



# News Release

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## OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

22 Market Street ♦ Poughkeepsie, NY 12601  
Phone: (845) 486-2000 ♦ Fax: (845) 486-2021

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For Further Information:  
Colleen Pillus, Communications Director  
(845) 486-2000

## **‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday’ Returns to Dutchess County Fair**

Poughkeepsie, NY... Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro and Dutchess County Fairgrounds President Andy Imperati invite individuals of all abilities and their families to the sixth annual “ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday” at the Dutchess County Fair on Thursday, Aug. 25th. Individuals with developmental disabilities and their families are able to enjoy the Dutchess County Fair ahead of the crowds with a special early gate opening at 9 a.m. and sensory sensitive hours on the carnival midway from 9:30 a.m. to noon. Tickets can be purchased at the gate or online at [dutchessfair.com](http://dutchessfair.com). Discounted pre-sale tickets can be purchased online through August 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The Dutchess County Fair was among the first county fairs throughout the United States to offer a sensory friendly day to fairgoers. Several county fairs throughout the state and country have since adopted the sensory-sensitive model, including last month’s Saratoga County Fair.

County Executive Molinaro said, “The Dutchess County Fair is an annual tradition adored by many, and we are so happy we can again make it accessible to all. Since its inception in 2016, ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday’ has become popular and successful, and this year will be no different.

We appreciate the Dutchess County Agricultural Society, the entire Fair team, and Dutchess County 4-H for promoting the message to ThinkDIFFERENTLY and make treasured events, such as the Fair, accessible to all. I look forward to seeing you on 'ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday.'

The Dutchess County Fair is an honored annual tradition, featuring live entertainment, carnival rides, agricultural exhibits, horticultural displays, and much more. For some individuals and families with special needs, however, the lights, sounds and crowds can make it difficult, particularly for those with sensory processing issues, to enjoy all the Dutchess County Fair has to offer. The flashing lights and loud music, in addition to waiting lines for rides, can create issues. "ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday" gives people of all abilities the opportunity to take part in fair activities without stress and anxiety.

The Fair is offering individuals of all abilities and their families early entry to the fairgrounds on Aug. 25<sup>th</sup> starting at 9 a.m., an hour before the official 10 a.m. start time. The early opening is a chance to enjoy the fairgrounds, including the animal barns on Livestock Hill and the Dutchess County 4-H Exhibit Hall, ahead of the crowds. Though not every attraction and exhibit will be open at 9 a.m., the soft opening provides families a chance to ease into their day at the fair, ahead of the arrival of the crowds.

Another advantage of "ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday," Powers Great American Midway area will open at 9:30 a.m. and will be "sensory sensitive" until noon. The flashing lights, music and other sounds and noises will be turned off throughout the morning for those impacted by sensory processing issues, giving them the opportunity to enjoy the rides without the drawbacks that lights and sounds can cause. The early midway opening also means fewer people and little to no waiting time for the carnival rides, making it easier for individuals who need extra time or have difficulty with the distractions of crowds.

Dutchess County ThinkDIFFERENTLY staff and ambassadors, along with Dutchess County Parks and the Cornell Cooperative Extension, Dutchess County's 4-H program "Flourishing Farmers" for children of all abilities will be stationed at the Fair all week long to provide information and resources for families and individuals, answering any questions at the ThinkDIFFERENTLY/4-H tent, located next to the Dutchess County Dairy Committee milkshake booth, near the Gate 2 entrance. ThinkDIFFERENTLY will also host a "Quiet Space," located directly behind the ThinkDIFFERENTLY tent. This area will provide a calm place for those families and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who need a break from the activity of the Fair.

Mr. Imperati said, “We are happy to host ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday’ at the Dutchess County Fair again this year. We pride ourselves on having the fair be accessible and fun for all. We’ve received lots of positive feedback about ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday, and we hope many can attend and make this year even better!”

County Executive Molinaro’s “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative, launched in 2015, is a call to action to help make Dutchess County a community that is supportive and inclusive for individuals of all abilities. 100 villages, towns, cities and counties across New York State have made the commitment to “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” in their own communities.

ThinkDIFFERENTLY ambassadors will also be joined by representatives of the Youth Opportunity Union (YOU), who will be sharing information and requesting input on the project. The YOU will be a state-of-the-art youth center for children and families from throughout Dutchess County. It will be built on the site of the former YMCA in the City of Poughkeepsie and serve as home to the County’s Path to Promise cradle-to-career initiative.

The Dutchess County Fair runs Tuesday, Aug. 23<sup>rd</sup> through Sunday, Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>, opening at 10 a.m. each day. Children 11 and under are free. On Thursday, Aug. 25<sup>th</sup>, families coming to enjoy “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” Thursday must enter the Fair at the main ticket gate, at the Welcome Center, conveniently located near accessible parking. For more information and a full schedule of the Dutchess County Fair’s events, see [dutchessfair.com/the-fair](http://dutchessfair.com/the-fair).