

GEORGETOWN FAIR CANCELLED FOR FIRST TIME IN 174 YEARS

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The Georgetown Fall Fair continued through two World Wars, through the Spanish flu pandemic. It was a well-established fixture in town long before the first car drove down Main Street.

Founded in 1846, it is the oldest fair in Halton and Peel Region and had run every year for more than a century and a half.

Which is what made the decision to cancel the 174th edition of the fair, scheduled for Sept. 11-13, so heart-wrenching.

In making the announcement on Facebook late Tuesday night, Georgetown Agricultural Society president Wayne Cunningham said the decision was made "with a heavy heart" but said there were too many concerns about holding the fair safely.

"With COVID-19 and six-foot social distancing, how do you fill the bleachers for a demolition derby?" he said. "How do you sit with three other people on a ride? You just have too many strikes against you."

Cunningham said they could have gone ahead with the fair and he's sure that some people would have attended. But he said there's



no way to know how many people would not feel comfortable in a large gathering, or even if they would be allowed by September.

Georgetown is not alone in its concerns. The country's largest fair, the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, was also cancelled on Tuesday. Of the 216 fairs listed on the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies website, 75

have been cancelled and many more will likely follow suit in the coming weeks.

Cunningham said many agricultural societies own their local fairgrounds, providing a source of revenue, but that's not the case in Georgetown, where the grounds are town property. That means the fair relies



Ray Lavender photos

The Georgetown Fall Fair, scheduled for Sept. 11-13, has been cancelled for the first time in its 174-year history. The fair, which has run every year since 1846, has been cancelled due to concerns about COVID-19. Pictured are children enjoying attractions at past events.

on donations and sponsorships, but ticket sales are also a large source of revenue.

"If we have a bad year, it affects us moving forward," Cunningham said.

Cunningham said the companies they work with have been very understanding. The fair had put down deposits with the companies that run the demolition derby and the midway as well as some of the entertainers. All agreed to return the deposits.

Similarly, the agricultural society is contacting those who provided money for this year's fair to see if they want it returned or put toward next year's fair.

It takes close to 300 volunteers to operate the fair

each year. The Knights of Columbus provides the majority, with 160 to operate the gates and another 60 to run the beer tent. The rest, about 65 members of the agricultural society, look after everything from set up and tear down, operating the education tent, arranging entertainment, running baking contests, livestock competitions, and everything needed to make sure the event runs smoothly.

"We have a phenomenal group of people, but we're always looking for new people to come in and volunteer," Cunningham said.

"There are lots of jobs to be done."

He said the commitment involves one two-hour meeting a month and the

fair weekend in September.

That group will now shift its focus to the fair's return in 2021. The theme will be history as the fair marks its 175th anniversary. Cunningham said the agricultural society will look for ways to improve the fair looking to ensure its long history continues.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: A much-anticipated kickoff to autumn for thousands of local residents, the Georgetown Fall Fair will not be held for the first time in more than 170 years. The Georgetown Agricultural Society president discussed what the cancellation means to its many organizers, supports and volunteers, as well as the community.

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