

Commissioner's column

You will notice a lot of information this month about agricultural fairs, because it is officially fair season. Close to 40 agricultural fairs are held across the state each year, showcasing the diversity of agriculture from the mountains to the coast, highlighting the skills and talents of our residents and offering up fun, family-friendly events for communities big and small.

I am proud of all the hard work that goes into organizing and managing a county fair. These events are true labors of love for the people involved, and I encourage you to support your local fairs and maybe even consider getting involved yourself.

Educating people about where their food comes from is a big task, and county fairs can help share this message with the non-farming public by drawing attention to the agriculture in their own communities.

Many people might not be aware that agriculture and agribusiness represents our No. 1 industry, and that its economic contribution is \$84 billion. Where it is easier to note the economic impact of a large business in a community, the collective impact of the many family farms in a community is a little less obvious.

We want to celebrate North Carolina agriculture for all of its contributions, and the fairs offer a fun way to do that.

Speaking of celebrating, this year marks the 150th edition of the N.C. State Fair, so we are busy planning some fun promotions that tie in to this milestone birthday and also preparing the grounds for this year's activities.

If you enjoy entering the competitions, you can find all the information you need online at www.ncstatefair.org/2017/Competitions/Entering/index.html. We have updated all the competition information for 2017, and several contests even tie into the 150th celebration theme, specifically for the Flower and Garden Show, Essay, Decorated Cakes and Kids Cookie Decorating competitions.

We are going to have some special promotions that I cannot talk about right now, but keep watching the Agricultural Review for updates.

The grounds are busy with a new building project and with improvements on other buildings.

For those of you who attended last year, you might have noticed that the chinking had not been completed on the new blacksmith shop. We have been busy this year putting the finishing touches on the blacksmith shop. The chinking has been completed, and we are fairly close to wrapping up a project to add a deck onto the back of the building, overlooking the flower and garden show area.

Heritage Circle is getting another log building this year, and work is under way on this ambitious project. Again, we are recycling old logs to construct this building, which fits into the style of Heritage Circle. The building will be near the Tobacco Pavilion, and will include more public restrooms.

I am excited for you to see these improvements. They really tie together my vision for Heritage Circle.

Another big project going on is the replacement of the roof on Dorton Arena. Because this building is so unique, this is anything but an ordinary roofing project.

Dorton Arena is on the National Historic Registry and is a National Civil Engineering Landmark. In architectural and engineering circles, Dorton Arena represents the first use of a cable-supported roof system. This system holds down an area the size of a football field without columns, which I'd say is pretty remarkable.

While those of us who are used to looking at this building frequently might be inclined to take it for granted, Dorton Arena actually draws visitors from all over the world to see this engineering feat.

We've had visitors from the Czech Republic, Japan, Sweden, Russia, the Netherlands, France, Germany and other areas come specifically to look at its construction.

We'll be busy working on these and other projects, and we'll be announcing some other fair news in the coming months. Go ahead and mark your calendar for Oct. 12-22 for the N.C. State Fair, and make your plans to check out to one of the county fairs that are listed on page 2 of the paper.