

Luke Mahin – Courtland Fun Day

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Fun Day. No, not Sunday, as in the first day of the week or an ice cream treat. I refer to an event called Fun Day in Courtland. For 50 years, the rural community of Courtland has put on a community Fun Day. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Luke Mahin is the economic development director for Republic County and is the one who told me about Fun Day in his hometown of Courtland.

In 1964, businessmen in Courtland wanted to have a community celebration. It morphed into an annual community picnic and much more. It is called Courtland Fun Day. Posters, koozies and t-shirts commemorate the event yearly.

The event is held annually on the last Saturday of July. During the week preceding Fun Day, called Fun Week, a downtown clean-up is held on Monday. "Everybody pitches in to clean up the town," Luke said. "They will literally bring brooms downtown and sweep the sidewalks." Talk about a hands-on way to take responsibility for your community's well-being!

Wednesday is the set-up day for the entertainment stage, seating, and displays downtown. Activities begin on Friday and continue with a full day on Saturday. The number of activities is incredible for a community this size.

Friday night has often featured a barbecue contest and talent show, with local bands performing. Tickets for this contest have been known to sell out in ten minutes. Twelve to fourteen cookers compete in the barbecue contest. In addition to ribs and shrimp, one can find such delicacies as fried pickles and barbecue cupcakes.

Saturday is a huge day. The beer garden is located in an empty lot on main street, with parachutes providing shade. Activities vary from year-to-year depending on the theme, but over time they have included such things as a bake sale, sand volleyball tournament, cake walk, hot air balloon rides, three-on-three basketball tournament, mutton bustin,' archery shoot, 5K fun run, a rock-paper-scissors tournament, and much, much more.

Courtland has found ways to celebrate its agricultural assets and build on them. For example, the parade includes lots of tractors and combines. A plastic duck race takes place at the local irrigation canal. (There are those agricultural assets.)

A hay tarp is set up with water running over it to be a belly slide. The corn pile features a huge mound of kernels of field corn in which the local bank has placed donated coins for the kids to dig and find. (Sounds like agricultural assets again.)

Another big draw is the pit chicken barbecue. Huge numbers of half-chickens are slow-cooked on an open-air cooker. One of the guys who helps cook is a character named Tater. The liquid concoction which he shares with the other cooks is called Taterade.

In contrast, a live chicken can be found in another contest called Chicken Bingo. For this contest, one buys a chance on a particular square, and the winner is determined by where the chicken drops its droppings. (Another agricultural asset, but not exactly a game of skill.)

Some hilarious attractions from previous years were brought back in 2014. These include the belly dancers (a bunch of big guys with their bare bellies painted in various

designs), the ladies who do a choreographed precision dance with their lawn chairs, and Republic County Riverdance (a bunch of guys in tank tops, kilts over cutoffs, and workboots, dancing to Celtic music). On top of everything else (pun intended), a ping pong ball drop will drop into city park hundreds of ping pong balls marked with prizes.

“I look forward to this more than Christmas,” Luke Mahin said. For the 50th anniversary celebration, some 3,000 people attended. That’s a remarkable achievement for a rural community like Courtland, population 285 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to facebook.com/courtlandfunday.

Fun Day. Not Sunday, but the Courtland Fun Day celebration in Courtland. We salute Luke Mahin and all the volunteers who are making a difference with their creative ways of holding a community celebration. It makes for a very fun day.

And there’s more. Luke also works with a remarkable Internet marketing company. We’ll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.