

CANADIAN



WINTER 2026
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FAIR NEWS

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**Diversifying to
Expand Your
Audience**

.....

**Meet Our New
Board Members**

.....

**The Role of
Local Fairs**

.....

**Service Member
Spotlight: Kidomo**

.....

And Much More!



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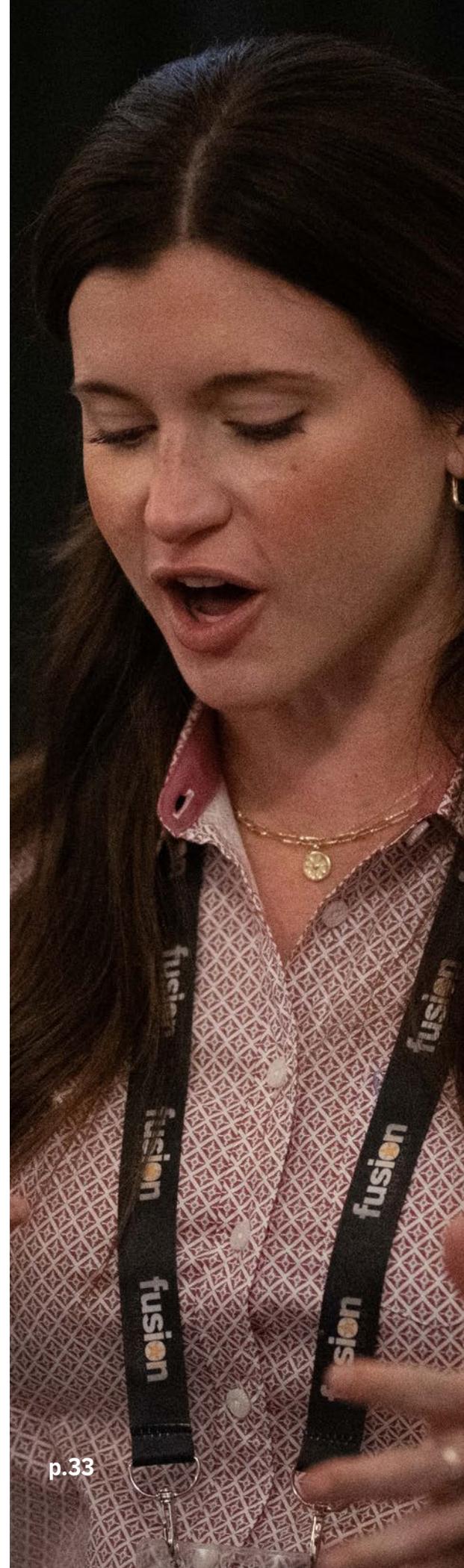
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President's Message

Allison Wright, President
Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions

As the calendar changes, it signifies a new start - a blank page that we can now fill with our dreams and hopes as we consider the fair season ahead. It is an exciting time full of possibilities and opportunities.

This turning of the page is especially exciting for the Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions. In 2026, CAFE will embark upon our next phase of service to the Canadian Fair industry through an updated strategic plan.

This roadmap for the organization will fill the first pages of our 2026 story and will reinforce the clear vision and ambition to guide our future efforts. Speaking on behalf of the industry, learning from each other in the spirit of broad collaboration and being a central resource for all of our members will be familiar foundational elements of the plan and will build on both the success of our previous plan and recent association activities. This combination of recent experience with a targeted point on the horizon will allow us to optimize our resources to be of the highest service to the industry by managing risks and providing a framework to identify and measure new opportunities. We will also pinpoint key actions to convert the high-level objectives into measurable results that will support the fairs, the members and the millions of participants across the country.

With so many talented members in our leadership, our Board and throughout our membership, it won't take long to fill our pages with creative and innovative ideas. I am grateful for all the efforts to date and even more excited to solidify and implement this blueprint in the days and months to come.

It is an exciting time – a time to turn the page, to put pen to paper and to chart the course towards a bright, engaging and rewarding season of advancement.....and smiles..... ahead.

**Until next time,
Allison Wright**

**“If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else.”
– Yogi Berra**

Message de la présidente

Allison Wright, présidente
Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions



Alors que le calendrier change, cela signifie un nouveau départ- une page blanche que nous pouvons désormais remplir de rêves et d'espoir envisageant la saison des foires, à venir. C'est un moment excitant, rempli de possibilités et d'opportunités.

Ce tournant de page est particulièrement excitant pour l'association canadienne des foires et des expositions. En 2026, l'ACFE entreprendra la prochaine phase de son service à l'industrie canadienne des foires, grâce à un plan stratégique actualisé.

La feuille de route de l'organisation remplira les premières pages de notre histoire de 2026 et renforcera la vision claire et l'ambition qui guideront nos futurs efforts. Parler au nom de l'industrie, apprendre les uns des autres dans un esprit de collaboration et agir comme ressource centrale pour tous nos membres, constitueront des éléments fondamentaux et familiers du plan. Ceux-ci s'appuieront à la fois sur le succès de notre plan précédent ainsi que sur les activités récentes de l'association. Cette combinaison d'expérience récente avec un objectif précis en vue, nous permettra d'optimiser nos ressources afin de rendre le meilleur service possible à l'industrie tout en gérant les risques et en fournissant un cadre pour identifier et mesurer de nouvelles opportunités. Nous identifierons également les actions clés afin de transformer les objectifs globaux en résultats mesurables qui soutiendront les foires, les membres, ainsi que les millions de participants à travers le pays.

Avec autant de talent à la direction, sur notre conseil administratif et parmi nos propres membres, il ne faudra pas longtemps pour remplir nos pages d'idées créatives et innovantes. Je suis reconnaissante de tous vos efforts accomplis à ce jour et encore plus enthousiaste à l'idée de concrétiser et de mettre en œuvre ce plan, dans les jours et les mois à venir.

C'est un moment excitant pour tourner la page, prendre la plume et tracer la voie vers une saison brillante, engageante et enrichissante, pleine de progrès à venir...et de sourires!

A la prochaine,

Allison Wright

« Si vous ne savez pas où vous allez, vous finirez ailleurs »

– Yogi Berra



Executive Director's Message

Linda Sicoli, Executive Director
Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions

As we begin a new year, I find myself reflecting on the incredible energy that carried us through Convention season and into the next chapter of CAFE's work. Calgary set a high bar, strong attendance, meaningful conversations, and a renewed sense of connection across provinces and communities. It was a reminder that our sector is at its best when we gather, learn from one another, and challenge ourselves to grow.

I want to extend a warm welcome to our newest Board members, Elizabeth Mackinnon, Kalyn Van Horne and Bennett Kavals. Their experience, regional insight, and commitment to the sector will be invaluable as we continue strengthening our national voice and supporting the work happening on the ground across the country. We also have two Provincial Association representatives sharing their seat on the CAFE Board so welcome to Bianca Harden from the Saskatchewan Association of Agricultural Societies and Dale Buhler from the Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies.

Over the past year, the Board has invested significant time in shaping a Strategic Plan that reflects the realities, pressures, and opportunities facing fairs and exhibitions. Through facilitated sessions in May and October, we identified what truly matters: building organizational capacity, elevating member value, strengthening national visibility and advocacy, and pacing our ambitions realistically based on staff and funding levels. That clarity is now guiding everything we do.

In practical terms, 2026 will be about beginning the 5 year implementation, translating the plan into tangible actions and supports that members will feel. This includes advancing national initiatives such as the new economic impact study, refreshing and delivering CAFE programs like the Designation program, the Youth Exchange and Levy program, and preparing for our 2026 Convention in Halifax. As always, this work is grounded in partnership: with fairs, provincial associations, funders, and the many volunteers who keep this sector moving.

We also recognize that the landscape continues to evolve. Labour shortages, increasing regulatory responsibilities, shifting audience expectations, and the need for sustained advocacy all require us to be more coordinated and more data-driven than ever before. Our goal this year is to meet that challenge with steadiness and transparency - supporting you with the tools, resources, and national representation you need, while ensuring CAFE remains strong, accountable, and future-ready.

Thank you for the work you do in your communities and for your continued trust in CAFE. I look forward to the year ahead and to everything we will build together.

Warm regards,

Linda Sicoli

Message de la Directrice Exécutive

Linda Sicoli, Directrice Exécutive
Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions



Alors que nous entamons une nouvelle année, je suis portée à réfléchir à l'énergie remarquable qui nous a menés tout au long de la saison du congrès et vers le prochain chapitre de notre travail à l'ACFE. Calgary a placé la barre très haute, avec une forte participation, de riches échanges ainsi qu'un sentiment renouvelé de connexion entre les provinces et les communautés. Ce fut un rappel que notre secteur est à son meilleur lorsque nous nous réunissons, apprenons les uns des autres et nous nous mettons au défi de croître et grandir.

Je tiens à souhaiter une chaleureuse bienvenue à nos nouveaux membres du conseil d'administration, Elizabeth Mackinnon, Kalyn Van Horne et Bennett Kavals. Leur expérience, leur connaissance de la région et leur engagement envers le secteur, seront inestimables alors que nous continuons à renforcer notre voix nationale et à soutenir le travail réalisé localement, à travers le pays. Nous avons également deux représentants d'associations provinciales partageant leur siège au conseil de l'ACFE; Bienvenue à Bianca Harden de l'Association des sociétés agricoles de la Saskatchewan ainsi que Dale Buhler de l'Association des sociétés agricoles du Manitoba.

Au cours de la dernière année, le conseil a consacré beaucoup de temps à l'élaboration d'un plan stratégique qui reflète les réalités, les pressions et les opportunités auxquelles sont confrontées les foires et expositions. Lors de séances animées en mai et en octobre, nous avons identifié ce qui compte vraiment: Renforcer notre capacité organisationnelle, accroître la valeur pour les membres, renforcer la visibilité nationale et le plaidoyer et adapter nos ambitions de façon réaliste en fonction des effectifs et des niveaux de financement disponibles. Cette clarté guide désormais tout ce que nous entreprenons.

En termes pratiques, l'année 2026 sera consacrée au lancement de la mise en œuvre sur une période de cinq ans en traduisant le plan en actions concrètes et en soutiens perceptibles par les membres. Cela inclut la promotion d'initiatives nationales telles que la nouvelle étude sur l'impact économique, la mise en jour et la réalisation des programmes d'ACFE comme le programme de désignation, l'échange jeunesse et contribution ainsi que la préparation de notre congrès 2026 qui aura lieu à Halifax. Comme toujours, ce travail ancré dans le partenariat avec les foires, les associations provinciales, les bailleurs de fonds et les nombreux bénévoles qui font avancer ce secteur.

Nous reconnaissons également que le paysage continue d'évoluer. Les pénuries de main d'œuvre, l'augmentation des responsabilités réglementaires, l'évolution des attentes du public et le besoin d'un plaidoyer soutenu, exigent tous que nous soyons plus coordonnées et davantage guidés par les données plus que jamais.

Notre objectif cet année est de relever ce défi avec constance et transparence en vous soutenant avec les outils, les ressources et la représentation nationale dont vous avez besoin, tout en veillant à ce que l'ACFE demeure forte, responsable et prête pour l'avenir.

Merci pour le travail que vous accomplissez dans vos communautés et pour la confiance que vous continuez d'accorder à l'ACFE. J'ai hâte de vivre l'année à venir et de tout ce que nous construirons ensemble.

Chaleureusement,

Linda Sicoli



Meet Our **New Board Members**

CAFE is pleased to announce our new Board Members for 2026. We are looking forward to working together closely, to ensure we continue to provide a well-rounded voice for all of our members across the country, regardless of size or region. Take some time to get to know our new Board Members over the next few pages.



Introducing: Dale Buhler

Executive Director, Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies (MAAS)

Dale Buhler brings extensive experience in agricultural society leadership, governance, and community engagement to CAFE's Board of Directors, where she serves as Co-Director for the Provincial Associations.

This position is key because these entities are the closest connection to agricultural societies and fairs on the ground. They understand regional realities, funding structures, regulations, and community needs, ensuring CAFE remains informed, relevant, and responsive across Canada.

Currently, Dale is the Executive Director of the Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies (MAAS), Dale has been in this role since February 2025 and represents both Manitoba's agricultural societies and provincial perspectives at the national level.

Dale's involvement with MAAS began in 2020 when she joined as District Director, later serving on the Executive as Secretary. In these roles, she worked closely with agricultural societies within District 1, supporting communication, advocacy, and education around governance responsibilities and funding opportunities. Her work focused on strengthening relationships between MAAS, its member societies, and provincial stakeholders.

Prior to her provincial leadership roles, Dale volunteered for over a decade with the Valley Agricultural Society, serving as Committee Chair for Fair Events from 2010 to 2020. During this time, she supported efforts to re-energize fair programming, including introducing Indigenous diversification initiatives as part of the Manitoba Stampede Exhibition. One of the most rewarding aspects of this work, she notes, was witnessing the enthusiasm and engagement of fair visitors as events continued to grow and evolve.

Originally from a small community in Quebec near Montreal, Dale grew up attending small-town fairs, experiences that left a lasting impression. Later, while living in Alberta, her family's love of horses further deepened her connection to agriculture and horsemanship. These early and ongoing experiences continue to shape her passion for agricultural societies and fairs today.

Dale attended the most recent CAFE Conference and looks forward to contributing as a member of the Board of Directors. Through her shared role as Provincial Associations Director, she is committed to strengthening communication, advocacy, and collaboration between provincial organizations and CAFE, ensuring agricultural societies across Canada are well represented and supported.



Introducing: Rachel Farr

Office Manager, Vegreville Agricultural Society

Rachel Farr was born in Edmonton and raised on a farm just outside Vegreville, Alberta, Rachel remains closely connected to the land and the community that shaped her values.

Today, she lives only a few miles from her family farm with her husband and son, continuing a life firmly grounded in agriculture. She brings deep agricultural roots, long-standing leadership experience, and a passionate commitment to agricultural societies and fairs to CAFE's Board of Directors.

A lifelong advocate for Agricultural Societies and Fairs, Rachel believes these events play a vital role in bringing families, friends, and communities together while strengthening Canada's rural heritage. Her connection to fairs began at a young age, inspired by her father's extensive service to their local Agricultural Society. As President, Vice President, and later an Honorary Life Director, his leadership left a lasting impression and sparked Rachel's own desire to serve.

Rachel joined her local Ag Society board more than 20 years ago and later served as President and Past President, gaining deep experience in governance, community engagement, and fair operations. Following the retirement of the organization's long-standing Office Manager, the Society faced challenges finding the right replacement. Recognizing the need for

continuity and strong leadership, Rachel stepped forward and applied for the role herself.

For the past five years, Rachel has served as Office Manager, a time period that was one of the most challenging in the history of fairs and exhibitions. Navigating the impacts of COVID required resilience, adaptability, and innovation, and these experiences further strengthened her leadership skills and reinforced her commitment to the future sustainability of fairs.

Rachel's interest in joining the CAFE Board of Directors was sparked after attending the Toronto Convention, where she was inspired by the passion, expertise, and collaborative spirit demonstrated by board members. Motivated to expand her knowledge and contribute at a national level, she knew she wanted to be part of that leadership table.

Although Rachel has served on the CAFE Board for just under a year, she has already gained valuable insights and looks forward to continued learning, collaboration, and growth. She is eager to contribute her experience and perspective in support of fairs and exhibitions across Canada and to help ensure these important community institutions continue to thrive for generations to come.



Introducing: Bianca Harden

Executive Director, Saskatchewan Association of Agricultural Societies and Exhibitions (SAASE)

Bianca Harden brings a strong background in agriculture, livestock exhibitions, and sponsorship development to CAFE’s Board of Directors, where she serves as Co-Director for the Provincial Associations.

She is the newly appointed Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Association of Agricultural Societies and Exhibitions (SAASE) and currently lives just outside Regina in Edenwold, Saskatchewan, with her husband Trevor and their two young sons, Anthony and Theo.

Born and raised in Switzerland, Bianca moved to British Columbia at the age of ten when her family purchased a 160-acre farm. It was there that she became actively involved in 4-H and began showing cattle—experiences that allowed her to travel extensively across Western Canada. She became a regular participant at major agricultural events such as the International Plowing Match & Rural Expo (IPE), Farmfair International, and Canadian Western Agribition.

Bianca pursued post-secondary education at Olds College, earning a diploma in Agriculture Production and Livestock Management. Following graduation, she worked with several purebred livestock operations across Western Canada and the United States, as well as with small agricultural retailers. She later joined Canadian Western Agribition, spending five years in

the sponsorship department and contributing to one of Canada’s premier livestock exhibitions—an experience that combined her professional skills with her love of livestock shows.

In her current role with SAASE, Bianca works closely with agricultural societies across Saskatchewan, supporting their operations and helping share the important story of agriculture throughout the province. She is passionate about ensuring societies of all sizes have the tools, resources, and voice they need to succeed.

The Provincial Association representative serves as the essential link between CAFE and the fairs in their region. They provide the Board with provincial-level insights, ensuring national strategies align with realities and that provincial voices are reflected in CAFE’s governance and decision-making.

Bianca is excited to join the CAFE Board to serve in a shared Director’s role as Provincial Associations Director alongside Dale Buhler. She sees this role as both a valuable learning opportunity and a platform to represent the needs, perspectives, and challenges of agricultural societies nationwide. Through collaboration and advocacy, she hopes to help advance practical, national solutions that support the long-term sustainability of fairs and exhibitions across Canada.



Introducing: Bennett Kavals

Director of Operations, North American Midway Entertainment's (N.A.M.E.) International Unit

Bennett Kavals is driven by a strong passion for live entertainment, operational excellence, and, above all, safety within the fair and amusement industry.

With a career dedicated to creating memorable guest experiences while upholding the highest safety standards, Bennett has built a reputation as a knowledgeable and committed leader in outdoor amusements.

With more than 13 years of experience in the outdoor amusement business, Bennett has developed a deep interest in the systems, standards, and teamwork that allow fairs and exhibitions to operate safely and successfully. He is particularly focused on ride safety, regulatory compliance, and continuous improvement—areas that are critical to building trust with both partners and the millions of guests who attend fairs each year.

Bennett currently serves as Director of Operations for North American Midway Entertainment's (N.A.M.E.) International Unit. N.A.M.E. is the largest travelling outdoor amusement park in North America, providing professional carnival midway rides and attractions at 12 of the top 50 fairs across the continent. Operating more than 120 events annually and entertaining approximately 17 million guests in the United States and Canada, the organization plays a key role in the fair experience. In his role, Bennett oversees staffing, logistics, and essential operational functions, including ride safety and maintenance documentation, ensuring compliance across multiple jurisdictions.

His commitment to safety is reinforced through certifications and accreditations from the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO) and AIMS International, the two leading organizations dedicated to amusement ride safety. Bennett is also an active member of ASTM International and closely follows the evolving standards and regulations that guide the industry today.

Bennett's decision to join CAFE's Board of Directors stems from the relationships and respect he has developed within the fair and exhibition community. A long-time attendee of the CAFE Annual Convention, he has had the privilege of working alongside dedicated volunteers, fair and exhibition professionals, and service partners across North America. He credits the resilience, collaboration, and passion of these individuals as the foundation of the industry's strength.

By serving on the CAFE Board, Bennett is eager to give back to the fair community and share the knowledge and experience he has gained throughout his career, learning from the pioneers who continue to shape and grow the industry.

Looking ahead, Bennett sees a strong and promising future for CAFE. Building on more than a century of history, he believes the organization must continue to honour its traditions while fostering innovation and community—ensuring fairs and exhibitions remain a vital part of Canadian society for generations to come.



Introducing: Elizabeth Mackinnon

Dairy Farmer, Stanstead County Agricultural Society

As the successor to an eighth-generation dairy farm and originally from the rural community of Ayer's Cliff, Quebec, Elizabeth Mackinnon grew up immersed in a culture where hard work, responsibility, and community involvement are not just ideals, but a way of life.

She has a deep connection to agriculture, 4-H, and community fairs for as long as she can remember. Her local fair, the Ayer's Cliff Fair, operated by the Stanstead County Agricultural Society and one of Quebec's oldest fairs, is a defining institution in her community. Celebrating more than 175 years of history and welcoming approximately 30,000 visitors annually, the fair stands as both a cultural and economic cornerstone of the region. Through this involvement, Elizabeth has developed a strong understanding of governance, operational leadership, and the responsibility required to sustain community-focused organizations.

Elizabeth's academic background reflects both creativity and practicality. She holds an undergraduate degree in English Literature with a minor in Business, completed in 2020, and later earned a Diplôme d'études professionnelles (DEP) in Agriculture from the Centre de formation professionnelle de Coaticook (CRIFA) in 2022. This combination of formal education and hands-on training has shaped her well-rounded perspective on leadership in agriculture and community organizations.

Currently, Elizabeth works on her family's dairy farm, where she is actively involved in the management and daily milking of 170 cows

across two tie-stall facilities. Following a significant fire, the farm is now rebuilding a modern free-stall barn—an important step toward consolidating operations and preparing for the future. As part of the next generation, Elizabeth is closely involved in planning the transition of the farm's operations from her uncle and father.

Elizabeth was motivated to join CAFE's Board of Directors, representing Fair Volunteers, by her passion for agricultural fairs and her desire to support their long-term success nationwide. She is especially committed to preserving long-standing traditions while helping small and rural fairs adapt to evolving challenges. Attending the most recent CAFE convention further reinforced her decision, as she was inspired by the passion, collaboration, and shared purpose within the fair community.

Looking ahead, Elizabeth sees CAFE playing a critical role as a national resource for fairs and expositions, helping them enhance visitor experiences, grow attendance, and strengthen operational capacity. Drawing from her experience on a local fair board, she recognizes the opportunity to bridge the generational gap between preserving tradition and embracing innovation. She believes CAFE is uniquely positioned to support thoughtful adaptation that honors heritage while fostering sustainable progress.

Elizabeth is eager to contribute her experience, perspective, and enthusiasm to CAFE and its members. She values collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and community-building as essential to the future of fairs and expositions across Canada, and looks forward to supporting initiatives that ensure these cherished institutions continue to thrive for generations to come.



Introducing: Jane Matthews

Chief Marketing Officer, Canadian National Exhibition (CNE)

Jane Matthews brings a strong background in marketing, communications, and audience insight to her role on CAFE's Board of Directors.

Driven by a close personal connection to fairs and exhibitions, Jane has built a career founded on understanding people, communities, and shared experiences. Her current role sees her in a leadership position at one of Canada's most iconic events: the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE).

Jane's professional career at the CNE began in 2017, but prior to that she worked with the organization for several years as a visitor experience and research supplier. However, fairs and exhibitions were always a big part of Jane's life, with the CNE serving as a staple of her childhood. Having attended nearly every CNE with her family while growing up (missing only one in her lifetime), Jane has fond memories of enjoying the weather, visiting the farm, shopping for unique treasures, riding the Zipper far too many times, and happily breaking her mother's nutrition rules with an ice-cream waffle for breakfast. You could say it was more than fate that led Jane to this point in her career. "I feel incredibly fortunate to now be on the other side of the experience, playing a small role in helping to create the joyous fair ecosystem that defined tradition for me," Jane explains.

As Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of the CNE, Jane leads the organization's brand positioning, messaging, and creative direction. She focuses on driving audience growth and oversees digital marketing, owned channels, promotions, media relations,

as well as audience insights and research. Beyond marketing, she works closely with the executive leadership team to manage government relations, strategic planning, and stakeholder relationships, ensuring the CNE remains connected to its audiences, partners, and community.

Jane's story with CAFE began at the 2017 Montreal conference, where a breakout session for professionals under 40 sparked her interest. Energized by the room and inspired by the group's passion for their communities and events, she decided to take on a more active role. She later facilitated the Youth Inspired Program at the 2019 Halifax convention. For Jane, serving on a board dedicated to strengthening fairs and exhibitions across Canada is both a privilege and a responsibility she values deeply.

Looking to the future, Jane believes that CAFE will continue to grow as the national voice for fairs and exhibitions across Canada. Through advocacy, strong member connections, meaningful engagement opportunities, leadership development, and a focus on industry priorities, she knows CAFE can reinforce the sector and inspire new generations.

Jane is excited to collaborate with her fellow board members on the vast opportunities ahead for CAFE—championing advocacy for funding, growing revenue opportunities, and strengthening insights management so the organization can remain ahead of trends and member needs. "I look forward to investing my skills and background to support these initiatives," she concludes.



Introducing: Kalyn Van Horne

Manager, Entertainment & Attractions KDays, Explore Edmonton

Lights on and let the music play.

That's how Kalyn Van Horne likes to pass her days, between lights, music, the scrape of skates on ice and crowds enjoying the cultural and culinary diversity that Canadian fairs and exhibitions have to offer. She's based in Sherwood Park, Alberta, with her husband and her five-year-old son, and remains deeply connected to the fair and exhibition community both professionally and personally. Currently, she's the Manager of Entertainment & Attractions for KDays at Explore Edmonton.

In this role, she oversees two concert stages and works with local and international artists to deliver a diverse entertainment lineup. Her responsibilities also include producing signature activations such as fireworks and drone shows, SuperDogs, Craft Beer Fest, Park After Dark DJ afterparties, and the Artist in Residence program. Kalyn is passionate about blending innovation with tradition, finding creative ways to honour the legacy of KDays while reimagining the event to ensure it remains a vibrant part of the community for years to come. She also supports the Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair International through production and stage management.

Kalyn's career began at the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she joined the organization in the summer of 2010 supporting agricultural programming. What started as a summer role quickly turned into a long-term career. After several seasons in the Agriculture department, Kalyn transitioned into year-round event operations, where she discovered a lasting passion for concerts and live entertainment. During her time at the PNE, she worked on a wide range of

events, including concerts, trade shows, hockey games, film shoots, and community events, gaining invaluable experience through the diversity and scale of programming.

In 2019, Kalyn relocated to Edmonton to join Oilers Entertainment Group as Manager of Live Entertainment at Rogers Place. In this role, she worked on some of the largest concert productions to come through the city while experiencing firsthand Edmonton's strong connection to its hockey team and live events. In the summer of 2022, Kalyn joined Explore Edmonton, marking a meaningful homecoming as she returned to working closely with fairs and agricultural events.

Kalyn was motivated to join CAFE's Board of Directors to ensure Edmonton and events such as KDays, the Canadian Finals Rodeo, and Farmfair International are represented at the national level. She is proud to continue the legacy of her colleague Amanda Frigon, who dedicated ten years of service to the Board and whose commitment to CAFE inspired Kalyn to step into the role.

Looking ahead, Kalyn believes that while fairs and exhibitions are deeply woven into the fabric of Canadian communities, many face increasing challenges in maintaining long-term sustainability. She sees CAFE's most important role as championing the value of fairs and exhibitions across the country and equipping members with the tools and resources they need to build success in their own communities. Kalyn is excited to collaborate with her fellow Board members and looks forward to building new connections with CAFE members nationwide. She is eager to learn, contribute, and support the continued strength and relevance of fairs and exhibitions across Canada.



Diversifying Your Offering to Expand Your Audience

Arlindo Gomes
Explore Edmonton

As communities across Canada continue to evolve, fairs and events are being challenged—and inspired—to evolve with them.



Audience diversification is no longer a “nice to have”; it is a strategic necessity for relevance, growth, and long-term sustainability.

Fairs that reflect the diversity of their communities are better positioned to deepen their impact, build loyalty, and welcome new generations of attendees.

At its core, audience diversification is about inclusion. Communities are changing demographically, culturally, and socially, and fairs must mirror those shifts to remain meaningful. Welcoming new audiences through inclusive programming not only strengthens community connections but also drives attendance, economic impact, and resilience. When people see themselves represented in an event, they are more likely to participate, return, and advocate for it.

One of the most effective ways fairs can expand their audience base is through diversified programming. At KDays in Edmonton, this has meant intentionally adding culturally relevant content, improving accessibility, and building programming that resonates with a broad range of communities. Over the years, KDays has developed partnerships that celebrate Pride Night, engage library members, highlight Francophone and Punjabi performances, welcome military families, and create space for newcomers. These initiatives are not standalone gestures—they are integrated into the fabric of the event, signaling that everyone belongs.

Importantly, diversifying programming does not mean abandoning core audiences. The key is addition, not replacement. At KDays, classic fair staples like mini donuts, corn dogs, rides, concerts, and shopping remain central to the experience. What has changed is what’s been added alongside them. Innovation zones, robotics competitions, cultural celebrations, and community showcases enhance the experience rather than compete with tradition. This balanced approach ensures long-time attendees still feel at home, while new audiences find reasons to attend and engage.

Partnerships play a critical role in this process. No fair can—or should—do everything on its own. Strategic collaborators bring expertise, credibility, networks, and access to new communities. At KDays, partnerships have been instrumental in shaping programming that is authentic and meaningful. These relationships help fairs move beyond transactional entertainment bookings and toward deeper community connection, allowing partners to tell their stories while enriching the overall event experience.

Data and audience insights are another powerful tool in diversification efforts. Understanding who is attending—and who is not—provides clarity and direction. Data helps fairs analyze behaviour, measure satisfaction, identify gaps, and refine

decisions related to programming, marketing, and pricing. At KDays, audience insights have guided diversification strategies and supported continued success, ensuring changes are informed rather than assumed.

That said, diversification is not without its challenges. It requires time, resources, and patience. New programming often demands new infrastructure, different staffing skills, and a willingness to manage change. There can also be pushback from legacy audiences who are wary of unfamiliar elements. Additionally, staff may need to shift from contracting traditional entertainment to convening, facilitating, and sustaining partnerships—an entirely different skill set. Acknowledging and planning for these challenges is essential.

A strong example of successful audience expansion at KDays is the Innovation Zone. What began in 2018 as a partnership-driven Maker Faire has steadily grown year by year. By 2022, the zone expanded to include robotics, gaming, and innovation showcases featuring local tech entrepreneurs. Today, it includes dozens of innovation and technology companies, universities and post-secondary institutions showcasing student work, and even military technology demonstrations. The gaming component alone has featured approximately 100 local gaming companies, offering unreleased games that guests can play and provide feedback on. This focus on innovation has also led to hosting a large international robotics tournament, attracting teams from around the world and drawing entirely new audiences to the fair.

Diversification also strengthens a fair’s role in destination marketing. Events like KDays are not just for locals—they attract visitors who support hotels, restaurants, and local businesses across Edmonton and the region. By programming with community in mind, fairs offer visitors an authentic taste of the city, positioning the event as both a celebration and a showcase of place, while acting as a significant economic driver.

For fairs looking to reach new audiences, the advice is simple but powerful: start by identifying the audience you want to reach. Ask communities what matters to them, listen carefully, and collaborate to turn ideas into action. Consistency is key—trust is built over time, not through one-off initiatives.

Ultimately, diversifying offerings and audiences is a cornerstone of success. When a fair reflects its community, it stays relevant. When it includes its community, it grows—not just in attendance, but in meaning, impact, and sustainability.

The Role of Local Fairs

in Driving Economic, Cultural, and Social Value in a Rural Community

For more than 160 years, Carp Fair has stood as a cornerstone of rural life in the village of Carp, Ontario.





Established in 1863, this long-running agricultural fair was created to celebrate farming, rural traditions, and community spirit and it continues to do exactly that today. Proudly volunteer-run and deeply rooted in its agricultural heritage, Carp Fair demonstrates how a local fair can deliver lasting economic, cultural, and social value to a rural community.

At its heart, Carp Fair is a gathering place. Each year, it brings together farmers, families, youth, artisans, volunteers, and visitors from across the region to celebrate agriculture and rural life. Through livestock competitions, agricultural exhibits, homecrafts, local entertainment, and family-friendly activities, the fair provides a platform for people to showcase their skills, share knowledge, and take pride in their community. These experiences help preserve rural identity while creating meaningful connections between generations.

The economic impact of Carp Fair is significant for a community of its size. The fair attracts more than 50,000 visitors annually, generating increased activity for local restaurants, shops, accommodations, and service providers. More than 150 local vendors, entertainers, suppliers, and contractors are supported through the event, keeping spending within the region and strengthening the local economy. For farmers, artisans, and small businesses, the fair offers valuable opportunities to sell products, promote services, and build long-term customer relationships. Sponsorships and partnerships with local businesses further reinforce these economic benefits, with proceeds reinvested back into the fairgrounds and community initiatives.

Beyond its economic contribution, Carp Fair plays a vital role in fostering social connection and community well-being. The fairgrounds serve as a year-round hub for activities that bring residents together, extending the fair's impact far beyond one weekend in September. Community events such as winter euchre nights, spring barn dances, outdoor bingo evenings in July, and even a community New Year's Eve celebration help maintain social ties throughout the year. These gatherings provide inclusive, affordable opportunities for people to connect, strengthening relationships and reinforcing a sense of belonging.

Preserving agricultural traditions remains central to Carp Fair's mission. Agriculture connects communities to their food sources, their history, and shared values such as hard work, stewardship, and cooperation. By showcasing farming practices, livestock, and agricultural education, the fair helps bridge the gap between farming and non-farming audiences. This is especially important for younger generations, who gain hands-on learning experiences that deepen their understanding of where food comes from and why agriculture matters to both the economy and the environment.

At the same time, Carp Fair recognizes the need to adapt to changing audience expectations. Balancing tradition and innovation is an ongoing challenge. While familiar experiences are essential to maintaining the fair's identity, introducing one or two new attractions each year helps keep the event fresh and engaging. The fair also embraces modern tools such as social media, digital promotion, and online ticketing to connect with contemporary audiences while remaining true to its roots.

Volunteers and community partners are the backbone of Carp Fair's success. With more than 400 volunteers and partners contributing time, expertise, and resources, the fair remains affordable, welcoming, and sustainable. Their dedication supports everything from planning and operations to exhibits and admissions, ensuring the fair continues to thrive year after year.

Looking ahead, Carp Fair's long-term vision is clear: to continue bringing people together, strengthening connections between agriculture and the broader community, and helping rural life flourish. By staying grounded in tradition while remaining open to change, Carp Fair exemplifies how local fairs can serve as powerful drivers of economic vitality, cultural preservation, and social connection - today and for generations to come.



**THE
EVOLUTION
OF THE
FAIR FOOD
EXPERIENCE**

Clayton Metcalf, President, Metcalf Food & Beverage Inc.

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njoying food at the fair is an important part of the experience. It always has been and always will be. It's the one time of year where people can come and get their favourite, freshly prepared fair food, done just right.

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A Lifetime in the Industry

As a second-generation operator, I have experienced the fair food industry evolve dramatically over the last several decades to what it is today.

Fair food has always been my life. I have childhood memories of my Dad, Arnold, packing up the trucks in the spring time and heading West to play the 'A' circuit or the Western Canadian roadshow, back in the Royal American days. I remember Mom standing on the porch waving goodbye and trying her best not to cry. We wouldn't see each other again until school was finished when we could all head West to join him on the road.

Today, I'm proud to operate at the same Western exhibitions that my father played all those many years ago. Along with the Western route, we have our dedicated Eastern route that I've established here in Ontario. We primarily operate our fleet of Chicken Tenders and The Colossal Onion trailers, but over the years we've done it all: Fresh Made Pizza, Philly Cheesesteak, Back Bacon On A Bun, Greek-style Pitas, Charburgers, Funnel Cakes, Lemonade, Soft Serve Ice Cream and more.

From Sit-Down Service to Grab Joints to Specialty Trailers

Back in the day, fair food was pretty simple. Hotdogs, hamburgers, sausages and fries were the standard. Most food was served from walk-up grab joints. At the major shows, some of the bigger operators like my father would operate cookhouses. This was a full-service sit-down deal, table and

chairs with waitresses where you would order a plate and enjoy your meal under the big top. These operations ruled in their day. They were it.

When setting out on my own, I framed up a small 20-by-20-foot grab joint to get started, decked out a truck and hit the road. Different iterations of concessions followed over the years including a full-service cafeteria, and many trailers, more recently.

As Canada's fair and food industry has evolved, it's not just the food items on the menu that are changing; it's an evolution of the food concessions and operators themselves. Operations have transitioned away from cookhouses, stick joints and cafeterias and toward custom-built trailers.

A major reason for this is space restrictions. Today, pressure gets put on every square foot of space for revenue consideration, making the days of the large footprint concessions a thing of the past. I have now packed up my cafeteria and parked it; it's like a time capsule.

The industry has shifted towards 'specialty trailer' concessions, where each trailer is designed to feature one item as the entire focus. If you can pick or create an offering that's a hit with the crowd and do it right, you could have success in sight.

The Food Truck Craze

We've also seen the advent of the food truck craze, giving newcomers their opportunity to try their hand in the food game. We've even seen some exhibitions create a designated area to act as an independent attraction. It was these food trucks that really began to turn up the dial on the wacky and unique offerings available at fairs and exhibitions. The fair food experience became an endless assortment of new choices and flavours.





Everyone's a Foodie

With the rise of social media, we have seen the rise of the foodie. People have become self-proclaimed food critics, posting their reviews of their fair food online and sharing photos. There's pros and cons to this and it's an important thing to keep in mind. It can be great publicity, but one bad post can also be damaging. It's also an opportunity for vendors to get online and join the conversation, connect with consumers, and promote to a wider audience.

It's All In the Presentation

It is now the norm for consumers to capture photos and videos of their fair food before they even take their first bite, and we know this content often ends up online. That means presentation is everything. Operators need to deliver an impressive, wow-worthy, professional presentation every time.

With some food items it can even be an advantage to bring customers in on the preparation and cooking action. We've strategically incorporated an open concept into the design and operation of The Colossal Onion because customers are curious about how our product is made. While they stand in line, they can follow along and be part of the flow. This is a style unique to our onion operation, and it works for us. We're confident that our operation can be observed by the public and we hold ourselves to incredibly high standards because of that.

We also incorporate a level of classic showmanship like you'd see back in the day. Calling or ballying from inside the booth, talking to the people, making them smile, inviting them in. It's now a dead art. With my upbringing, it became so ingrained in me that it's almost impossible to enter a concession without ballying it up. It's second nature! Folks love it and it all adds up to a memorable experience.

Balancing Traditional and Trendy Food Options

While traditional candy apples, corn dogs and funnel cakes will remain fair favourites, people are also excited to taste something new every year, like butter-flavoured ice cream or pickle pizza. It's a balance. The classics are classics for a reason and the new experimental food items are a big attraction.

Many fairs and exhibition boards are progressive in their efforts to generate buzz for new items each year, including awards, media days and social media. It's a great initiative to draw people to the grounds, and the momentum gives vendors incentive to innovate and get creative. If the media hypes it up, there will be people lining up for it!

We've successfully experimented with new, well-received food items over the years like the Frosted Flake Chicken on a Stick from our Chicken Tenders trailer, and our Poutine Colossal Onion and Bacon Wrapped Onion Rings from The Colossal Onion.

Testing new ideas, working at it through trial and error until you actually perfect it, and creating a hit can be truly rewarding. This is how the Colossal Onion was born.

Becoming a "Midway Staple" Is a Matter of Quality and Consistency

Over the past decade, The Colossal Onion has evolved into a midway staple at some of the biggest exhibitions in Canada. Every year, we have customers in our lineup telling us they've "waited all year for this" and they've come to the grounds just to get their Colossal Onion fix.

Satisfying the returning customer is more challenging than attracting a new, one-time purchase. When you've built a

reputation, or you're looking to build one long-term in this industry, you have to consistently meet your customers' expectations year over year. It's about quality over hype. We've set a standard for our product and we won't serve a Colossal Onion that doesn't meet our specs.

As a business we've intentionally focused our efforts on perfecting our core offerings from ingredients to production. This took years of trial and error, failures and different renditions. Determining the correct onion type and size, playing with batter recipes, perfecting the dipping sauce and trying

different preparation and cooking methods. We've built it from the ground up and it's been a dedicated process. Now, we have an award-winning, branded and trademarked product with a proprietary recipe, a finely tuned prep and cooking process, and one of the largest scale capacity operations in the business.

Evolving Together

Together, as vendors and fairs and exhibition boards, we are responsible for the success and future of this industry and it should be a collaborative effort.

5 Pieces of Advice for Fairs and Exhibitions when Working with Food Vendors

Listen to your vendors. We are professionals. We're the experts of our businesses and it's important that we can run them smoothly. We know what works best, we have experience operating in environments exactly like yours. A good concession manager has open conversations, listens and takes action when needs are flagged for a seamless operation.

Get to know our business. Your vendors are integral to the success of your fair and it's important you're invested in our success. Every operator is different. Take the time and effort to understand each unique operation so things can flow smoothly. Get your feet on the ground. Come around when we're busy. Come around when we're slower and able to talk and walk you through the operation.

Include us in the decision-making process. If a decision directly impacts our business or our ability to operate, include us as stakeholders. We can have a positive impact if we're consulted, especially as a group. We have years of experience to draw from and might have valuable input when given the opportunity. There's a wealth of knowledge available if you consult us. Don't be afraid to include your vendors in the process.

Be present and reachable. We're invested in your event and want to be a strong component of your success annually. When we are percentage-based we are actually in business together; it's a two-way street where we share a common goal. Be present and accessible before, during and after the event, especially when challenges arise. There needs to be a direct line of communication to voice concerns and have conversations so that it's a mutually beneficial relationship.

Ask for feedback. Ask questions. What's working? What's not? What's running smoothly? Where are there pain points or opportunities? Your vendors are your ears on the ground. We can offer valuable feedback and suggestions from our perspectives that could ultimately improve the experience for visitors. This is exactly what spaces like the CAFE Convention present. An arena to have these important industry-specific conversations and stay up-to-date on changes, challenges and key topics together. This is a perfect place for fairs and exhibitions to gather food vendors for a topic of discussion.



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Creating Meaningful Family Experiences Through **LICENSED CHARACTERS**



In today's competitive live-events landscape, fairs and exhibitions are under increasing pressure to deliver experiences that are memorable, safe, and meaningful for families. One of the most effective ways to do this is through the use of licensed characters and professionally produced children's programming.

Kidomo is a Canadian marketing and live entertainment company specializing in family-focused events and national touring productions. Working with leading global licensed brands, Kidomo delivers high-quality, engaging experiences for children and families across Canada—experiences that go beyond simple entertainment to create lasting memories.

Why characters resonate so strongly with children

Characters are powerful tools for engagement because they invite children into an interactive, imaginative world. Seeing a beloved character come to life creates a sense of wonder and emotional connection that children don't forget. These moments are not passive; they encourage participation, spark joy, and foster shared experiences between children, caregivers, and peers. For families, these interactions often become the highlight of their day—and the memories they take home.

What “licensed” really means

When a character or program is licensed, it means the intellectual property owner has granted legal permission for that character to be used by a producer or event partner. Licensing ensures the character is portrayed accurately, consistently, and professionally, while protecting the integrity of the brand. Importantly, licensing also means the performers are trained, insured, and authorized—critical elements for public events.

Why licensed programming matters for fairs

Licensed characters bring instant recognition, credibility, and excitement to an event. Well-known characters can significantly boost attendance and enhance the overall atmosphere of a fair or exhibition. They also attract media attention and encourage social sharing, as families capture photos and videos that organically extend the event's reach online. Each shared moment becomes a form of authentic promotion.

The value of professional programming

Professional children's programming elevates the entire family experience. Trained performers know how to interact safely with children of all ages, manage crowds, and adapt to live environments. Professionally designed programs are engaging, inclusive, and thoughtfully paced, ensuring that families feel welcomed rather than overwhelmed. The result is an experience that feels polished, intentional, and memorable.

The risks of untrained or unlicensed performers

Using unlicensed or untrained characters poses serious risks. These can include physical safety concerns, legal liability related to copyright infringement, and reputational damage to the event. Without proper training, performers may be unprepared

for the physical demands of costumed work or for interacting appropriately with children and the public. Licensed programming mitigates these risks by ensuring professional standards are met.

Choosing high-quality children's entertainment

Successful fairs understand their audience. Event organizers should consider the age range, interests, and expectations of their attendees and select programming that reflects those needs. Choosing relevant, current, and recognizable brands helps ensure strong engagement. Ultimately, attendees themselves determine what resonates—so knowing your demographic is key.

Supporting education and inclusion

Characters can also play a meaningful role in education and inclusion. As familiar and non-threatening figures, they help bridge social gaps, encourage participation, and model positive behaviors. Well-designed character experiences promote collaboration, creativity, and emotional development, transforming entertainment into an active, shared learning experience for families.

Emerging trends in family entertainment

Looking ahead to 2026, family entertainment is shifting toward immersive, interactive experiences that appeal to both children and adults. Key trends include “kidult” attractions, the blending of digital and physical play, themed environments, and a growing emphasis on sustainability and inclusivity. Families increasingly value experiences that feel intentional, responsible, and emotionally engaging.

Advice for fairs expanding kids' programming

The most successful programs keep things simple, focus on creating positive experiences for the entire family, and extend the magic beyond the event through take-home moments or co-branded giveaways. Research, thoughtful partnerships, and a commitment to supporting children's physical and emotional growth all contribute to programming that families return for year after year.

In an era where experiences matter more than ever, licensed characters and professional programming are not optional extras—they are essential tools for building trust, engagement, and lasting impact at fairs and exhibitions.

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**Advancing
Waste Diversion
and Greening
Practices at Fairs
and Exhibitions**



Fairs and exhibitions are vibrant, high-impact community events, but their large scale also brings environmental challenges. With thousands of attendees, hundreds of vendors, and intense activity compressed into short periods of time, these events generate significant volumes of waste, consume large amounts of energy, and rely heavily on logistics and disposable materials. Sustainability is increasingly viewed not as optional enhancement, but as fundamental operational responsibility.

According to Avash Raut, Sustainability Coordinator at Explore Edmonton, the visibility of fairs and exhibitions makes them uniquely influential. “These events bring together hundreds of thousands of people in a short period of time,” he explains. “That creates the potential for negative environmental impacts, but it also creates an opportunity to model best practices and inspire behaviour change that extends beyond the event itself.”

At Explore Edmonton, sustainability efforts span climate resiliency, responsible consumption and production, social procurement, and leadership and advocacy. Raut also supports the environmental program at K-Days, where the focus is on waste diversion, public education, and ensuring that event waste is redirected away from landfills and back into the circular economy.

One of the biggest challenges in event sustainability is human behaviour. “Attendees are there to enjoy the rides, food, and entertainment,” Raut notes. “Environmental considerations often become secondary.” Convenience plays a decisive role. If waste sorting stations are poorly placed, confusing, or inconsistent, even the most well-intentioned attendees may dispose of materials incorrectly. Therefore, clear signage, intuitive systems, and accessible infrastructure are essential.

From an operational standpoint, effective waste diversion begins with understanding what is actually being thrown away. Waste audits and assessments help organizers identify key materials and determine which diversion streams will have the greatest impact. At K-Days, this approach led to dramatic improvement: waste diversion increased from 19 percent in 2022 to 58 percent in 2025, diverting more than 87,000 kilograms of material through composting and recycling. These efforts earned Explore Edmonton the Recycling Council of Alberta’s 2025 “R’s of Excellence” Impact Award.

Vendors and partners play a critical role in greening efforts. Food and beverage packaging, in particular, represents a significant portion of event waste. Raut emphasizes the importance of vendor cooperation, from separating cardboard and food waste to choosing compostable or reusable packaging. Simplicity is key: operational requirements must be clear, realistic, and easy to follow, especially during busy event periods.

For Mark Holland, CEO of the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), sustainability is embedded directly into operations. “For us, sustainability is not a side program; it’s operational discipline,” he says. “It’s about standards, accountability, and measurement.”

At large-scale events like the CNE, contamination control is one of the biggest challenges. A single incorrect item can compromise an entire stream. To address this, the CNE combines clear packaging standards, establishes vendor requirements, and guest-facing tools, including AI-assisted

sorting units that help attendees make quick, correct decisions at disposal points.

The results are significant. In 2025, the CNE diverted more than 842 tonnes of material from landfill, captured nearly 94 tonnes of organics, and recycled over 23 tonnes of used cooking oil. Additionally, partnerships extend sustainability beyond waste management. In collaboration with Second Harvest, the CNE donated more than 25,000 pounds of surplus food to community organizations, highlighting the social aspect of sustainability.

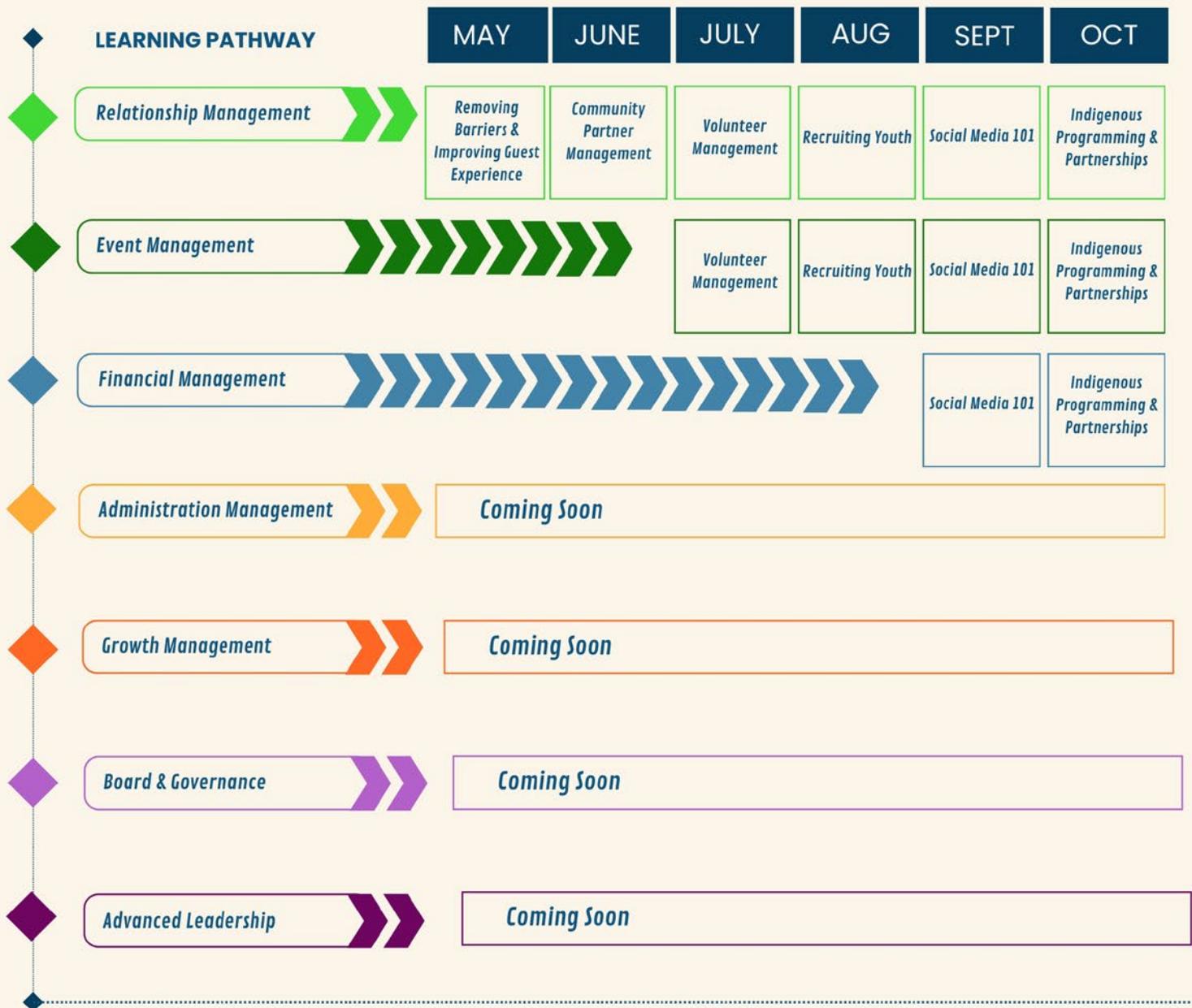
Both Raut and Holland emphasize that achieving success in sustainability requires viewing it as a long-term journey. By starting small, piloting initiatives, collecting data, and scaling successful efforts, fairs of all sizes can develop effective sustainability programs. Consistency across events and jurisdictions can further support vendors and improve compliance.

Ultimately, green fairs and exhibitions are about making sustainable choices. When systems are clear, engaging, and well-integrated into operations, sustainability enhances the guest experience, rather than detracting from it, while delivering measurable environmental and community benefits.



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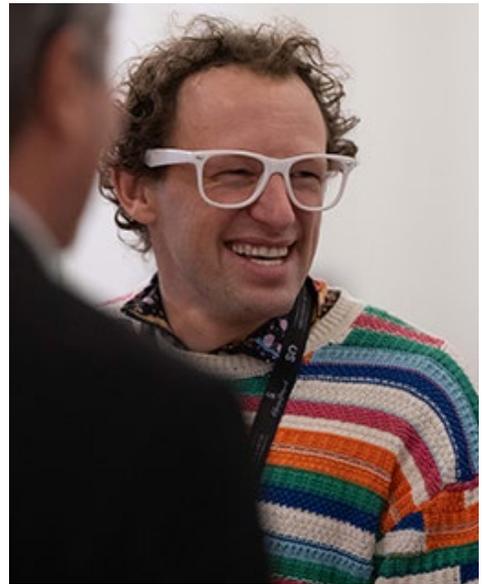
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Delegates

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Sessions

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16

Entertainers

Sponsors

20



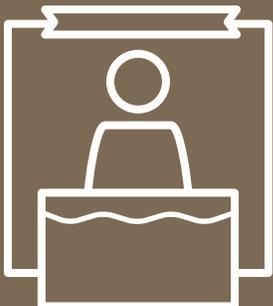
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From Dinner to Dance Floor, the Showcases that Brought the Convention to Life

Some of the most powerful moments of this year's convention unfolded not behind podiums or presentation screens, but under stage lights, between dinner courses, and to the sound of live music and applause. Throughout the week, Showcase performances were carefully woven into lunches, dinners, and the Awards Gala, creating shared experiences that energized attendees, sparked conversation, and reminded everyone of the essential role live entertainment plays in fairs and exhibitions.

The first Showcase evening took place during Wednesday's dinner, when anticipation quietly built across the room. As attendees settled in and conversations flowed, the lights dimmed and the first act took the stage. Three Hat Circus immediately captured attention with a visually striking performance that blended physical comedy, object manipulation, and skillful storytelling. What began as a relaxed dinner atmosphere quickly shifted into one of focused curiosity and delight, as guests paused conversations to take in the unexpected artistry unfolding before them.

The energy continued to build with music that filled the space and brought a sense of familiarity and fun. Ten02 Band delivered a polished, high-energy performance that showcased their versatility and ability to connect with diverse audiences. Their sound set a lively tone, seamlessly transitioning the evening from spectacle to celebration. Closing out the night, Travis Dolter brought charisma, strong vocals, and undeniable stage presence, leaving guests energized and setting a high bar for the days ahead.

Thursday offered a different pace, with lunchtime showcases in the Crystal Ballroom providing a bright and engaging midday break. The afternoon began with Rupert from Fizzlewit's Fairy Finding Tours, who invited attendees into a whimsical, interactive world built on storytelling, imagination, and participation. The performance highlighted the power of immersive entertainment, especially for family-focused

events, and demonstrated how engagement can be just as impactful as spectacle.

Following this imaginative experience, JoJo's Magic Circus brought vibrant energy and playful chaos to the room. With music, movement, and audience interaction, the performance transformed the lunch hour into a lively shared moment, complete with laughter and spontaneous dancing. The lunchtime showcases concluded with Aaron Halliday's Alan Jackson Experience, a polished video tribute that resonated deeply with fans of classic country music. His performance underscored the enduring appeal of well-executed tribute acts and their ability to connect across generations.

As Thursday evening approached, the convention shifted into celebration mode with the Awards Gala. Entertainment played a key role in shaping the tone of the night, beginning with cocktail hour, where Dan the One Man Band provided strolling entertainment that blended seamlessly into the reception. His presence added warmth and movement to the room, enhancing networking conversations without overpowering them.

Following dinner and the awards presentation, the stage once again became the focal point. Kendra Kay, whose roots trace back to a Canadian rodeo family, delivered an authentic country performance filled with warmth and sincerity. Her connection to the genre was evident, drawing listeners in and setting the mood for the rest of the evening. She was followed by Brad Sims, a rising voice in Canadian country

music, whose performance brought renewed energy to the room and had guests leaning forward, clapping along, and gathering closer to the stage.

The night concluded with Martina Dawn, whose bold personality and country sound brought a sense of fun and spontaneity to the gala's final moments. Her performance carried the evening to its close with confidence and flair, leaving attendees smiling, energized, and reluctant to let the night end.

The final day of showcases took place during Friday's lunch, once again in the Crystal Ballroom, offering a mix of high-impact visuals and engaging performance. Ride the Vibe presented a dynamic video showcase highlighting their motorcycle stunt show, giving attendees a clear sense of the scale, excitement, and adrenaline their act brings to large outdoor events. The presentation sparked conversation and curiosity, particularly among those seeking bold attractions for their upcoming fairs.

Next, JJordan Magic took the stage with a variety performance that combined technical skill, humor, and audience connection. His ability to adapt to the room and engage attendees demonstrated the versatility of magic as a programming option for events of all sizes. The lunch showcases concluded with a video presentation from Janna Leduc, a Canadian country artist known for her powerful vocals and heartfelt storytelling, rounding out the convention's entertainment offerings on a strong and memorable note.

Across three days, the Showcase performances did more than entertain - they inspired ideas, encouraged collaboration, and helped attendees envision how live entertainment can elevate the guest experience at their own fairs and events. Experiencing these acts in person allowed for genuine connection and a deeper appreciation of the talent and professionalism behind each performance.

Showcase Performer Listing

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The Alan Jackson Experience
Ash Entertainment
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www.aaronhallidaymusic.com

Abygale Durie,
Country Recording Artist
Abygale Durie Music
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587.280.1505
www.abygaledurie.com

Brad Sims
Sirroma Entertainment
sirroma@telus.net
403.818.7223
www.bradsims.ca

Canine Circus
Canine Circus
info@caninecircus.ca
905.439.0871
www.caninecircus.ca

Chanelle Munroe,
Magician and
Multi-dimensional Artist
Magician & The Muse
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www.chanellemunroe.com/magician-and-the-muse

Dan the One Man Band
Select Entertainment
chris@select-entertainment.com
403.700.5170
www.dantheonemanband.com

Fizzlewit's Fairy Finding Tours
Select Entertainment
chris@select-entertainment.com
403.700.5170
www.fairyfinding.com

James Jordan
James Jordan
james@jjordanmagic.com
403.585.4247
www.jjordanmagic.com



Showcase Performer Listing

Janna Leduc
Janna Leduc
jannaleduc7@gmail.com
519.949.3623
www.jannaleduc.ca

Jojo's Magic Circus
Select Entertainment
chris@select-entertainment.com
403.700.5170
www.select-entertainment.com

Jordyn Pollard
Fame Agency Group
carla@famegroupagency.com
403.992.5286
www.jordynpollard.com

Kendra Kay
Fame Group Agency
carla@famegroupagency.com
403.992.5286
www.kendrakaycountry.com

Ride The Vibe,
Performer
Select Entertainment
chris@select-entertainment.com
403.700.5170
www.select-entertainment.com/ride-the-vibe

Spandy Andy
Select Entertainment
chris@select-entertainment.com
403.700.5170
www.spandyandy.com

Three Hat Circus
Select Entertainment
chris@select-entertainment.com
403.700.5170
www.select-entertainment.com

Travis Dolter,
Country Music Artist
Travis Dolter Music
travisdoltermusic@gmail.com
780.878.8486
www.travisdolter.com



Innovation, Ideas, and Industry Connections: Inside the Convention's Tradeshow

Beyond the sessions, showcases, and evening events, one of the most dynamic spaces at this year's convention was the Tradeshow floor, a hub of conversation, discovery, and collaboration where innovation met real-world experience.

Throughout the week, attendees explored new services, reconnected with longtime partners, and discovered creative solutions designed to help fairs and exhibitions evolve in a rapidly changing events landscape.

From insurance specialists and event technology providers to entertainment companies and operational experts, the Tradeshow reflected the full spectrum of the fair and live events industry. More importantly, it provided something that cannot be replicated online: meaningful, face-to-face conversations that sparked ideas and strengthened relationships.

As soon as the Tradeshow opened, the energy in the room was unmistakable. Booths quickly filled with attendees eager to learn about new tools, programming opportunities, and industry best practices. Many exhibitors brought hands-on demonstrations, interactive displays, and real-world case studies, turning the space into an active learning environment rather than a traditional exhibit hall.

Companies like Encore AV, Showpass, Eventim, and EventPro highlighted the growing importance of technology and production in today's events industry. From ticketing and event management platforms to audiovisual solutions that

enhance the attendee experience, these organizations showcased how innovation continues to shape the future of fairs and live gatherings.

Insurance and risk management professionals also played an essential role on the Tradeshow floor. Campbell & Co Insurance Consultants, PAL Insurance Brokers Canada, and Quasep provided valuable insights into coverage, operational planning, and business solutions that help organizers navigate complex environments with confidence. Their presence reflected the industry's ongoing focus on safety, sustainability, and responsible event management.

Operational expertise and event infrastructure were also strongly represented. Exhibitors such as Daytime Enterprises Limited, Farco Enterprises Ltd, and FrontDoor+ offered practical tools and services designed to support the behind-the-scenes work that keeps events running smoothly - from logistics and guest management to on-site solutions that improve efficiency.

Entertainment remained a major highlight of the Tradeshow experience, with a wide range of companies presenting new acts, programming ideas, and creative experiences for fairs of all sizes. FUSION Talent Group, Select Entertainment, Thrillstar



Entertainment, Redd Swing Productions, and Kidomo brought energy and creativity to the floor, showcasing opportunities for immersive performances, touring productions, and family-focused programming.

Audience engagement took center stage with exhibitors such as SuperDogs, Canine Circus, and SUPER CRUNCH INC., each demonstrating how entertainment can captivate audiences, create memorable moments, and strengthen community connections. Whether through high-energy performances, unique attractions, or interactive experiences, these exhibitors reminded attendees that innovation in entertainment continues to be a driving force behind successful fairs and events.

Throughout the Tradeshow, the most valuable takeaway wasn't just the products or services on display - it was the conversations. Attendees exchanged ideas, asked practical questions, and shared their own experiences from fairs across the country. Many left with new contacts, new partnerships,

and new inspiration for upcoming seasons.

The Tradeshow also served as a reminder of the strength and diversity of the industry itself. From long-established companies with decades of experience to newer organizations bringing fresh ideas and technologies, every exhibitor contributed to a shared goal: helping fairs and exhibitions thrive in an evolving world.

The Tradeshow stood out as a place where innovation met collaboration, where challenges turned into opportunities, and where the future of the industry took shape through live connections and shared expertise.

We extend our sincere thanks to all of this year's Tradeshow participants for their time, creativity, and commitment to supporting the fair and exhibition community. Their contributions helped make the convention not only informative, but truly inspiring for everyone who walked the floor.

Tradeshow Listing

Campbell & Co Insurance Consultants

andrew.hart@ccinsurance.ca
www.ccinsurance.ca

Canine Circus

farco@idirect.com
caninecircusshow.com

Daytime Enterprises Limited

dayent1@aol.com
www.daytimeenterprises.ca

Encore AV

Mark.DellaValle@encoreglobal.com
www.encoreglobal.com

Eventim

kennedy.cook@eventim.com
www.eventim.ca

EventPro

sales@eventpro.net
www.eventpro-planner.com

Farco Enterprises Ltd

office@farcoentertainment.com
www.farcoentertainment.com

FrontDoor+

nbales@b4tsolutions.com
jason@b4tsolutions.com
frontdoor.plus

FUSION Talent Group

drewpogson@gmail.com
www.fusiontalentgroup.com

Kidomo

jessica@kidomo.com
www.kidomo.com

PAL Insurance Brokers Canada

amber@palcanada.com
www.palcanada.com

Quasep

chan-william@avendra.com
quasep.ecps.ca

Redd Swing Productions

Nikky@reddswingproductions.ca
reddswingproductions.ca

Select Entertainment

chris@select-entertainment.com
select-entertainment.com

Showpass

katelyn.marchyshyn@showpass.com
www.showpass.com

SUPER CRUNCH INC.

info@supercrunch.ca
www.supercrunch.ca

SuperDogs

josh@superdogs.com
phil@superdogs.com
www.superdogs.com

Thrillstar Entertainment

watsonsmagic@gmail.com
www.thrillstar.net

Partners Who Made the 2025 Convention Possible

Behind every successful convention is a network of committed partners who believe in the value of coming together, sharing knowledge, and strengthening our industry.

This year's convention was made possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors - organizations whose leadership, innovation, and dedication continue to shape the future of fairs, exhibitions, and live events across Canada and beyond.

Their support went far beyond logos and signage. From world-class venues and event technology to entertainment, ticketing, and community-focused initiatives, our sponsors helped create an experience that was seamless, engaging, and memorable for every attendee.

Platinum Sponsors: Setting the Standard

Our Platinum Sponsors represent excellence at the highest level, each bringing a unique legacy and vision to the convention.



The **Calgary Stampede**, proudly known as “The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth,” represents the very best of Western heritage, culture, and community. Thousands of volunteers, strong youth programs, and world-class entertainment make it a cultural institution. With strong economic impact and deep agricultural roots, the Stampede is a national leader in the fair and exhibition industry. Their off-site day gave delegates a mini-rodeo experience, insights from Stampede leadership, and a behind-the-scenes tour of the grounds.



The **Canadian National Exhibition (CNE)** stands as one of Canada's most iconic and enduring fairs. Welcoming more than 1.5 million visitors annually, the CNE has been a cornerstone of Toronto's summer traditions since 1879. Its blend of agriculture, innovation, culture, and entertainment continues to inspire generations and reflects the evolving role of fairs in urban communities.



Encore Canada played a vital role behind the scenes, bringing technical expertise and production excellence to the convention experience. As Canada's leading event technology provider and largest employer of audiovisual professionals in the country, Encore's support ensured that every session, showcase, and gathering was delivered with precision and professionalism.



Showpass brought innovation to the forefront through its modern approach to live event ticketing. Focused on enhancing the fan journey from start to finish, Showpass continues to empower event organizers with tools that simplify operations and elevate the guest experience. Attendees were invited to explore their solutions firsthand in the Tech Lounge, highlighting the importance of technology in today's live events landscape.

Gold Sponsors: Powering Experience and Place

Our Gold Sponsors represent scale, community connection, and the excitement that defines fairs and festivals.



North American Midway Entertainment (NAME), the largest traveling amusement company in the world, delivers unforgettable midway experiences across North America. With a strong emphasis on safety, professionalism, and showmanship, NAME continues to set the benchmark for amusement operations at major fairs and festivals.



Explore Edmonton, the city's destination marketing and management organization, showcased the vibrancy, hospitality, and innovation of the region. Through signature events such as K-Days, FarmFair International, and the Canadian Finals Rodeo, Explore Edmonton connects visitors to the city's unique energy and sense of place.



West Coast Amusements, a fourth-generation, family-run operation, represents the heart of Canadian midway tradition in Western Canada. Serving more than 100 fairs and rodeos each year, their commitment to community involvement and charitable giving reflects the deep local roots that define the fair industry.



The **Western Fair District**, based in London, Ontario, continues to be a year-round hub for agriculture, entertainment, and community engagement. Anchored by its historic fair, the district fosters inclusion, education, and innovation while creating meaningful gathering spaces for all.

Silver Sponsors: Innovation, Safety, and Storytelling

Our Silver Sponsors brought expertise across insurance, technology, ticketing, venues, and entertainment—each playing a crucial role in the success of modern events.



Acera Insurance, is proudly 100% Canadian-owned. With more than 60 years of experience, Acera provides tailored coverage and impartial advice to individuals, families, and businesses across the country. Their deep local roots combined with national strength make them a valued partner for fairs and events navigating today's complex risk environment.



Since 2010, **AuthentiGATE** has delivered cutting-edge ticketing and access control solutions designed for events of all sizes. Through real-time admissions tracking, guest management tools, and live reporting capabilities, AuthentiGATE supports safe, seamless, and professional event experiences—an increasingly essential component of successful fair operations.



Part of global leader CTS **EVENTIM**, Eventim connects Canadian audiences to world-class entertainment through ticketing and live event promotion. With decades of international expertise and a growing Canadian presence, Eventim continues to strengthen the bridge between artists, organizers, and fans nationwide.



EventPro Software, provides a comprehensive and scalable event management system trusted by venues, catering teams, and event professionals around the world. By streamlining planning, operations, and reporting within one integrated platform, EventPro helps organizers create efficient workflows and exceptional event experiences.



Rooted in history since 1886, **PrairieLand** remains Saskatoon's premier event destination, hosting more than 400 gatherings annually. From trade shows and agricultural events to large-scale fairs, PrairieLand reflects the enduring importance of community-centered venues in bringing people together.



For over 40 years, **SuperDogs** have delighted audiences with fast-paced, heartwarming performances featuring rescue pups, family pets, and incredible canine talent. Beloved across Canada, their shows continue to inspire, entertain, and create memorable moments for audiences of all ages.

Bronze Sponsors: Tradition, Talent, & Industry Support

Partners whose dedication, creativity, and heritage enrich the fair experience from the ground up.



With a proud history dating back to 1863, **Carp Fair** continues to celebrate agriculture, competition, and community pride. As one of Canada's largest country fairs, it draws visitors from across North America to experience exhibitions, livestock shows, and cherished traditions that reflect the enduring spirit of rural communities.



Founded by world champion diver Yves Milord, **Milord Entertainment** brings breathtaking acrobatics and diving performances to audiences around the globe. With decades of international experience, the company continues to push artistic boundaries, inspiring wonder and elevating live entertainment experiences at fairs and events worldwide.



QUASEP serves as a trusted purchasing program for the hospitality industry, supporting restaurants, hotels, camps, and catering operations with strong supplier partnerships and tailored resources. Through strategic collaboration and cost-saving solutions, **QUASEP** empowers members to operate more efficiently and effectively in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

In-Kind Sponsors: Strengthening the Experience

Contributors whose support, talent, and resources helped elevate the convention experience in meaningful ways.



Fusion Talent Group delivers unforgettable live entertainment experiences across North America. With deep expertise in performance and event production, Fusion brings world-class talent, innovation, and creative energy to every stage, supporting fairs and exhibitions with dynamic programming solutions.



Partnering with fairs and events nationwide, **Select Entertainment** brings excitement and engagement to audiences of all ages. From high-impact stunt shows to interactive performances, their diverse roster continues to energize crowds and enhance the live event experience.



For more than 110 years **The BCNE**, proudly presented by the Prince George Agricultural and Historical Association, has celebrated agriculture, 4-H youth, home arts, and community spirit in northern British Columbia. Their in-kind support reflects a commitment to preserving agricultural heritage while fostering strong community connections.

Friend of CAFE: A Valued Industry Ally



The convention was also proud to recognize **Robertson Amusements** as a *Friend of CAFE*, honoring their longstanding commitment to the fair industry in Canada. Known as *Canada's Traveling Theme Park*, Robertson Amusements is a fourth-generation, family-owned midway based in Orangeville, Ontario. Operating exclusively under the Robertson name, the company is trusted by fairs across the province for delivering a safe, high-quality, single-unit midway experience.

Our Thanks

Together, our sponsors made this convention not only possible, but exceptional. Their continued support reinforces the strength of our industry and the importance of collaboration, creativity, and community. We extend our sincere thanks to every sponsor who helped bring this year's convention to life and who continues to invest in the future of fairs and exhibitions.

CAFE NATIONAL AWARDS

The heartbeat of the Canadian fair and exhibition industry is its people. Behind every successful event is a network of visionaries and dedicated leaders who push boundaries, foster community spirit, and pave the way for a brighter future.

Each year, the CAFE National Awards spotlight these passionate people and organizations whose commitment, leadership, and creativity continue to shape the Canadian fair and exhibition industry. Their work strengthens communities, drives innovation, and ensures our sector remains vibrant and resilient.

As we celebrate last year's recipients, we also invite members across the country to consider participating in future awards. The impact you make today could be recognized tomorrow.



Roll of Honour

First established in 1979, the Roll of Honour is one of CAFE's most prestigious recognitions, celebrating individuals whose contributions have made a national impact on the fair and exhibition industry.

This time, we celebrate **Virginia Ludy**, who's currently the VP of James Needler Event Consulting Ltd. and it's the former CEO of the CNE — the first woman ever in that role — for her profound legacy of leadership. Her strategic vision and unwavering commitment to CAFE's mission have resonated far beyond her immediate community, setting a standard of excellence for the entire industry.

Virginia was nominated by several people as Jim Laurendeau, the executive VP park development and operations of the Calgary Stampede, also by Scooter Korek, VP of client services at the North American Midway. Karen Oliver, former Manager of the Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba, among other positions where she has been able to observe Virginia's work and leadership. Ludy's work was also recognized by Peter Male & Associates who recognized Virginia's support, friendship and assistance to the industry as invaluable.



Service Member of the Year

The Service Member of the Year Award highlights a service provider whose leadership, innovation, and operational excellence have made a meaningful contribution to the industry.

Rob Hauser of West Coast Amusements was recognized for his strong commitment to safety, equipment standards, and operational excellence. Through innovative practices and a consistent focus on customer service and efficiency, Rob's leadership has positively impacted fairs and exhibitions across the regions he serves.

Wendy Hauser nominated Rob because of his innovations, such as the "Magic Money" cashless payment system he introduced at over 30 events, and the customized employee training program tailored to each department and emphasizing safety, inspections, transportation operations, and customer service. Her journey was also recognized by Amber Williams, who defined his attractions as top-notch and cutting-edge.



Canadian Fair Champion

The Canadian Fair Champion Award recognizes individuals whose dedication and generosity of spirit go above and beyond in support of their fair organization or agricultural society.

Basil Lychowyd, the chair of the CLE fair and vice president of agriculture, is honoured for his exceptional commitment, willingness to step in whenever needed, and the countless hours he has devoted to supporting his fair. His passion and reliability have made a lasting difference to both the organization and the wider community it serves.



Innovation Award

The Innovation Award celebrates new ideas, programs, or approaches that enhance engagement and strengthen connections with communities.

Adaptability is the key to longevity. **The New Brunswick Fairs and Exhibitions Association** has demonstrated a remarkable ability to modernize programming while deepening community roots. This award celebrates their forward-thinking strategies that keep the industry fresh and engaging.

Billy DeLong made this nomination because he believes the association provides valuable programs for its members and focuses on mental health. The association develops strategies for managing events to help prevent volunteer burnout and improve motivation.



Canadian Fair Champion

Judy McAloon, from Russell Agricultural Society, is recognized also as a Canadian Fair Champion for her outstanding leadership, dedication, and continued support of her fair organization. Known for her enthusiasm, dependability, and readiness to embrace new challenges, Judy exemplifies the volunteer spirit that lies at the heart of successful fairs and agricultural societies.

Judy received a nomination from Billy DeLong, who recognized her contributions to the fair and agricultural society over the last few decades as essential to its existence. Melanie Armstrong supports this and adds she's an inspiration for all because of her selflessness, dedication, and passion for preserving agricultural heritage and community spirit.



Central Canada Exhibition Youth Education Scholarship

Established in 2025, the Central Canada Exhibition Youth Education Scholarship supports emerging professionals by providing opportunities to attend the CAFE Convention for education, learning, and networking.

Devin Dobrev-Onyskiw, from Explore Edmonton, is recognized for their strong involvement in community initiatives and agriculture, as well as their potential as a future leader in the fair and exhibition industry. This scholarship supports Devin's continued growth and engagement within the sector.

Devin's nomination was driven by his professionalism, problem-solving skills, and dedication, as Lori Wheeler describes, and adds that he has demonstrated exceptional knowledge, adaptability, and composure during the Farmfair International. Leah Jones also nominated Devin because of his pivotal role in developing and delivering engaging programs that not only meet organizational objectives but also inspire participants.



Top 10 Under 40

The Top 10 Under 40 recognition celebrates emerging leaders who are helping shape the future of the fair and exhibition industry through innovation, dedication, and community impact. These individuals represent the next generation of leadership, bringing fresh perspectives and a strong commitment to building inclusive and engaging experiences nationwide. We proudly recognize the 2025 Top 10 Under 40 recipients:

Angela Hogeveen – Norfolk County Fair

Dalton Barteaux – Annapolis Valley Exhibition

Eric Connell – Spencerville Agricultural Society

Kalyn Van Horne – Explore Edmonton / KDays

Leigha Beckwith – New Brunswick

Melissa Player – New Brunswick Fairs and Exhibitions Association

Phillip Davis – Davis Concessions

Shayla Flanagan – Westerner Park

Shaylene Kirton – AuthentigATE

Sydney Adams – Paris Agricultural Fair

Through their leadership, creativity, and dedication, these individuals are helping ensure the continued growth and success of fairs and exhibitions across Canada. Nominations for the **2026 CAFE Top 10 Under 40 are now open**, submit your nomination before March 31, 2026. You can send an email to communications@canadianfairs.ca with the subject line “CAFE Top 10 Under 40 Nomination”.

Congratulations to Our 2025 Winners!

The future of fairs starts here!



cafe

Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions
Association canadienne des foires et expositions

CAFE Top 10 Under 40

Innovation doesn't wait. Leadership doesn't follow trends. And the future of our industry is already taking shape in the hands of passionate young professionals across Canada.

The CAFE Top 10 Under 40 recognizes emerging leaders who are driving progress in fairs and exhibitions — those who bring new ideas, strengthen their communities, and elevate the experiences we create.

Now it's time to shine a spotlight on them.

Do you know someone making an impact?

Nominate them!

Who can be nominated?

- People under 40 years of age
- Have at least one year of experience in the fairs & exhibitions industry
- Be affiliated with a CAFE Member Organization or be an Individual CAFE Member

What to submit?

- Nominee's name
- Organization
- A short bio (approximately 100 words)
- A statement explaining why they deserve recognition (100–150 words)
- A headshot

How to nominate?

Submission Deadline:

March 31, 2026

Email Subject Line:

CAFE Top 10 Under 40 Nomination

Send To:

communications@canadianfairs.ca

Submit your nomination and help us recognize the next generation shaping the future of our industry.