

One thing hasn't changed for the scaled-down Boulder County Fair

By Patricia Logan

About now, Clarence Kneebone would be setting up the last metal corral panels, straw bales and exhibit tables at the Boulder County Fairgrounds. For more than 25 years, he's been the man behind the scenes, making sure the grounds are set up so the 4H kids, animals and fairgoers can have a great experience. But the 87-year-old volunteer got his work done a week early this year. There just wasn't much to it with the fair curtailed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's going to be a whole different experience for everybody, to say the least," Kneebone said about the mostly virtual fair that starts Friday, July 31 and runs through Sunday, Aug. 9.

No ferris wheel to light up the Longmont night, no tractor pull, live music or swirls of cotton candy, no broncs, bulls or [fair queen](#) in bling atop her quarter horse. But the fair did salvage some in-person activities for the 4H kids to show off the animals they've been working on all year. There will be small classes with no more than 10 people, including judges and support staff. Competitors with cattle, pigs, goats, dogs and other 4H projects will load, show and pack up in a day.

Families and spectators will have to root for their favorites from home via a live video stream of the [events on Facebook](#). The site will also feature photos and videos of artwork, music and other entertainment.

At least there's that.

Unless you're Kneebone. "I don't have the set-up for that," he said. "I feel lost, disappointed that I can't be there to see the kids show." Kneebone has been involved in 4H one way or another for nearly 80 years. "It's all about the kids. Keep the kids on the right track and keep them going. Teaches them responsibility and morals and just makes them a better kid."

He started in 4H when he was eight, growing up on a dairy farm in Lafayette. He kept at it until he was 19. The Korean War took him off the farm. When he came back, he picked up 4H again as a club leader and continued for decades. When farming and ranching started utilizing new technology, he stepped aside and concentrated his volunteer efforts on the Boulder County Fair.

This year he's doing the set-up and tear-down with the help of a couple guys from the grounds crew. "I'm in pretty good shape for my age," he said. The tall, lean cowboy wears the proud tradition he's lived all his life - a white, western shirt with pearl-colored snaps, jeans, a big shiny belt buckle and cream-colored cowboy hat trimmed in leather and sterling.

If it weren't for the pandemic, he'd have a lot more help. Kneebone normally supervises a crew of Boulder County Jail inmates on work release. He started the program in 1996. "I enjoy working with inmates. They are a big help. If it wasn't for the inmates, there wouldn't be a county fair. There is so much work to be done in the background that people don't realize," he said. "And they don't bring any inmates out that [aren't] good. No sex offenders or felonies. They're just in there for stupid things. Good workers and very polite."

The inmates get to leave their cells behind, make a little money, move their bodies and breathe fresh air. It's hard work and long hours. In a normal year, Kneebone starts working with his crew a week before the fair, ten days during the fair and a couple of weeks after. He stays in an RV at

the campground next to the fairgrounds and doesn't go home. His days can start as early as 6 a.m. and end as late as 10 p.m. "You're just go, go, go all day long," he said.

His wife Eleanor helps make it all possible. She brings him meals and supplements the inmates' jail food with tasty snacks. When the program first started, she drove the van to pick up the inmates. The jail eventually took over those duties.

This August will be much quieter for the couple and for the community. The full-on fair will be missed. "It brings a lot of revenue to town. People come in with trucks and trailers to the campground. They're going to restaurants, buying gas," he said, adding that fairgoers will lose out too. "It's just a good education for everybody. A lot of the city folks don't have this experience. They can come out and talk first hand to us and see the animals and touch them."

Kneebone continues to live the life that he loves and supports. He cares for a small herd of cattle "for another fella" on his property off 75th Street near Gunbarrel. Even though he won't be heading for the campground, he can take comfort knowing he got a last task done before opening day on Friday - the photo background where the 4H winners can get their pictures taken with their animals.

The kids won't necessarily know how everything was so carefully set up for them, but others do, including Boulder County Fair manager Linda Boldt. "He is (a) volunteer extraordinaire. He's always positive, always excited and always doing it for the youth. He does it for those kids. He is positive no matter how tired he is. No matter what goes on, he's positive and happy," said Boldt.

This year is testing that sunny outlook. Kneebone admits he's sad that he can't be there in person, but he understands that everyone needs to be safe. He's doing his part to make the scaled-back fair a success. "If they need me I'm ready to go and help out wherever I can."

Kneebone is already looking forward to next year. "As long as I'm able, I'll be there." And besides, "I'm about the only one who knows where the stuff is."