

It's a party

Rides, shows, food and more fill state fair's calendar of fun

By Jamie Rogers
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Alaska, you don't look a day over 21, much less 50 years old. But the Alaska State Fair is saluting your 50 years of statehood this year with a celebration that lasts 12 days. And what better way to fete the state than a summer tradition that keeps throngs of fairgoers coming back year after year with its youthful enthusiasm?

The fair kicks off and lets it hair down Thursday with the **Governor's Day Alaska Statehood Celebration**, when cake, dancers, a blanket toss and more will welcome visitors on opening day.

But there's so much more that will attract this year's fans. How do we love thee, Alaska? Let's take a look at the fair's plans:

Let me discount the ways

With many gas tanks hovering near empty and the economy running on fumes, it's nice to know there are ways to save on fair admission — so you can better spend the cash on corn dogs.

Special dates to save at the fair gates include: **Premiera Blue Cross Blue Shield Kids' Day** (Aug. 22), youth 12 and under get in free; **2 Buck Tuesday** (Aug. 26), with \$2 admission from noon to 2 p.m.; and **Union Day** (Sept. 1), when you show your union ID card for \$2 off admission for you and a guest.

Carpool to the fairgrounds and you'll do your wallet, and the planet, another favor while saving on parking fees.

Free entertainment

Some events at the fairgrounds don't cost an extra dime. Get the most fun for no mout' money at the **King BMX/Skate Stunt Show** (3, 5 and 8 p.m. weekdays and 1, 3, 5 and 8 p.m. weekends and Labor Day, Grandstand Tent), the **Petting Zoo** (open until 8 p.m. daily, Farm Exhibits) and **Fred Scheer's Lumberjack**

Getting there

Driving: The Alaska State Fairgrounds are at 2075 Glenn Highway in Palmer, 45 miles northeast of Anchorage.

Riding: The Alaska State Fair Train offers roundtrip travel from Anchorage to Palmer, Aug. 23-24 and Aug. 29-31. The early train, available Saturdays and Sundays, leaves Anchorage at 9 a.m. and leaves Palmer to return at 4:30 p.m. The late train, running Aug. 23, 29 and 30, departs Anchorage at 1:30 p.m. and departs Palmer to return at 10:30 p.m. Train trips last about 1½ hours. Tickets: \$54 for adults, \$47 seniors, \$27 children and \$22 for 5 and under. All tickets include fair admission. For more information, call 265-2494, 1-800-544-0552 or visit alaskarailroad.com/fairtrain.

Show (1, 3 and 6 p.m. daily, SBS Woodlot).

Multitude of musical acts

When it comes to big-name fair bands, Alaskans love 'em or leave 'em. But there's plenty to adore at the Borealis Theatre, including country singer **Tracy Lawrence** (7:30 p.m. Aug. 23, \$35-\$45), ventriloquist **Terry Fator** (7:30 p.m. Aug. 27, \$35-\$60), hip-hop star **Sean Kingston** (5:30 and 8 p.m. Aug. 29, \$29.50-\$39.50) and rock bands **The Gin Blossoms** and **The Rembrandts** (7:30 p.m. Aug. 31, \$29.50-\$39.50).

That's not even counting the additional classic rockers and tribute bands plus the nightly live music at the fair's Sluicebox. All Borealis Theatre concert tickets include fair admission when purchased prior to the day of the event.

Crazy contests

Suit up in your dingiest overalls and warm up your vocal cords for goofy fair games and contests including **Carhartt Competitions** (6 p.m. Aug. 26, Events Tent), the **Fiddle Contest** (5 p.m. Aug. 30, Colony Stage) and the **Husband Holler** (6:30 p.m., Aug. 28, Bluebonnet Stage). New tests of skill this year include



ERIK HILL / Daily News archive

Atz Kilcher hangs on to his overalls while running the Carhartt Relay Race at the 2007 Alaska State Fair.

Alaska State Fair

When: Thursday through Sept. 1. Gates open at noon on weekdays and 10 a.m. on weekends and Labor Day. Fair closes at 10 nightly.

Where: Alaska State Fairgrounds, Palmer

How much:

- Daily admission is \$10 for adults, \$6 for seniors and ages 6-12, free for 5-and-under.
- Three-day passes are \$25 for adults, \$15 for seniors and ages 6-12.
- Season passes are \$60 for adults, \$40 for seniors and ages 6-12.
- Parking fees include: \$5 for cars, \$18 for RVs, \$25 daily premiere on-grounds parking. Extra \$10 for towed trailers or cars.

Phone: 1-800-850-FAIR (3247)

Web: www.alaskastatefair.org

For Alaska State Fair coverage and complete schedules, visit adn.com/statefair.

Alaska's Got Talent (1 p.m. Aug. 24, Events Tent, and 9 p.m. Aug. 27, Borealis Plaza) and a **Text Messaging Contest** (5 p.m. Aug. 29, Events Tent). Most contests are free to enter with fair admission. And don't miss the **Giant Cabbage Weigh Off** (6 p.m. Aug. 29, Farm Exhibits).

Get busy a-gettin' dizzy

Squeal, squirm and stand in line for a multitude of midway rides this year including the hydraulic Hurricane, the airborne Arabian Nights and the sweet Apple Spinner. Rides operate daily during fair hours. Individual tickets are \$1, with kiddieland rides averaging two tickets and major rides averaging three tickets.

Save your change (but don't let it fly out of your pockets) during **Coca-Cola Carnival Zip Strip** days, Aug. 25 and 27. That's when you can buy a "Little Zip" for 15 kiddieland rides for \$25 and a "Big Zip" for 15 bigger rides for \$35.

Elite eats and treats

Admit it. Some of you are going to the fair simply for its unique bounty of food. Where else can you dine on elephant ears, roasted corn cobs, turkey drum-

sticks, candy apples and battered halibut all in one sitting? Not that you should.

This year's crop of more than 60 vendors won't disappoint, with returning favorites such as **Denali Cream Puffs**, **Rollin Donuts**, **Friar Tucks**, **Rae's Gourmet Tamales** and, last but not least, **Hoop'n Hula Milk 'n Cookies**. Grab a hoop and shake off a few crumbs and calories at this Miner's Loop spot popular with kids.

Words of advice: Tums are your friends, and ride the rides before eating. No one enjoys the Tilt-A-Hurl.

Powerful pyrotechnics

Twirling midway rides light up the Alaska nights, but not like the spectacular sparkles of **fireworks displays**. Oooh and ah on three evenings: Thursday and Aug. 23 and 29. Shows start at 10:15 p.m.

As if the booms aren't blast enough, the Aug. 23 show, sponsored by Target, will include 3-D glasses and a musical simulcast by Q99.7 Valley Radio throughout the grounds. Oooh, pretty!

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Palmer, Wasilla spots beckon fairgoers not ready for bed yet

It's that time of year again. The fireweed is blooming, the sunlight is waning and "back to school" sales are present in annoying abundance — all depressing reminders that summer is on its way out.

The biggest reminder for Alaskans is the impending Alaska State Fair. It's mission? To provide enough entertainment, food and fun to distract us from the chilly breath of September on our necks.

For a nightlife-oriented person, however, the fair can be too much face paint and too little fermentation, if you catch my drift. So to assist those of us who are planning a Valley trip in the next two weeks, I've compiled some party-oriented suggestions.

First, we all know where the Sluicebox is, and we all know what it entails: live entertainment every night, for one. Cold beer and a dark, cool respite from the throngs outside, for another.

But sometimes the Sluicebox just isn't enough of a break, and when you're stuck in a crowded, sticky place, things can get frightening.

Luckily there's a light at the end of the Gravitron — a quick



Last Call

[With Jessica Bowman]

hop to Palmer or Wasilla.

First, either find a designated driver or make sure you have enough cash for a cab ride — some can take up to a half hour, depending on traffic and whether you know where the bar is.

A ride will cost you at least \$10 to Palmer and about \$15 to Wasilla — and that's if you're lucky, there's no traffic and you stop exactly on the city limits. Plan on at least twenty bucks, to be safe.

Second, decide which town you want. Pros for Palmer include the fact that it's much closer; pros for Wasilla are that it's bigger and has a wider array of nightlife venues. So

think carefully. Here are my suggestions:

Palmer

If you're in the mood for fine dining (finer than elephant ears) and wine, head to the new venue on the scene, **Turkey Red** (550 S. Alaska St., 1-907-746-5544). This place is open until 10 p.m. on weekends and features a menu with a Mediterranean/Northern Italian flair and lots of yummy baked goods courtesy of a stone-hearth oven.

If you're in the mood for live music and general rowdiness, head to **Klondike Mike's** (820 S. Colony Way, 1-907-745-2676). Highlight: the place has a Jagermeister machine (Jager bombs!) and karaoke — come on, you know after you see Kansas in concert, you'll be hankering to strut your Will Ferrell-esque rendition of "Dust in the Wind."

Wasilla

The best part about Valley bars is that they don't turn on blinding lights and kick you out at the ridiculously ear-

ly hour of 2 a.m. For example, **Tailgaters Sports Bar & Grill** (151 W. Parks Highway, 1-907-376-1314) stays open past 3 a.m., with food service until 10 p.m. on the weekends.

Or, head to the **Mugshot Saloon** (251 W. Parks Highway, 1-907-376-1617), which features darts, pool, live music, TVs and canned beer specials — plus, they're open until 5 a.m. every day of the week. (Every. Day.) Another option is the German-themed, bratwurst-heavy **Schwabenhof** (Mile 7.5 Palmer/Wasilla Highway, 1-907-357-2739).

But, if you're set on staying on the fairgrounds, there's always the concert lineup plus a few extra events that might

strike your fancy, including the annual rodeo dance after the Tracy Lawrence concert (Aug. 23), where Ken Pel-tier and his band continue the country crooning in front of the Borealis Theater for those wanting to boot, scoot and boogie. And there will be a fireworks show on Aug. 21.

Whatever your plans include — giant turkey legs, Hobo Jim or the petting zoo — stay safe, have fun and enjoy the last days of summer in local, kitschy, state fair style.

► Contact nightlife columnist Jessica Bowman at adn.com/contact/jbowman or visit Play's Lush Life blog at play.adn.com/lushlife.

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