

Homestretch for a horse barn

by Adam Hoogenakker | Posted: Thursday, April 20, 2017 5:00 am

By the end of this summer, Lance Baumann is hopeful enough donations and grants will be found to start construction on a new horse barn at the Aitkin County Fairgrounds in 2018.

Baumann is president of the Fair Foundation, which has set at goal of \$180,000 to build a new 4-H horse building measuring 60 feet by 150 feet next to the existing cattle barn. The structure would house roughly 50 portable horse stalls which could be removed to have space for training purposes early in the year. The Fair Foundation exists to help the Aitkin County Fair raise funds for improvements to buildings and grounds.

“This will help promote youth,” said Baumann. “And to have a facility all summer long for numerous horse events.”

The fundraising efforts went from a trot to a gallop recently, as American Peat Technology (APT) of Aitkin pledged \$50,000 over two years toward the project.

Peggy Jones, vice president of sales and research for APT, said the new building fits the company’s giving program, which focuses on three areas – locally based programs, youth and family development and education.

“We were looking for a cause to get behind,” said Jones. “Lance is bringing the passion and enthusiasm we’ve been looking for.”

Thus far, \$80,000 has been raised for the horse building from sources ranging from the county board approving \$10,000 per year (out of \$20,000 the county allocates to the overall fairgrounds) for the project, and from efforts by members of the Young Riders 4-H program and the Bit and Bridle Club. Private donors have



Members of the Young Riders 4-H Club gathered at American Peat Technology (APT) to acknowledge the donation made by APT toward the new horse barn to be built at the Aitkin County Fairgrounds.

APT donated \$50,000 over two years to the project. Pictured are, front, Dixie Riggs, Kaelynn Gruhlke, Audrianna Schneider, Madellyn Schneider, Coltan Baumann, Andrea Hanson, Aliyah Fayaz and Layne Baumann; back, Faren Riggs, Young Riders 4-H Club leader; Jennifer Schneider, Kim Gruhlke, Peggy Jones, vice president of sales and research, APT; Lance Baumann, Aitkin County Fair Foundation president; and Kendra Gruhlke.

also contributed. A full list of donors will be displayed once the facility is finished.

Fairgrounds

The Fair Foundation is one of three entities working together to improve the county fairgrounds in Aitkin – the Ag Society (fair board) manages the property; the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners owns the buildings and grounds; and the Fair Foundation is a non-profit organization which works on raising funds for projects.

Since 2008 there has not been a dedicated horse barn at the fair, after the former building had to be torn down due to age and safety issues. There was no plan to fix the old building, explained Baumann.

More buildings will come down at the fair to make space for the new horse building – the swine, sheep and goat building, and the cattle arena will be torn down and the new horse building will be erected in its place.

According to Sharon Dotzler, livestock superintendent of the Aitkin County Fair, a new swine, sheep and goat building and livestock show arena will be constructed on the south side of the existing cattle building (between the cattle and poultry buildings). Construction is scheduled on those buildings to be completed in 2017, hopefully in time for the fair, added Dotzler.

“All improvements at the fairgrounds have a minimal impact on county taxpayers,” said Baumann. “But the benefit is for all community members through events held at the fairgrounds.”

Baumann can be contacted at 218-340-6893.

Aitkin County 4-H Horse Program

The Aitkin County 4-H Program has a membership of nearly 200 youth and has a network of 47 screened adult volunteers that serve the program. Aitkin County 4-H offers many 4-H projects for the youth to learn and grow from and develop their skills. One of those project areas is “Horse.”

There are 65 4-H youth out of the nearly 200 in Aitkin County that are enrolled in the Horse Project. This is the highest animal enrollment area in Aitkin County.

The youth who are enrolled in the horse project practice all summer to participate in the Aitkin County Fair 4-H Horse qualifying horse show. This show gives them an opportunity to earn a Minnesota State 4-H Horse Show Trip.

A highlight for the 4-H’ers who participate in the county fair is the opportunity to allow the public to learn about horses and be able to see the horses on display at the Aitkin County Fair.

A highlight for fair goer’s is to walk through a horse barn and other livestock barns to see the animals and

have the opportunity to talk with 4-H'ers to learn about their projects.

Aitkin County currently does not have a horse barn on the County Fairgrounds which takes away the opportunity for 4-H'ers to interact with the public in a safe way. Currently horses come in to show and are trailered home and then trailered back to the fun show if they choose to participate in that. Horses are tied to trailers or are standing in the open for long periods of time and the only way for spectators to see the animals more closely and engage a 4-H'er is to come up and walk in between the horses waiting to show. This creates an unsafe environment and puts both the participants, horses and spectators at risk.

The Aitkin 4-H Horse Project Members including the Young Riders 4-H Club are working to raise money to create a safer more educational opportunity to show horses. The Aitkin County Ag Society is willing to support the building of a new horse barn on the fairgrounds. 4-H is working to fundraise to purchase the stalls and materials to build the interior and make a safe environment for the horses and spectators to interact and experience horses more closely.

There is a Horse Building Fund set up and money donated to 4-H for this purpose will be earmarked and set aside for this purpose. 4-H is a part of the University of Minnesota Extension and is a 501c3 so your donation is tax deductible.

– *Faren Riggs, 4-H Young Riders Key Leader*