

expo

Explore the Golden Circle

THE YOUTH EXPO TURNS

50



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For 50 years, Navarro County residents have “stepped up” to support the youth of the county, by way of the Navarro County Youth Exposition.

The 50th anniversary of the week-long event will take place in March, and if you’ve never been, make it a goal to visit at least once.

I remember coming to Corsicana as a young girl from Dallas. My first experience at the Youth Expo was one of awe — awe of so many farm animals under one roof! I remember that being the first time I’d ever seen a cow close up, actual-

ly seen in real life what pigs eat, or touching a real rabbit. It was a real eye-opener for a city kid like me!

Though I never did become involved in either FFA or 4-H, I always liked going out to the Youth Expo. The fascination with the animals was replaced by a fascination with the cute boys, and later with social opportunities in general. As an adult, it is the best time of year to see most of the folks you know from every corner of the county, all in one place.

When you think about it, Navarro County is really a pretty awesome place — where people get behind their youth, and encourage them to succeed. Several “Friends of Youth” groups sprang up around the county, to ensure the success of the kids from their particular town. Business leaders, farmers, ranchers, and ordinary citizenry gather in one place to vie for items at the auction.

Hundreds of kids from this county have received a great start for college by hard work, the generosity of the town, and the very existence of the Navarro County Youth Exposition.

Happy 50th!

— Deanna Brown

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★ NAVARRO COUNTY YOUTH EXPOSITION ★

50 YEARS



Ronny Willis & Frances Watts-1959



*Frances Watts 1959
Champion Steer*

Building character, teaching responsibility, and training the next generation of farmers and ranchers has been the goal of the Navarro County Youth Exposition for the last 50 years. Hundreds of kids have

groomed animals, sewed clothing, baked a pie, and battled a case of nerves waiting to show their goat or pig or heifer. As well, hundreds of generous volunteers have devoted countless hours, sweat, and labor to pull this production off each year — and make no mistake, it is a production. Businesses have supported it by purchasing animals and projects at the auction, and many, many Navarro County kids have made it to college funded by their earnings from the sale.

1930s until 1957. This event involved adults and kids alike, and people came from all over the United States. It was held at the old fairgrounds, on East Highway 31, and resembled a mini state fair.



*Margaret Montgomery—
Crowned first
NCYE queen
1959*

“That Youth Expo is the result of a lot of peoples’ efforts — people giving in many different ways, some with time, some with money,” said Dr. Ray Dean Carroll, long-time supporter. “That is something I’ve enjoyed the most through the 50 years — the cooperative effort of everyone.”

The precursor to the NCYE was the Corsicana Livestock and Agricultural Show, held from the



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The first Navarro County Youth Exposition was the brainchild of James Cummins, the Corsicana High School vocational agriculture instructor at that time. It was held March 13-14, 1959, in a tent on the site of the original Corsicana Livestock and Agriculture Show. The divisions then included beef cattle, dairy cattle, sheep, hogs and poultry. There was also a dress revue, arts and crafts division, talent show and a queen's contest.

"I got dressed up that afternoon, and Mother carried me to Myra Jo Lanier's house, and she took me to the banquet at the Navarro Hotel," said Margaret Montgomery Thomas, first queen of the expo.

Lanier was the wife of the Mildred Independent School District superintendent, J.H. Lanier, and Margaret attended Mildred High School. Thomas had no idea what to expect, but recalls enjoying the banquet decked out in her for-

mal attire in the Cactus Room of the hotel.

"They had seven girls, a girl from each school, plus kids from 4-H, and some adults I didn't know," Thomas said. "Three Navarro College teachers were the judges. I was very frightened, because I had to give a three-minute speech on the subject of my 'most exciting moment,' and my mother had suggested I tell about the time the horse ran away with me."

Thomas remembered all the other contestants spoke about their prior "queen" moments, as all the schools held coronations back in those days. When the time came for the contest coordinator to give the instructions for the person named queen, Thomas didn't pay attention, because she was quite convinced one of the other "queen type" girls would win.

"The announcer said, 'And the winner is Margaret Montgomery,'



and I thought to myself, 'What do I do?'"

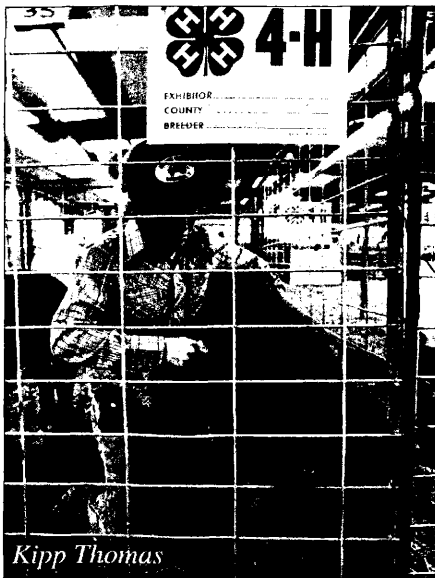
Thomas selected her beau, Gene Thomas, (and present-day husband) as her escort, and she was chauffeured in a new car from Forester Chevrolet to the fairgrounds. She received a bouquet of flowers, a string of pearls and pearl earrings from Daiches Jewelers, and was given the honor of bestowing ribbons on the winners of the livestock judging.

"I remember it all being a lot of fun until it was time to get up and talk," she said.

Corsicana Chamber of Commerce sponsored the show, which it continued through 2001. The NCYE style show, which has been discontinued along with the talent show and queen's contest, was held in the Navarro Junior College auditorium, with Elaine Mayfield as narrator.

The permanent site for the NYCE was selected in 1970, when 4.5 acres on Farm-to-Market Road 744 was purchased. Fannie Mae Vernon, who served as chairman of the non-ag divisions for 40 years, was honored with a building named in her honor.

"Mr. Louis K. Wolens wanted to donate \$25,000, and the Fannie Mae Vernon Room was built," Vernon



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