

**Letter to the Editor
Herald Citizen
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I give a flip about the Putnam County Fair!

I know there are people in Putnam County who do not go to the fair; and who perhaps don't care about it. I was surprised to hear a county commissioner say "He didn't give a flip about the fair, and neither did anyone else he had talked to."

Perhaps he doesn't understand that the county fair offers a segment of our society an educational and entertainment venue unlike any other. Almost 7,000 people did enter items/animals in the fair last year and took home \$68,000 in cash premiums. That is up almost 3,000 people bringing entries over three years ago and cash premiums are up \$31,000 over three years ago.

The fair invested over \$200,000 in local businesses and services in this community – buying marketing, parking, cleaning, security, emergency, products and other services used to conduct the fair.

We hired 25 people, many for a month and all for at least ten days to two weeks. We provided over 800 volunteers with opportunity to contribute to their community and help others – among these volunteers there are almost 60 people now who work on the fair program during the year and show up and conduct the fair.

Over 60 businesses rented space to show their products and highlight services they offer to area residents. Fifty two thousand people came thru the gates to see and be a part of the award winning Putnam County Fair. That may not be 52,000 different people because some folks attended the fair more than once but overall that's a lot of people. We have grown from 33,000 just three years ago.

The fair provides a showcase for area agriculture. Putnam County may be more urban now than rural but we still have agriculture here and the fair gives voice to that segment of our society – youth and adults. Our young people gain valuable experiences as they exhibit and participate in all the different contests and events at the fair.

The fair appeals to families who cannot afford to go to Disneyworld, Six Flags or even Dollywood. They can bring their children to the Putnam County Fair and as long as there are struggling families there will be a need for a county fair.

In January of this year, we received the first runner-up award at the Tennessee Association of Fairs in Nashville. We beat the Wilson County Fair who was second runner-up. Let that sink in for a minute we offered a better fair program than Wilson County with its 160 acres and multi-million dollar budget as determined by the state association of fairs.

The Putnam County Fair is the largest single event held annually in Putnam County. The largest. The people who come to the fair from all over Tennessee and adjoining states buy gas, eat in our restaurants, buy groceries, rent motel rooms, pay for goods and services in addition to the money they spend at the fair. We did an economic impact study of the fair last year which estimated the economic value of the Putnam County Fair to the county to be at least 1.2 million dollars annually.

We welcome anyone and everyone to come see the fair and talk to the people who attend. Find out what an incredible community event it really is.

Presently County Executive Randy Porter is looking at other options for locating the fairgrounds but what he is actually doing is looking for another location for a venture much larger than the fair. We are talking about a complex that the county can rent twelve months out of the year. Buildings that have heating and air conditioning that will attract businesses, and civic organizations, shows, horse events and events of every kind that are now going to Harriman, Lebanon, Franklin, Nashville and Murfreesboro. And, ten days out of the year be the home of the Putnam County Fair.

With the growth that is occurring in Putnam County it would be a shame if the county did not plan for the expansion of its facilities to attract more businesses and industry to showcase their products and services here. Just like the new hotel and conference center being built downtown the county needs a facility that can handle seven to ten thousand people for business, industry and agriculture events and activities.

Let's keep focused on the larger vision here and remember we are planning for twenty years from now, or thirty years from now and it's so much more than moving the fairgrounds. It's building our economy, adding jobs and opportunities that will attract more and more business to Putnam County and at the same time continue to highlight our agriculture, industry and what a wonderful place it is to live and work in Putnam County.

As President of the Putnam County Fair Board I am passionate about the fair – I have to be, to devote the time to it that I do. I grew up here and the fair was important to me and my family. I want to see it continue to grow and improve and remain relevant and most of all I want others to understand it's so much more than just a 'fair' – it is a piece of our heritage that has adapted and changed to meet the needs of today's families. It brings people together once a year to celebrate community.

John Allen, President, 91st Putnam County Agricultural & Industrial Fair.

