

PETTINGS ZOOS: can, and do, occur safely according to officials

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recommendations would likely involve some costs.

The panel was formed last fall after the Fair became the focal point of an E-coli break out that resulted in 106 cases and the death of a toddler.

Are fair officials expecting lower turnout this year following the E-coli breakout? Responding to reporters at a press conference, Hastings acknowledged that concern. Another concern is weather. Last year it rained six days during the fair and attendance was down nearly 15,000.

State officials said last fall that consistent heavy rains during the fair may have played a role in spreading contamination by washing waste products to nearby parking lots and walking areas. Hastings said the Commission determined by environmental and epidemiologic analysis that the 2012 outbreak of E-coli pathogen likely resulted from direct animal contact and with soil contaminated by the animals at one particular petting zoo.

Many of the recommendations announced at a press conference by



CC Fair Manager Calvin Hastings spoke on behalf of fair officials, in regard to petting zoos, at Monday's press conference.

photo by LIB STEWART

county and state officials at the Cleveland County Health Department deal with sanitation measures. County Health Director Dorothea Wyant, chairperson, said the health department would provide training to Fair employees to review procedures for preventing the spread of diseases, one of those precautionary measures pointing to hand washing.

Wyant said the impact of the

2012 Fair Shiga Toxin producing E-coli (STEC) outbreak, with over 100 ill persons, including hospitalization and a death, required an extensive six-month review of fair practices and policies, including risks of human disease with this annual event.

Panelists concurred that while eliminating animal contact, including petting zoos, might prevent E-coli or other communicable disease outbreaks from occurring, most of these events can and do occur safely when preventive measures are taken, the public is educated about what they can do to prevent the risk, and the public follows recommendations.

While there is no guarantee that the disease outbreak will ever occur, she said the committee believes that following the recommendations put forward will further reduce the risks association with illness acquisition and disease transmission at the Shelby fair. Animal contact exhibits at sanctioned agricultural fairs, such as Cleveland County Fair, must adhere to the requirements in Aiden's Law and county fair officials say they were in compliance at the 2012 fair. The

fair is subject to inspections every year and in 2012 the animal contact exhibits were fully inspected by state and local health agencies and found to be in full compliance with all applicable laws.

Hastings said additional control measures, including signage and hand-washing stations, were also in place in areas not required under Aiden's law. Despite this level of compliance by the Fair, he said the outbreak demonstrates that outbreaks may occur even when thorough control measures have been implemented. As a result of the outbreak, the Cleveland County Health Department initiated a comprehensive review of Fair activities to further enhance health and safety of future editions of the Cleveland County Fair, Hastings said.

Some of the specific health and safety recommendations include:

- Provide a clear separation between all food vending and animal exhibits and animal entertainment. Most food vendors will be located along the main alley at the Fairgrounds with the last food vendor location at the Weathers Arena. Other food vendors will be located along the carnival ride locations.

No animal exhibits will be placed outside of the designated animal areas.

- Provide marked entranceways into the animal exhibit areas by some type of banners/gates, etc. with signage notifying fair patrons they are entering animal exhibit areas.

- Provide hand-washing stations at marked entrances and exits of animal exhibit so that the funneled traffic will be encouraged to wash their hands upon exiting.

- Commercial vendors may have displays within the animal areas.

- Locate hand-washing stations on each side of the food vendor strip.

- Provide pre-packaged, pre-portioned food condiments or make other arrangements to avoid public contact with hand pump devices, ketchup, mustard, vinegar, etc.

- Consider installing motion-sensor paper towel and soap dispensers.

- Consider restricting the number of patrons allowed at any one time in animal contact exhibits.

- Install underground drainage piping to handle surface water and run-off from animal areas.

NO INCREASE: for property taxes proposed

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county allocation in the budget totals \$27,249,570. Capital outlay will remain the same at \$1,550,000 and special capital projects will be funded at a total of \$1.2 million. The supplemental tax will increase by an estimated \$150,000 and the sales tax is expected to increase \$59,500.

The Sheriff's Office budget reflects an increase of 3.97% for a total appropriation of \$10,569,361. This budget includes the addition of 11 new Sheriff's vehicles to replace current high mileage vehicles as well as the conversion of two full-time hourly positions without benefits to full-time permanent positions with benefits. Both of these positions will be administrative support positions at the Detention Center.

No. 7 Fire District is requesting an increase of 1 cent for a total tax rate of 4 cents. The proposed budget includes a 2 cent increase in the county fire district tax. As the only source of funding, Fire District tax funds are used to support the Volunteer Fire Departments purchase of equipment and to provide required training for volunteers.

Cleveland County revenues, as proposed for 2013-14, include: sales tax and other taxes, 13.2%; permits, fees, interest, misc., 9.8%; fund reserves, 2.9%; federal, state and local funds, 2.9%; property tax, 71.2%; prior year taxes 2.2%; and current year taxes 69.0%.

The budget includes an increase of \$109,573 to \$1,590,573 in current expenditures for Cleveland Community College. Funding for capital projects will increase \$25,000 to \$100,000 for 2013-14 budget years.

The budget will appropriate \$161,000 to the Cleveland County Economic Development Partnership to be used in the recruitment of new businesses, as well as existing industry expansions. The budget is allocating \$110,000 for travel and tourism with a majority of funding coming from the local occupancy tax.

The overall appropriation of county funding for the Department of Social Services is \$7,869,324 for an increase in funding of 6.14 percent over the previous year. This increase is primarily due to a reduction in Federal and State funding for county mandated programs and services.

ECONOMY: leaders tout growth

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state. Also, there's a computer for every one and a half students in Cleveland County schools, Boyles said in his presentation.

The annual breakfast, held at the Patrick Senior Center and sponsored in part by the Kings Mountain Hospital, drew about 75 local officials, business leaders and members of the general public. In addition to Murphrey and Boyles, Cleveland County Commissioners Chairman Ronnie Hawkins and Senior Executive Director of the Kings Mountain Family YMCA Kevin Osbourne also spoke, among others.

The crime rate in Kings Mountain remains at 20-year lows, with arrests in 2012 numbering 474. The rate has been on a steady decline since

2001, which saw more than 1,100 arrests. In 2012 the police department answered 15,927 calls, down sharply from the 22,000 to 26,000 it was making annually when the crime rate was peaking about a decade ago, according to information provided by law enforcement officials.

The city's fire department answered 368 calls in the same year, with no loss of life, according to information provided by fire officials. The department continues to see a decline in the number of severe fire calls.

The Patrick Senior Center is scheduled for a \$1.1 million expansion project that includes a new reception and multipurpose rooms, an upgraded computer lab and a larger crafts room. The city and county have committed a total of \$450,000 to the

planned construction and improvements.

Look for more bike and pedestrian trails in Kings Mountain's future. The city has won grants and funding for improving or adding onto five projects including the Kings Mountain Gateway Trails, the Kings Mountain Bike Plan and the Eat Smart, Move More initiative - aimed at making exercise easier and more fun for residents.

The city achieved a Fit Community "Silver Level" from the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund last year.

In May, Kings Mountain's Main Street program was designated as an accredited National Main Street Program. The initiative aims to drive business and promote growth through revitalization and building strong public-private partnerships.

THE SAVVY SENIOR

By JIM MILLER
Editor



How Married Couples Can Boost Their Social Security Checks

Dear Savvy Senior,

I've heard that there are strategies available that can help married couples increase their Social Security benefits when they retire. My wife and I are approaching retirement age and would like to understand these options. What can you tell us?

Getting Prepared

If you're willing to wait to full retirement age and beyond, married couples have several unique claiming options that could actually add tens of thousands of dollars to your Social Security checks over your retirement. Here's what you should know.

Waiting Strategy

Before we go over the different benefit boosting options for married couples, it's important to know that the most commonly used strategy for increasing retirement benefits is to delay taking them.

While workers can start collecting their Social Security retirement benefits as early as age 62, postponing them to full retirement age (which is 66 if you were born between 1943

and 1954), or better yet to age 70, can make a big difference.

Let's say, for example, that you're eligible for a \$1,200 monthly benefit at age 62. By waiting to 66 your monthly benefit would increase to \$1,600. And by delaying to age 70, you would boost your benefit a whopping 76 percent to \$2,112. Delaying will also increase your wife's survivor benefit if you die first. Waiting, however, beyond age 70 will not increase your benefits.

Claim and Suspend

In addition to waiting, Social Security also offers two other little known strategies for married couples, but you must be at least full retirement age (currently 66) to use them.

The first one is called "claim and suspend" (see ssa.gov/retire2/suspend.htm) that allows a worker at full retirement age to file for Social Security so their spouse can begin collecting a spousal benefit, but asks to receive their own benefit later.

This is best suited for one-earner couples where one spouse worked

full-time and the other spouse did not work outside the home or did not work long enough to qualify for Social Security retirement benefits.

Here's an example of how it works: Let's say that you are age 66, but want to keep working until 70 to collect a higher benefit. Let's also say your wife is a nonworking spouse who just turned 62 and would like to start receiving spousal benefits on your work record. The problem is she can't get them until you sign up. So you file for your Social Security benefits but request an immediate suspension which allows your wife to claim spousal benefits, without locking you into a lower payment for life. Then when you do decide to start collecting, at age 70, you end the suspension and receive a higher benefit for delaying.

This strategy can also be used if you have children under 18, or 19 if they are still attending high school, or are disabled. Each dependent child is eligible for up to 50 percent of the retiree's full benefit. And, if any child is younger than 16, your spouse can also qualify for additional benefits as

a caregiver, even if she's under age 62.

Claim Twice

For two-career couples, the second strategy known as "claim twice," lets you collect Social Security (at full retirement age) first as a spouse and later using your own work record.

Here's how it works: Let's say that you are 66 and would like to continue working until age 70. But, your wife started collecting her benefits on her own work record at age 64. You could file a "restricted" application with Social Security and collect a spousal benefit which is half of what your wife gets. Then, once you reach 70, you stop receiving the spousal benefit and switch to your own benefit, which will be 32 percent higher than the benefit you would have collected at your full retirement age.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.

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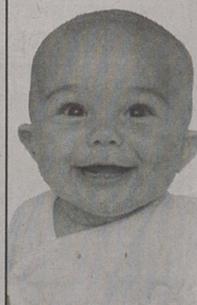
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