



News Release

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday’ is Back at 177th Dutchess County Fair

Poughkeepsie, NY... The popular “ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday,” an inclusive collaboration between the Dutchess County Agricultural Society and Dutchess County Government, returns to the Dutchess County Fair for its seventh year on Thursday, Aug. 24th, offering people of all abilities and their families the opportunity to enjoy the Dutchess County Fair. Fair organizers offer these visitors entrance ahead of the crowds with an 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.

County Executive William F.X. O’Neil said, “We are excited to partner again with Dutchess County Agricultural Society President Andy Imperati to host ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday’ at the Fair. Historically, this annual tradition has attracted a large crowd as the inclusive and sensory friendly offerings provide a fun and interactive experience for people of all abilities. A big thank you to Dutchess County Agricultural Society, the entire Fair team, and Dutchess County 4-H for encouraging others to ThinkDIFFERENTLY and help make our community an inclusive place for all.”

On ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday, the Fair offers individuals of all abilities and their family’s early entry to the fairgrounds 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, enjoy some of the child and adults rides ahead of the arrival of the crowds.

Mr. Imperati said, “Everyone deserves the opportunity to enjoy the fun and allure of the Dutchess County Fair, which is why ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday’ is so important. We take extreme pleasure in

seeing the smiling faces of those who join us each year, and we know this year will not disappoint with many inclusive attractions and experiences.”

Providing another benefit of “ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday,” Powers Great American Midway area will open with limited rides, at 9:30 a.m. and will be sensory-sensitive until noon. 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 distractions 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 difficulties with crowds.

Dutchess County Government’s ThinkDIFFERENTLY staff and ambassadors 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 renowned Dutchess County Dairy Committee milkshake booth, near the Gate 2 entrance. Part of the ThinkDIFFERENTLY tent will be designated as a quiet space for those who need a respite.

ThinkDIFFERENTLY events will take place throughout Fair week including the “GrowDIFFERENTLY” exhibit, which will feature supplemental Recycled Garden Art submitted by individuals of all ages with special needs. A full schedule of ThinkDIFFERENTLY offerings at the Fair can be found [online](#).

The Dutchess County Fair was the first in New York State, and among the first in the nation, to offer a sensory-friendly day to fairgoers. Several county fairs throughout the state have since adopted the sensory-sensitive model, including Saratoga and Erie counties. Former County Executive Marc Molinaro created the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative in 2015 as a call to action to help make Dutchess County a supportive and inclusive community for individuals of all abilities. On “ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday,” Rep. Molinaro will read a story as part of AgriVenture, at 10 a.m. in Building E.

The Dutchess County Fair runs Tuesday, Aug. 22nd through Sunday, Aug. 27th, opening at 10 a.m. each day; children 11 and under are free. On Thursday, Aug. 24th, families coming to enjoy “ThinkDIFFERENTLY Thursday” must enter the Fair at the main ticket gate, at the Welcome Center, conveniently located near accessible parking. Visitors needing sensory assistance can visit the Fair information booth, across from the Fair souvenir booth, or visit the ThinkDIFFERENTLY 4-H tent on Livestock Hill.

For more information and a full schedule of the Dutchess County Fair’s events, see dutchessfair.com/the-fair.