



# VIEWS & VISIONS

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## The State Fair of West Virginia: Summer's Greatest Adventure

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Kelly Collins is the Chief Executive Officer of the State Fair of West Virginia, a position she has held since 2015. She is an active member of the International Association of Fairs and Expos Institute of Fair Management and currently serves as Vice Chair for the West Virginia Association of Fairs and Festivals. Collins is also a board member of the Greenbrier County Chamber of Commerce and West Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association, and a member of the marketing advisory committee for the Greenbrier Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Ten days, 160,000 people and 95 years of traditions. That's what is set for this year's State Fair of West Virginia on August 8-17 in Lewisburg. With a theme of "Summer's Greatest Adventure," the State Fair looks to continue to grow as the largest multi-day event in the state, featuring top-name concerts, carnival rides, competitions, agricultural displays and some of the best and most unique foods around.

Outside of all the fun, the State Fair of West Virginia (like other fairs and festivals) has continued to play a vital role to the economic impact of our state. Originally called the Greenbrier Valley Fair, it began in 1921 as not only a way to celebrate agriculture, but also as a way to spur commerce for the area. From sales tax revenue on tickets and over \$2 million in State Fair food sales alone, to hotel rooms being filled, as well as gas tanks, our fairs and festivals are leaving an impression financially, socially and educationally.



As a part of the State Fair's goal to promote and support education, five students from the state are selected each year to receive a four-year scholarship of \$1,000 a year to attend any accredited university or trade program. Since it was started, this scholarship has awarded well over \$200,000 to our state's youth.

Perhaps most importantly, our society needs fairs and festivals now more than ever. We live in a time when differences in opinions can make or break friendships, business ties and even families. But not at your local fair or festival. We've seen the left and the right wait in line – together – for two hours to get a cinnamon roll. We've seen teenagers put down their cell phones to share a laugh with parents. And we've seen grandparents and grandchildren hold hands as they stroll through the cattle barns. Race, age, ethnicity, political views – none of that matters at your fair or festival, because, for at least one day, everyone has the same goal: to have fun!

Outside of the importance of the annual event, the State Fair of West Virginia has turned its focus on generating revenue during the remaining 355 days of the year by creating a



year-round event center with over 40,000 square feet of indoor meeting space within six buildings and over 650 full-service camper spots. Since 2012, non-fair events on the property have increased over 200 percent and span from weddings and business meetings to the West Virginia Craft Brew Festival and the Spring and Fall Giant Flea Market and Antique Shows.

As one of the largest campgrounds in the east, the State Fair Event Center has attracted groups such as the Tiffin Allegro

Owners Group, Family Motorcoach, and the Wally Byam Caravan Club International (WBCCI) Rally, which featured over 630 airstreams from across the U.S., Canada and Mexico. During the WBCCI's 2016 visit, the area was hit with devastating floods on the first official day of the event. Fortunately, only one building on the fairgrounds was affected, but the WBCCI group jumped into action to help clean the community. They also donated over \$60,000 to the area for future cleanup and relief efforts.

Events such as this have continued to grow over the years, distinguishing the State Fair of West Virginia as not just a 10-day event, but a year-round economic driver for the community and the state! 

