have seen the cost benefit of healthy foods. All food vendors offer a healthy food choice.

Marin fairgoers now expect that they will be able to find healthy food options that are vetted by USDA nutrition guidelines. Bite-sized treats may also be enjoyed in single-serving portions too.

Vendors take pride in their award-winning healthy creations throughout the year.

Many vendors have taken these offerings on the road. Adding the healthy options as a regular menu item to be enjoyed at other fairs and festivals across the country makes Marin's healthy glow contagious.

The Kids 1K Fun Run, sponsored by Mercedes-Benz of Marin and coordinated by the Marin YMCA, is a wonderful event we enjoy on Kids Day; this year it was July 1. Children of all ages are invited to the lagoon area in front of the Giant Wheel where kids may enter races to run around the lagoon.

All children receive a medal for competing and may enjoy other prizes.

Health Ambassadors may be seen across the fairgrounds in their bright yellow shirts ready to give sunscreen, connect folks to healthy fun, or to help fairgoers flourish.

Trick them by asking what their favorite fruit or vegetable is before they ask and win a double prize.

This year, the American Public Health Association has invited the Marin County Fair to share how these initiatives were built over time.

Health and Human Services and Healthy Marin Partnership representatives will showcase the power of partnerships, policy and perseverance.

Social norms change takes time.

Our sponsors, Alcohol Justice, Bay Area Community Resources, First 5 Marin Children & Families Commission, Healthy Marin Partnership, Huckleberry Youth Programs, Marin Community Foundation, Marin County Board of Supervisors, San Rafael Police Department, Marin County Sheriff's Office, the Marin YMCA, and Marin County Department of Health and Human Services have continued to invest for over a decade, trusting that doing the right thing is good for all of us.

This year's annual meeting will be held in Chicago, Illinois. A Healthy Fair Guide will be available in December 2015.

On with the Show!

Cío Hernández of Marin County Health and Human Services and Teri Rockas of Kaiser Permanente have led the Marin County Fair Health Initiatives for over a decade.