

NORTHWEST DALLAS COUNTY

Coppell festival a chance to pig out

By Virginia Sullivan

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Sometimes all you need is a little sense of humor to raise a lot of money. Certainly that's the idea behind "Coppell Celebrates: Pig Fest" during the last weekend in April.

Indeed, organizers are hamming it up for all it is worth. The festival is dedicated to the pig with attractions like the "Olympigs" and the children's "Pig Pen" area. Pig Fest also offers a large carnival, a health fair, an arts and crafts show, live entertainment and an 8-kilometer race. The annual event raises money for Coppell's nonprofit organizations and their many ongoing community projects.

One of the civic groups benefiting is the Exchange Club of Coppell, which supports the XCAP (Exchange Child Abuse Prevention) Center of Dallas, along with many other local projects. "Every year we're getting more and more people involved. There used to be a whole lot of festivals competing with each other for funds. Then we decided to combine, pool our resources and

Event raises money for town's nonprofit groups

split costs," says Exchange Club Treasurer Eli Dragon.

"Coppell Celebrates: Pig Fest" also benefits the city's Lions and Rotary Clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Library, The Community Theater, Friends of the Parks, the YMCA, plus various schools and sports organizations.

"It started out as a simple community event, but as the numbers went up they [the organizers] needed to publicize it more and had to have a more marketable theme," explains Chamber of Commerce president Debbie Cook.

The Pig Fest concept is not only salable, but it's based on the city's history. Coppell's claim to fame around the turn of the century was its abundance of pig farms.

Last year's festival raised \$45,000 for use on projects ranging from providing shoes and eyeglasses for needy children to funding scholarship programs and making improvements to the city's parks.

"Our goal is to not only raise

money, but to also offer our community's families a good time," says Coppell Celebrates chairman Angelo "A.J." Vaccaro.

"It's gotten better and bigger each year — in that order. Those are our goals. Better first, bigger second."

Last year's attendance exceeded 13,000. Organizers are expecting over 20,000 this April. "We're estimating doubling our profits this year. The goal is to reach \$90,000," Mr. Vaccaro says.

Ms. Cook says: "We've got a giant Ferris wheel coming in and that should draw in a lot more people. The carnival itself will be three times larger than in previous years."

The children's area, or Pig Pen, also has been expanded this season. It includes two moon walk tents, face painting, clowns, several carnival games, a caterpillar crawl and a petting zoo.

"Many of the games and activities along with the concerts are in-

cluded in the price of admission," Ms. Cook says.

Olympig events will include a pig beauty contest, a pig calling challenge and will end with a pig parade through the park. The YMCA's Health Fair will offer blood pressure screening to vision/health/speech testing for children, while the 8K race will attract the athletes in the family. Live entertainment will include the popular Beatles tribute group The Peatles as well as Coppell's own Dave Alexander Band.

"When you think about it, \$3 for a weekend pass is nothing. Parents can bring the kids back again and again," notes Ms. Cook, "and it's all for a good cause." In addition to weekend and daily passes, the festival also offers a "Family Squeal Deal" weekend pass for up to five people.

Pig Fest is set for April 25-27 at Andy Brown Park West, 363 N. Denton Tap Road in Coppell. Hours will be Friday 6 to 11 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.