



AGRICULTURAL AGM: It was standing room only for the public portion of the Acton Agricultural Society's annual general meeting at the Dufferin Rural Heritage Centre on Saturday as Fair Board members assessed last year's Fair and look forward to this year's – the 100th anniversary. – Frances Learment photo

From Rural Roots to New Branches

Acton Agricultural Society looks at history and future

As Acton Agricultural Society members look back 100 years to celebrate the Fair's rich agricultural legacy, they are also looking forward with plans for a Junior Board to harness and encourage future generations to ensure the Acton Fall Fair remains, as billed, "One of the best little fairs in Ontario."

New plans for a Junior Board – probably ages nine to 18 – were discussed briefly at the Society's annual general meeting on Saturday at the Dufferin Rural Heritage Centre. "If young people are interested, you've got to encourage them," said Society secretary/treasurer Jill Medland. "Our members – we all are aging – these young kids are coming up and we want the Fair to be here for the next 100 years," she said.

Medland told the standing-room only meeting that "it was another profitable year" for the Fair. Society members heard the financial details of the Fair's three revenue

sources – the beer tent, concessions and gate – in a closed session.

In an email Tuesday, Medland said "despite gate revenue being down a bit, it was another successful and profitable year," and that sponsorships were also down from the previous year. Over \$19,000 was awarded in prize money.

Although beer tent sales were down over last year, the profits were "good." While donations, advertising and rental revenue were all down last year at the Dufferin Centre, interest expenses were also reduced, resulting in a profitable year, according to Medland who thanked former building manager Mike O'Leary for his hard work, and introduced Betty Walsh, the new building manager.

In the committee reports, Homecraft division chair Marg Aitken reported another successful year with entries in antiques and photography "exploding" with growth, requiring new display

areas. She said the 100th anniversary celebrations for Homecrafts involve a wall art competition with a \$100 cash prize.

Aitken introduced her son Joel Aitken, a second year Masters student at the University of Guelph, explaining that she'd "offered" the Society up as a community group for his community development communications project. "I'll look at the community development that the Agricultural Society does within Acton," Aitken said, asking members for their help and Fair memorabilia.

Heavy rain meant only 300 local school children – not the usual crowd of over 1,000 – attended Education Day, but it was still a "success" according to Anjali Viegas who said they'd look into additional indoor events in future years, and that this year – the 25th anniversary – will be a "little more exciting."

September's Fair will also mark the 50th anniversary of the Miss Acton pageant, a crowd pleaser every year. Attempts are being made to reach as many former Miss Actons as possible to join in the celebration.

Dealing with concessions and vendors, George Henderson reported 99.9 per cent of existing Fair vendors want to return this year. Although it would make them more money, Henderson said he doesn't want to overcrowd the fair grounds, but hopes to use the tennis courts for smaller, boutique-type vendors.

With the 100th anniversary celebrations, committee chair Leigh Whiting said they are looking forward and backward with the help of co-op student Andrew Pronk who is compiling a Fair history. "We're celebrating the people who already celebrate the Fair every year," she said adding there will be buttons, banners and goodie bags to mark the 100th milestone.

On May 20, one hundred trees, with Acton Agricultural Society plaques, will be planted on Dufferin quarry land south of Acton, and a tree donated by the Town to mark the 100th anniversary will be planted near the Dufferin Centre in Prospect Park. The 100th anniversary gala is April 13 at Blue Springs golf club.

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