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Big name rodeo stars help launch festival in Brant

Two-time International Professional Rodeo Association champion steer wrestler offers to donate winnings to Help a Child Smile

Posted By Cate Breaugh

Posted 14 days ago



Pictured above is the Brant County Canada Day Western Festival organizing committee at the media event on Saturday to officially launch the event. Photo by Cate Breaugh

A spontaneous gesture of support for children with cancer capped a media event held Saturday at the Paris Fairgrounds to launch the upcoming Brant County Canada Day Western Festival. The first time rodeo festival will roll into Paris for five days beginning June 30.

Two time International Professional Rodeo Association champion steer wrestler Matt Mousseau's on the spot offer to donate any winnings from the festival to Help a Child Smile certainly brought a smile to the face of Joyce Hutson, who represented the charitable organization at the event.

"That was amazing. I had to hug him," a jubilant Hutson told The Paris Star. Help a Child Smile provides opportunities like special trips to children being treated for cancer at McMaster Children's Hospital. The group, formed in 1987, has partnered along with the Paris Agricultural Society and the Festival organization hoping to raise funds at the festival to help more sick children smile.

Hutson said that her group's main focus at the festival would be to provide fun for families who attend. And they hope to use the \$7,500 minimum donation promised from the event to help clear the backlog of children waiting for attention from Help a Child Smile. Although the group is still considering what kind of events they will be involved at the festival, Hutson, kitted out in a cowboy hat and western garb for the media event, said that she thinks the event will be a "hoot".

Organizers want that for the Festival and so much more.

They hope that the local celebration of all things western may eventually put Paris on the map as the go to place for rodeo in Ontario. Similar to a small town called St. Tite in Quebec where an annual 10- day festival attracts almost a

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half a million people bringing not only a boost to the extreme sport of rodeo but big benefits to the local economy.

"We need rodeo in Ontario," said Mousseau, who hails from Corbett, Ontario near Grand Bend. The steer wrestler said that as it is now, people like him have to drive all over to have a crack at winning the big money in rodeo. Twenty-seven year old Mousseau, who has competed in rodeos all over North America, said that he thought the Brant County Festival would do well if it could attract 5,000 to 6,000 people to start off. He also said that to draw crowds, the festival would have to offer more than just one event.

And that's the plan. The five-day festival will feature a trade show, concerts, two professional rodeo performances, a performance of high school rodeo and a time-event challenge as well as a barrel racing training clinic by Troy Crumrine followed by a three-day nationally sanctioned barrel race. There will also be two licensed areas on the grounds plus cowboy breakfasts (like the Olympic breakfast recently held by PAS) and a steak dinner. Event goers can also enjoy on site camping.

For the Paris Agricultural Society, it's a chance to get closer to its agricultural roots— something that the organization says people want. For Parisians who miss the Canada Day celebrations that used to be held here, it's a chance to once again mark their country's birthday with a local bash. And PAS General Manager Russell Press said that organizers haven't ruled out the possibility of Canada Day fireworks at the festival, but only if a group steps forward to help make it a reality.

Award winning rodeo emcee Joe Scully will be the voice of the festival and is responsible for the event's website www.BrantCountyWesternFest.com where competitors and spectators alike will find all the information they need. He brings years of experience and his encyclopedic knowledge of rodeo to the job as well as the resources of rodeo production company Rawhide Rodeo.

"We want to build this event to bigger and better things to come. We are excited to be working with the Paris Fair board." Scully said that festivals like this one are golden opportunities for young people who are interested in rodeo, "It's how we create our world champions". Like Scully's brother Ross who is the first cowboy from an Ontario high school to get a full ride scholarship in college rodeo. "It's really exciting. They are getting an education and learning great values," Scully said. The festival will offer participants a chance to qualify for the National high school rodeo and a chance to win buckles, saddles, scholarships and to strut their stuff before rodeo talent scouts.

The open mic night at the festival will also be a golden opportunity for fledgling country entertainers. Press announced that the winner of the event would get a coveted contract to perform at the 2010 Paris Fair in the beer garden. Press was also pumped to announce festival concert headliner James Warren. "He's a real cowboy's artist and we're real happy to have him here," said Press.

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Champion professional barrel racer Robin Williamson was part of the line-up at the media event. She said that she was thrilled to be part of the festival. "If you do it right and everyone pulls it together it will be something," Williamson said.

Press said the PAS was "blown away" by the caliber of people the event has already attracted. "There are two world champions sitting here at this launch," Press pointed out.

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