

All's f

*Move over banjos
barbecues, 1997 is
more eclectic gat*

BY BRET SCHULTE
Senior Reporter

Featuring such traditional entertainment as tractor pulls, rodeos and live country music (or dead rock 'n' roll), the Nebraska State Fair has been an agrarian-inspired pop culture hoedown.

But the times — and the state fair — are a-changing.

While farm equipment and aggravated livestock are still state fair mainstays, the event is being regeared to attract a younger, more urban crowd — one more indication of Nebraska's shifting population from the rural areas.

This year, alongside the banjos, belt buckles and barbecue, those in attendance will witness racing ostriches, local punk rockers, "Weird Al" Yankovic, regional blues bands and educators on home beer brewing.

J.P. Palmer, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate student and the special events coordinator for this year's fair, is responsible for the planning and organization of this year's new attractions. She said among them are the "Beer, Blues, and Regional Rock" shows.

"These shows are designed for a younger crowd — people not as interested in country western and who want to have a beer while they listen to music," Palmer said.

Since the vast majority of the main stage acts in the alcohol-free Bob Devaney Sports Center are country-western musical groups or recently reincarnated '60s rock bands, the "Beer, Blues, and Regional Rock" shows will cater to a younger and more casual crowd. Palmer said that although alcohol will be served, all ages are welcome.

"It's not like the Devaney center where you sit for three hours and then leave," she said. "This has a

dance area,
and
you
can

come and go as you please. It's not going to be like an Edgefest, where you are gated off. People are welcome to go and enjoy the midway, get some food or check out other attractions and come back whenever."

Throughout the fair's opening weekend, "Beer, Blues, and Regional Rock" will showcase rhythm and blues bands from across the country. The mini-music festival begins Friday, Aug. 22, at 6:00 p.m. with the sounds of the Self Righteous Brothers, Exit and the Chris Herriges Project. Saturday, Aug. 23, will spotlight the country-western group Sandy Creek, with Baby Jason and the Spankers and BossPhilly playing Sunday, Aug. 24.

"The blues will really be only the first weekend, and a concerted effort was made to fill the Open Air Auditorium (by) showcasing local talent for the second," Palmer said.

Receiving this regional rock makeover, the Labor Day weekend lineup will feature Nashville recording artist Jill Marie on Friday, Aug. 29, Omaha's alt-rockers Secret Skin and Grasshopper Takeover on Saturday, Aug. 30, and local rock-ballad factory Blue Moon Ghetto on Sunday, Aug. 31.

If the blues only get you down and local rock leaves you feeling like a stranger, the fair's Zeus of Zaniness will get you giddy.

"Weird Al" Yankovic, the reigning king of rock parody and fashion nihilism, will set the tone for this year's state celebration Friday, Aug. 22. In an event where hybrids abound, "Weird Al" stands alone with his own special blend of rock 'n' taunt polka tunes and musical comedy.

"Last year we had Gallagher at the fair and he did so well that he was the inspiration for us to bring in 'Weird Al' while he was on his 'Bad Hair Day' tour" she said. "This mix gives people a break from the usual old rock bands and country music, most of which don't sell out."

But the oddities will only begin with "Weird Al."

For the first time in state fair history, ostriches and camels will be seen alongside their barnyard brethren. Because the ostriches and camels are not Nebraska natives, their appearance at the state fair will bring a touch of exoticism to this flag-waving American event. On Friday, Aug. 29, the animals will take part in a series of races similar to horse racing, but with a few obvious differences.

"When camels race, they don't necessarily go in a straight line," Palmer said. "And the same is true for ostriches. I've seen a camel get a hair and make a complete U-turn. There are no reins, so the jockeys just hold on with both hands. You can kick them, but they couldn't care less."

Camels are too large to race from starting gates, and getting them started also can be a bit tricky; but when they get moving it's worth watching, Palmer said.

AARON STECKELBERG/DN

