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SUNDAY ISSUE: Crawford County Fair to try 'American Jam'

By Keith Gushard
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MEADVILLE — The Crawford County Fair Board is trying out a different feature entertainment option at this year's fair for the first time — one that some folks have been clamoring after for years.

The fair board has decided to experiment with using local bands as featured performers on the grandstand stage.

“American Jam,” an eight-hour entertainment extravaganza designed to showcase northwestern Pennsylvania musicians and their various musical styles, will take to the fair's main stage Aug. 23. Some 12 different bands or solo musicians are set to perform from 2:30 to 10:30 p.m. that Monday.

“It's the first time we've had paid local bands (as a headliner) on the main stage,” said Fred Wagner, the fair board's treasurer.

A few years ago, the fair did try a high school band festival on the main stage. Also, the fair has had a local band, the Earthquakers, open for featured national acts, Wagner said. And the fair board has had local acts perform over the years on some of the small, free act stages.

But with the economy still lagging, the fair board wanted to offer a third night of concert entertainment at a lower ticket cost than stars on a national tour.

The fair board has two nights of nationally known country artists set to perform at this year's fair. Josh Turner with guest Phil Vassar will perform Aug. 25 at 7:30 p.m. with tickets \$25 and \$30 each; and Darius Rucker with guest Kellie Pickler will perform Aug. 26 at 7:30 p.m. with tickets \$35 and \$40 each.

Tickets for “American Jam” cost \$10 and allow a person to enter and leave whenever they wish, provided they have their hand stamped before leaving the grandstand area.

“This is something we talked about in 2009,” Wagner said. “We decided to try it this year and see if it'd be successful.”

The fair board has shelled out \$9,725 to DirtyDogLive.com to line up area performers to appear.

“Every national act was a local act at one time,” said E. Lisa Bower, president of DirtyDogLive.com. “These are people who haven't been discovered yet nationally.”

Performers lined up cut across musical styles — from gospel, jazz, folk, country, rock 'n' roll, blues to solo acoustic musicians.

Wagner said the fair board liked the idea of a variety of bands and styles.

“We can offer a little bit of everything to everybody,” Wagner said.

Bower approached the fair board with the idea partly because she said not everybody wants to go into a bar to listen to a band, and partly to show off the different styles.

“I like to listen to a variety of things and I think a lot of people do, too,” Bower said.

“They’re talented and professional at what they do,” she said of the musicians. “They’ve not gotten (national) fame and recognition.”

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You can go

Tickets for American Jam are \$10 and are available in person only at the Crawford County Courthouse, 903 Diamond Park, Meadville, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Tickets also will be sold at the fair office on the fairgrounds on Aug. 23.

Gates for American Jam open at 2 p.m. Aug. 23, Monday of fair week. Persons may take a lawn chair for racetrack seating as no seats will be provided in this section. Grandstand seating is first come, first served. Concertgoers may come and go as they please provided they have their hand stamped upon leaving the grandstand area.