

Paid attendance hits 25-year high during successful 2009 Fair

2009-09-23



Paid attendance at the New York State Fair hit its highest level in at least a quarter of a century, and overall Fair attendance grew more than it has in a decade, as families flocked to one of the most successful state Fairs in New York history.

This year's paid admissions were boosted by a 21 percent increase in advance ticket sales - the biggest one-year jump in 16 years. Crowds hit historic milestones at Chevy Court, the Mohegan Sun Grandstand and the Strates Shows Midway, yet the 2009 Fair was one of the safest and smoothest in memory.

"This truly was a great New York State Fair," Fair Director Dan O'Hara said. "I think it's clear that families responded to Gov. David Paterson's call for New Yorkers to vacation close to home and that they saw the Fair as a fun, affordable and absolutely unique option. We worked hard to make sure families would get their money's worth at the Fair, and it is extremely gratifying to see that our efforts appear to have paid off."

In all, 971,273 people attended the Fair, which ran from Aug. 27 through Sept. 7. Signs of the 2009 Fair's success include:

Paid admissions

A total of 558,267 people bought tickets for the 2009 Fair giving it the highest paid attendance of any New York State Fair since 1984 and probably in the 163-year history of the Fair. That includes the record-setting 2001 Fair, in which overall attendance topped 1 million, but tens of thousands more non-paid tickets were issued than in 2009.

Overall attendance

Overall attendance at this year's New York State Fair was the sixth highest on record. It topped last year's total by 43,402 people - a 4.7 percent increase. The Fair hasn't grown that much in a single year since 1999.

Advance ticket sales

Much of the increase in paid admissions stemmed from a jump in advance-sale tickets, which give Fairgoers a 40-percent discount. The number of tickets sold in advance for the 2009 Fair rose by 44,945 this year, making 2009 the third-biggest year for advance-sale tickets in 17 years.

Public safety

New York State Police officials said the 2009 Fair was one of the safest in memory, thanks in large part to advance planning and cooperation between local, state and federal agencies. Traffic flowed smoothly in and out of the Fair parking lots, and 233,873 people took advantage of Centro bus routes to the Fair - an increase of 7,534 from last year. "From our standpoint, the result was an extremely quiet Fair," said New York State Police Troop D Commander, Maj. Donald L.X. DePass Jr. "There were very few reportable incidents or arrests, and no serious injuries during the 2009 State Fair."

Chevy Court

Chevy Court drew more than 150,000 Fairgoers to 24 free performances during the Fair - a number that appears to be a record - according to estimates by concert producer Triangle Talent. The concert schedule featured five performers who drew estimated crowds of more than 10,000 people to their shows, including the rock band Shinedown, which appears to have drawn the biggest Chevy Court crowd since Sonny and Cher performed there in 1972. This year's Fair marked the inauguration of a new Chevy Court format that doubled the number of high-quality entertainers on the Fair's primary free stage.

Mohegan Sun Grandstand

Average attendance at the Mohegan Sun Grandstand's seven concerts topped the record set during the 2008 State Fair. An

average of 9,248 people attended each of this year's seven grandstand concerts; a 4.6 percent increase from last year's record-breaking average of 8,833 fans for each of the season's concerts.

Strates Shows Midway

"As far as we're concerned, it was the biggest gross we ever had at the New York State Fair," said Jimmy Strates, head of James E. Strates Shows Inc., which operates the midway. "It was probably one of the smoothest Fairs we've ever had. There were tons of families and young people there and they all had a good time. It was definitely a great Fair, and we're just really proud to have been a part of it."

"Buy Local" initiatives

Fair visitors overwhelmingly support the Fair's efforts to promote New York products, and this year they took full advantage of several expanded opportunities to buy, eat or learn about items produced in New York State. An estimated one out of every 10 Fairgoers, for example, visited either the New York Café or the New York Grill; two new restaurants that served nothing but dishes prepared with EmpireState ingredients. Feedback from those patrons has been extremely positive. Visitors also took home three times as much fresh, New York produce as they did last year - thanks, in large part, to the re-location of the Fair's Farmer's Market to a spot near the main gate. The number of New York companies and organizations exhibiting in the Americraft Center of Progress Building, meanwhile, increased by more than 60 percent this year, due to the growth of the Fair's Vision NY initiative