

# **FLORIDA STATE FAIR AUTHORITY**

## **2023 OVERSIGHT REPORT**



In accordance with Chapter 616, Part III, Florida Statutes, the Commissioner of Agriculture is providing oversight supervision of the Florida State Fair Authority. The members and their designated terms of service were as follows:

**Membership December 31, 2023**

<b>Honorable Wilton Simpson</b> Tallahassee, FL	<b>Richard Bowman</b> Delray Beach, FL New Term: Sept. 29, 2022 – June 28, 2025
<b>Reggie Holt</b> Lakeland, FL Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	<b>Charles “Chuck” Bruno</b> Riverview, FL New Term: June 30, 2022 – June 29, 2026
<b>Jake Raburn</b> Lithia, FL New Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	<b>Doyle E. Carlton, III</b> Wauchula, FL New Term: June 30, 2021 - June 30, 2025
<b>Susanne Clemons</b> Okeechobee, FL New Term: May 30, 2023 – May 29, 2027	<b>Cynthia B. Sanders, Phd</b> Tampa, FL New Term: June 29, 2022 – June 28, 2026
<b>Robert Thomas</b> Thonotosassa, FL New Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	<b>John “Jack” T. Vogel</b> San Antonio, FL Term: July 1, 2018 – June 29, 2026
<b>Eve Council Gloede</b> Tampa, FL New Term: March 31, 2021 - March 31, 2025	<b>Marcia Lightsey</b> Lake Wales, FL New Term: June 30, 2021 – June 30, 2025
<b>Chad Lyons</b> Mayo, FL New Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	<b>A.D. “Sandy” MacKinnon</b> Tampa, FL New Term: June 30, 2022 – June 29, 2026
<b>Charlie Lykes</b> Lake Placid, FL New Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	<b>Honorable Gwen Myers, District 3</b> Tampa, FL Term: December 2, 2020 – June 6, 2024
<b>Ted Schrader</b> Tampa, FL Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	<b>Amanda Taylor</b> St. Pete, FL New Term: June 6, 2022 – June 5, 2026
<b>Linda Syfrett</b> Okeechobee, FL New Term: June 30, 2022 – June 29, 2026	<b>Thaddeus Bullard</b> Lutz, FL Term: January 6, 2021 – May 29, 2025
<b>Archie Collins</b> Tampa, FL Term: March 20, 2023 – March 19, 2027	

**December 31, 2023 Officers**

- Chairman – Susanne Clemons
- Vice Chairman – Jake Raburn
- Treasurer – Linda Syfrett
- Secretary – Eve Council Gloede

The Commissioner’s Executive Staff, working with management staff from the Florida State Fair Authority, established five (5) Goals/Objectives for Calendar Year **2023** as a guide for continuing to improve the Florida State Fair Authority and serve as a basic required plan for oversight.

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**GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

1. Increase the revenue producing event days in 2023 by at least 5% to the **475** level. This increase should enable the Fair to increase the non-Fair revenue to over **\$6,200,000**.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

The Fair Authority had 495 revenue producing Event Days in 2023. Due to larger events and increased pricing, the non-Fair revenue increased significantly to approximately \$6,785,000.

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**GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

2. During calendar year 2023 have a net increase of at least 5 new major events versus non-returning major events. Also have a net revenue increase on these events of at least **\$100,000** of additional revenue.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

The Fair Authority had 25 new major events versus 24 major events that were discontinued in 2023. Management strategically targeted more profitable events in 2023 resulting in a significant net increase in revenue despite keeping the number of large events at the approximately the same level.

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**GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

3. Successfully build our advance sales program for the 2023 Florida State Fair. Historically, our advance sales have been below Fair industry averages. We are embarking on program with Noise Media to substantially increase advance sales through social media marketing.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Advance online sales increased by 110% to \$692,000 for the 2023 Fair. Our new partnership with Noise media and increased social media marketing were driving factors for this increase.

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**GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

4. Successfully rebuild the State Fair Authority’s sponsorship revenue to **\$1,100,000** for calendar year 2023. This represents an 11% increase in revenue over 2022.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Sponsorship revenue failed to increase in 2023 and remained relatively flat versus 2022. We expanded our staff in late 2023 to drive both sponsorship and group sales revenue with an anticipation of meeting this goal in 2024.

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## **GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

5. The Florida State Fair Authority, in continuation of its implementation of its business plan, will emphasize the following capital-related projects (subject to adequate funding to complete these projects):
  - A. Upgrade our IT infrastructure with new hardware and expert protection and monitoring of our network and systems.
  - B. Install a comprehensive camera system through the fairgrounds with offsite monitoring and alerts. The current system is outdated with monitoring capabilities that can be unreliable on certain occasions.
  - C. Upgrade our utilities, pedestal, and roadways in our main campground. Our campgrounds are vital to our annual State Fair and year-round equestrian events.
  - D. Enhance the Fair Agricultural exhibits with new pens and animal rings.
  - E. Replacement of the Gate 3 ticket booths with design to match our major entry points. Gate booths are outdated and of poor quality.
  - F. Replace Security Gate and Overhang as current building is undersized for current needs.
  - G. Install overhang for the MLK parking booths to protect sellers from rain and sun exposure.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

The Florida State Fair Authority was able to spend almost \$5.5 million in capital projects in 2023 due both a healthy cash reserve and \$3.0M grant from the State of Florida. Some of the identified projects in 2023 were delayed due to limited availability to obtain A&E drawings and contractors able to complete the projects. In those cases, the funds were repurposed to other major needs.

- A. The IT Infrastructure upgrade was completed in 2023 making our network both safer, more reliable, and better organized.
- B. Phase I of the camera system upgrade was completed before the 2023 Fair. The remaining upgrades were completed in the Fall of 2023, with all the upgrades to be fully operational for the 2024 Fair.
- C. Campground upgrades alternatives are still being evaluated for the most cost-effective and long-term solution. We expect these upgrades to occur in 2024.
- D. New pens and animal rings expenditures of \$187,000 were completed before the 2023 Fair.
- E. Replacement of the Gate 3 ticket booths has been delayed until at least 2025 as the new ticketing system may allow us to replace them with a smaller, less expensive alternative.
- F. The Security Gate and Overhang was completed in the Fall of 2023 and considered a model for our two main patron entrances.
- G. Overhand for the MLK booth has been delayed until we evaluate our long-term plan on entrances. We expect the solution to be similar to the Security gate project.

The Commissioner’s Executive Staff and the Florida State Fair Authority’s Executive Staff established the following Goals/Objectives jointly for Calendar Year 2024.

1. Increase the revenue producing event days in 2024 to **500**. In addition, maintain the non-Fair revenue at over **\$6,700,000** despite significant one-time events in 2023 and a large number of concerts significantly increasing our camping revenue.
2. During calendar year 2023 have a net increase of at least 5 new major events versus non-returning major events. Also have a net revenue increase on these events of at least **\$100,000** of additional revenue.
3. Maintain our increases in the advance sales program for the 2024 Florida State Fair despite some headwinds in the economy.
4. Successfully rebuild the State Fair Authority’s sponsorship revenue to **\$1,100,000** for calendar year 2024. This represents an 11% increase in revenue over 2023.
5. The Florida State Fair Authority, in continuation of its implementation of its business plan, will emphasize the following capital-related projects (subject to adequate funding to complete these projects):
  - A. Construction of an IT & Security Office to move IT to a superior location and replace a deteriorating Security Office.
  - B. Flooring restoration in show buildings including grinding and re-coating of concrete floors.
  - C. Upgrade our utilities, pedestal, and roadways in our main campground. Our campgrounds are vital to our annual State Fair and year-round equestrian events.
  - D. Interior improvements to show buildings walls that includes upgrades and painting.
  - E. Exterior restroom renovations on Mall and Midway areas.





## **FAIR RANKINGS**

The Florida State Fair continues to enjoy a strong presence within the North American Fair industry. The International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) collects data from IAFE member fairs and positions them in accordance with the attendance that each responding fair submits. The 2023 Florida State Fair was in the 41<sup>st</sup> position on the list compiled for the Fair Industry. In 2022 the Florida State Fair was in the 39<sup>th</sup> position.

## **2023 FAIR ACTIVITIES**

The 118<sup>th</sup> Florida State Fair in 2023 saw Fair attendance decrease from 428,200 to 405,888 due primarily to poor weather on our first weekend. Our guests visited this year's fair to check out thrilling entertainment, delicious foods and exciting rides and exhibits. Our financial performance for the 2023 Fair was still strong despite the attendance decrease, with Fair Net Income of over \$3.5 million.

The Florida State Fair once again offered lots of current and fresh entertainment acts to give guests a top-notch entertainment experience for 2023. New performers included Circle Circus Live, an arena quality show, The Flying Royals, the world's only crisscross flying trapeze act, Bello Nocks Aqua Rock and so much more! The fair also added many local music acts never seen at the Fair.

There was plenty of new and exciting foods available throughout the fairgrounds for guests to indulge on in their Florida State Fair experience. Vendors had the opportunity to participate in the new Three Dollar Thursday which allowed them to serve up sample sized fair foods for a great price. This allowed fairgoers to have an opportunity to taste so much more compared to having to pay full price for fair food. We once again offered an "only at the fair" flavored cider and Sound Spot in conjunction with a partnership with Keel Farms. The "Fan Favorite Food" was the Tampa Cuban Funnel Cake.

We continue to increase the amount of strolling entertainment for our guests. This allows us to better control the flow of the fair making sure guests remain spread out and get a chance to see everything that we have to offer. In the equestrian center, we brought back the fan favorite Demolition Derby for two nights of action-packed fun. In this area we also offered a livestock judging contest and dog show for 4-H and FFA youth to participate in as well as the public to enjoy.

We experienced strong midway sales of slightly under \$4.7 million. Our second Saturday was only our second "million-dollar" midway day in the fair history and contributed to an extremely strong weekend. Our midway partner provided 90 rides for fair goers to enjoy.

Our Livestock events featured more than 5,000 animals to both entertain and educate our patrons. Many of these patrons participated in the hands-on activities offered at the Ag-Venture Exhibit located in the Ag Hall of Fame Building. They also visited the Mooternity Ward (which was relocated to the TECO Arena) where they saw baby Holstein calves being born. The Florida Cattlemen's Museum and Forestry Discovery Center was a crowd favorite.

## **2023 FAIR ACTIVITIES-Continued**

Little Farm Hands was relocated to the Ag Hall of Fame Building. “Little Farm Hands” kids, (ages 3-8) become farm hands at this free, hands-on exhibit as they are provided the opportunity to experience the agricultural process, beginning at the farm and ending at the market. The exhibit was relocated this year to enhance the fair-goers experience in the Ag Hall of Fame Building. With Little Farm Hands and Ag-Venture, we have made the building an Ag Education Destination.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services presented the “Insect Encounter” that once again entertained patrons with bugs and other crawling creatures. This year, this exhibit was moved to their own building location. By moving Little Farm Hands, this opened the space to Insect Encounter to be their own educational destination. People were excited to see this exhibit have their own space.

Florida’s Learning Garden had staff available to talk to fairgoers about caring for a mature/established landscape, how to create a small-scale organic vegetable garden and much more. In the Agriculture Hall of Fame building, Ag-Venture became the center exhibit focusing on the Importance of Florida Agriculture. This exhibit had hands-on activities like Strawberry DNA, Making Butter, “There is a Cow in my Truck” and much more. The Florida Peanut Federation created a field of peanuts in the center of the exhibit so fairgoers could see actual plants growing.

Cracker Country Living History Museum once again offered fairgoers a chance to step into rural Florida history before the turn of the 20th century. Our permanent collection of historic 19th century buildings was enhanced by over 25 period craft, cooking and life skills demonstrators and vendors. Musical entertainment featured bluegrass bands Southern Express and Bits of Grass and American Folk Music entertainer and educator, Buffalo Barfield. Cracker Country is included with Fair admission.

In 2023 the Florida Center hosted STEAM fest. Held in the Florida Center iconic “Red Room”, this 2000 sq. ft. exhibit area featured Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math related hands-on interactive fun and learning opportunities for all ages, including: Aerial Drones, Combat Robotic Competitions, 3D printing & LEGO Wall. Art activities were also part of the space. The St. Pete Robot Show included art-themed pieces based around robots and technology.

The Florida Center was also home to the Florida State Fair Competitive Exhibits, School Exhibits, Arts & Crafts Contests, Hillsborough County Public Schools displays with a tribute to Black History Month showcase and multiple special performances each year. Our Creative Living competitions included horticulture, baking, food preservation, photography, fine art, sewing, needlework, quilting, crafts, woodwork, and technology.

**2024 FAIR PLANNING** - What follows is information pertinent to the upcoming Florida State Fair event, which will take place February 2024, at the Florida State Fair Authority's facilities in Tampa.

### **OVERVIEW**

The 2024 Florida State Fair follows a good 2023 Fair where record attendance days were offset by poor weather conditions that resulted in early closure the first weekend and impacted total fair attendance and revenue. Our plan for 2024 is to utilize research insights to expand our marketing efforts to appeal to a broader audience with new entertainment, experiences, and promotions that appeal to both existing guests and new visitors. We will specifically target younger families and young adults and compete more aggressively for guests the first weekend and on Super Bowl Sunday.

### **GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

1. Grow 2024 attendance to exceed 500,000 visitors.
2. Deliver new offerings to delight existing fair fans and attract new fans.
3. Build community engagement to promote excitement and fair participation.
4. Leverage barrier research to build awareness, consideration, and trial with new segments.
5. Establish and promote a safety-first culture and experience for all.
6. Introduce fun elements to build the Florida State Fair brand.

### **2024 FAIR DAILY PROMOTIONS**

#### **Heroes Day – Thursday, Feb 8**

- Free admission for law enforcement, first responders, active or retired military and veterans with valid ID.

#### **Super Savings Sunday – Sunday, Feb 11**

- Free admission for law enforcement, first responders, active or retired military and veterans with valid ID.
- Free admission with purchase of an Anyday Armband after 3:00pm.

#### **\$3 Thursday – Thursday, Feb 15**

- \$3 admission, select rides, games, and food items after 3:00pm.

#### **Family Day – Friday, February 16**

- Persons 17 years of age or younger will receive free admission to the Florida State Fair until 6:00 p.m. with an admission paying parent or guardian, 21 years of age or older with a valid ID, for entry to the Florida State Fair.
- A parent or guardian can supervise up to 4 persons 17 years of age or younger.

#### **Kids Day – Monday, February 19**

- Persons 17 years of age or younger will receive free admission to the Florida State Fair until 6:00 p.m. with an admission paying parent or guardian, 21 years of age or older with a valid ID, for entry to the Florida State Fair.
- A parent or guardian can supervise up to 4 persons 17 years of age or younger.

#### **Senior Days – Any Monday – Friday of the fair**

- Admission is \$11 for seniors 55+ online or at the gate.



**Marketing Campaign:**

Florida State Fair Authority has been utilizing the Marketing Agency “PRESS” since 2018.

- A. PRESS will continue to boost awareness of the Florida State Fair and continue its legacy of being a fun and safe entertainment experience along with fulfilling its mission to educate the public about agriculture, crops, animals, and sustainable resources.
- B. PRESS understands the Florida State Fair customer and its target demographic and will create on-brand messaging, story angles and announcements to keep Florida State Fair as the place to spend a fun day with family, the perfect date night, or a great place to learn more about Florida and all the state has to offer.
- C. PRESS will meet with editorial boards to plan coverage and provide a framework and timeline for secured pre-fair media coverage. PRESS will then work to fill in gaps of coverage with topical, relevant, and interesting story angles to ensure consistent coverage throughout the length of the contract.
- D. PRESS will also create branded and thoughtful media drops to announce the upcoming fair, its entertainment, and other fair highlights. PRESS will focus on pre-fair coverage to ensure advance ticket sales and to free up spokespeople during fair time.
- E. PRESS will connect with the major departments of the Florida State Fair – agriculture, Cracker Country, food vendors, entertainment, Midway rides – to garner human-interest stories and ensure accurate information is provided to journalists in a timely manner.
- F. Pre-fair, PRESS will distribute weekly media updates to journalists in drivable distance to the Florida State Fair (Orlando, Jacksonville, Gainesville, Ft. Myers, and others). This tactic would begin in November through end of January.
- G. In February, daily updates to media will be provided. The daily updates will include potential story angles customized to the writer, the next day’s schedule of events and any additional information applicable to the writer.
- H. PRESS will also coordinate a media credential and access policy to allow for a PRESS representative escort when on the Florida State Fairgrounds.

**MEDIA MIX**

- TV/Cable – 40.0%
- Digital/Social, DR Ads – 26.4%
- Radio – 6.4%
- Out-of-Home – 13.6%
- Print – 7.8%
- Target Segments Mix – 5.8%

**COMMUNICATIONS**

- Broadcast TV
- Web, Social, Email campaigns
- Broadcast Radio
- Billboards
- Newspapers, Magazines
- Social/Print/Digital Mix



**CRACKER COUNTRY MUSEUM**

In 2023, Cracker Country was open a total of 95 days. Events included the Florida State Fair, Tall Tales of Old Florida, Christmas in the Country, and Museum Day. In the spring of 2023, Cracker Country hosted 10,492 elementary, Pre-K and homeschool field trip participants in the Rural Home Life School Tour, the pre-K and Kindergarten Long Ago and Today, Extended Day Field Trip and 2 homeschool events. In the fall we are on track to host 13,000 elementary and homeschool students, parents and teachers in the Rural Home Life Tour, Extended Day Field Trips and 2 homeschool events.

During the 2023 Florida State Fair, Cracker Country featured music, crafts and demonstrations of 19<sup>th</sup> century trades and skills by historic educators and artisans. The museum also provided staff and docents to interpret the Florida Cattle Ranching exhibit, Florida Forest Discovery Center, and the Power of Steam exhibit. During the fall of 2023 Cracker Country produced Museum Day, the annual Tall Tales of Old Florida in October, and Christmas in the Country in December. These three events total an additional 2,300 participants.

**EDUCATION/AGRICULTURE**

The Agribusiness Department at the Florida State Fair strives to expand its educational programs each year. The “Youth Livestock Show Ethics and Animal Care Workshop” program continues to grow as the Authority offers this program to any Fair in Florida. Through the Agribusiness website, our department schedules and posts times and locations, tracks the attendance of exhibitors for issuing certification numbers, processes mailings and offers our exhibitors the ability to check their Ethics certification. This program was developed through the cooperation of the University of Florida, the Florida State Fair Authority, and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. For the 2023/2024 Fair Season, we have been offering both On-Site Workshops and Zoom Meeting Workshops for new exhibitors or anyone who needed to renew. So far this year, we have scheduled 82 workshops for students to attend and plan to keep scheduling until we make sure exhibitors have the information. So far this year, we have certified approximately 1750 students from around the state.

The Authority’s “Ag Venture” program at the Fairgrounds continues to grow and we are thrilled this program has been able to return for the Fall of 2023 and Spring of 2024. We have been able to add a Homeschool Day to our Fall tours which has been wonderful since we are reaching a totally different group of students and parents. Our Educational Seminar happened again in September. We continued with the revised format to give the students more room. We did 5 workshops in the morning, the 1<sup>st</sup> Orientation during the lunch break and 5 more workshops in the afternoon. The new format has been well received and we were thrilled with the turnout!!

The Authority will continue to be involved in the following events:

1. Florida Federation of Fairs Workshop	2. Cattlemen’s Convention
3. Florida Ag In the Classroom	4. State FFA Convention Trade Show
5. Florida Federation of Fairs Convention	

## FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT

Numerous major Capital projects were completed in 2023 including the following essential items:

- A. The Security Gate replacement along with the expansion of our Orient Road entrance was completed in the Fall of 2023 and considered a model for our two main patron entrances.
- B. Agricultural offices were demolished and rebuilt in 2023.
- C. The IT Infrastructure upgrade was completed in 2023 making our network both safer, more reliable, and better organized.
- D. The Fairgrounds camera system was upgraded in two phases in 2023 and will be fully operational for the 2024 Fair.
- E. Equestrian center had a major restoration of the ring footing along with the completion of the roofing on of our largest barn.
- F. LED lighting installation in secondary buildings and support facilities.
- G. Significant investment in major equipment and work vehicles.
- H. Significant investment in Chairs & Tables for Non-Fair events.

