

Rain Did Not Dampen Durham Fair Spirit

I am writing this column exactly one week after a most unusual and challenging Durham Fair. I am in utter amazement of how well everyone responded, from the fairgoers themselves to the volunteer workers. I saw a lot of colorful boots and umbrellas and more importantly, I saw a lot of smiles. The rain did not dampen the Durham Fair spirit. As much as the three days of the Durham Fair may be disruptive to our community, it is also the reason why our sense of community is so strong. It gives us a reason to work together for a common cause, see each other socially in a safe, friendly environment and to feel a sense of belonging to something bigger than ourselves. Very few communities have an event such as the Durham Fair that evokes such civic pride. "Social capital" is a term used by political scientists and economists to describe the value of social networks to a community. As I walked around the fair on Friday, I realized that our "social capital fund" is well endowed. For that, I am most grateful.

I am also grateful for all the hard work that it takes to run such an event. I especially want to commend Durham Fair President Gene Chiappetta and his fair personnel, Durham Public Works and Building and Health officials, members of the fire, ambulance and emergency services departments including the Connecticut State Police. Yes, we knew the rain was coming. In fact, it was one of those rare occasions when the forecasts were accurate. Contingency plans and precautions were in place and stockpiles of materials were strategically located. However, in the end, Mother Nature reminded us that she was in charge. It was near impossible to handle that much water in such a short period of time. There were some issues brought to my attention by some of our residents and I assure you that they will be addressed for the next fair. Each year we learn from our experiences and try to make the proper adjustments for the following fair.

The Durham Fair and the Town of Durham are moving swiftly to restore the town green and White's Farm. There is equipment outside my window on the green today working to remove the stone process that was laid down for safety purposes as well as all the muddy soil. Once stabilized, the soil will be aerated down approximately 15-18 inches which will aid growth when seeded. Enriched topsoil will be applied and graded in a way to foster better drainage. We appreciate the timely attention that the Fair is giving to the green so that we can take advantage of the rest of the growing season.

The physical damage caused by the storm will be repaired. But the washout will definitely affect our local civic and non-profit agencies including the fair. We have been the beneficiaries of many riches raised at the Durham Fair, from scholarships, park enhancements, food banks, fuel assistance and more. I'm not so worried though. We will find a way to meet our needs. After all, the Durham Fair spirit is in our hearts and our "social capital" is strong.