



EL DORADO COUNTY FAIR

"SQUEALS & WHEELS"

JUNE 14-17, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 16, 2007

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FAIR CONTESTANTS VIE TO EARN A PLACE AT THE TABLE

The floral arrangement is stunning. The glasses sparkle. The menu is healthy and scrumptious. Every item is appropriately selected and is in its rightful place.

Coordinating a successful dinner party takes time, talent and a flair for entertainment. But setting the table for that party is truly an art form.

And a judged one at that.

"The history of table setting judging evolved from flower arrangements," explained Meda Benefield, table setting judge. "The florals were placed on dinner tables and eventually came to be surrounded by place settings, establishing a new category of judging."

For more than 8 years, Benefield has been judging Table Setting at county and state fairs, and is prepared to serve as judge again at the El Dorado County Fair from June 14-17, 2007. She learned this trade at the side of another judge.

She noted that most restaurants do not set tables according to the Fair's rules of Table Setting, so winning a blue ribbon in this event means studying correct settings in flower arrangements class, through home economics or 4H clubs.

"Restaurants usually stick napkins in glasses, which is not the correct way," she stated. They usually focus more on function than form. But winning entries combine both.

While she has never seen a bad setting, she looks for and awards points for tables that are appropriately aligned with the theme outlined in the County Fair's Entry Guide.

"If the menu is formal, then the setting must also be," she noted. "You wouldn't serve barbecued steak and green salad on a formally set table."

She cites an example of someone who had entered her table setting around the theme of the World's Fair held in San Francisco in 1915. "Her menu was printed on a replica of that World's Fair program, and the menu was based on food that would have been served at that time, including ice cream cones, which were popular."

Generally, each age category offers two themes on which to base your table setting. The contestant will select a menu that is well balanced, colorful and nutritious and based on their chosen theme.

They set the table with appropriately selected dinnerware. Added Benefield, "If you're serving salad, then you must have a plate or bowl; if you're offering wine, you must have a wine glass."

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But not all themes are so formal nor do they need to be. In fact, Benefield has judged entries that are informal but creative, including a setting using a camping theme with camping tableware and another based on a racing theme, complete with racing flag salt and pepper shakers.

One year, Benefield judged 54 junior entries in table setting, which delighted her. "I usually don't get that many junior entries, but I commented on each one of them." Judging is open, which means you can talk with Benefield after the judging takes place to learn how points were awarded or subtracted from your overall score.

"I know nothing about the entries before judging. I just show up and judge based on originality and how well the setting matches the selected themes."

So plan the menu, select your dinnerware and practice setting the table, and for your next dinner party, you may have a blue ribbon to complement your table.

Go to www.eldoradocountyfair.org for entry and theme details or call 621-5860 for an Entry Guide.