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# BUCKWHEAT FESTIVAL

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# Time for buckwheat cakes

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM  
DPNews@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — When someone says “Buckwheat Festival,” the first thing that pops into many people’s minds involves the buckwheat cakes.

Buckwheat Festival General Chairman Evan Hardesty said growing up he didn’t particularly like the sourness of buckwheat cakes.

“Now I love them,” he said. “I like the ones they make here at the community building with the buckwheat cake and sausage dinners.”

Hardesty said it takes several hundred volunteers working shifts to keep up with the demands for the dinners.

Assistant Buckwheat Chairman Chase Thomas said it takes five tons of buckwheat flour and 60,000 sausage patties to provide enough dinners to last throughout the festival.

“We’ve been serving buckwheat cakes since 1938,” he said. “We used to serve them at the fireman’s breakfast. I grew up eating them. It’s what you do when you’re growing up in Preston County.”

An article by WVU Extension Agent Tom McConnell in the San Francisco Bak-

ing Institute and the West Virginia Small Farm Advocate explains why buckwheat became so popular in West Virginia.

According to the article, mountain farmers learned to rely on buckwheat to supply food and feed. Its reliability was confirmed, some say, in 1816 when the great volcano Tambora erupted and spewed 11 cubic miles of debris and dust across the world, lowered the earth’s mean temperature 1 degree Celsius, shortened the growing season by half, and caused the last great subsistence crisis of the western world the next year. That next year, 1817, was referred to as the “year with no summer.”

In the article, McConnell said a piece of farmer lore he learned was that during “the year with no summer” farmers sowed and planted their crops only to have them all frozen in July. All they had was a little buckwheat that was left over in their granaries. They sowed the last seed they swept up from their granary floors and harvested a crop that carried the farmers and their animals through the winter.

According to the article, buckwheat can produce a crop in 70 days. It also possesses the capacity to tiller (sprout



Buckwheat Festival photo

Five tons of buckwheat flour and 60,000 sausage patties are needed to provide enough dinners to last throughout the Preston County Buckwheat Festival.

many stalks from one seed). This allows farmers to harvest a near normal crop even when the stand is weak due to challenged seed bed preparation or a lack of seed.

He said buckwheat doesn’t require as much nitrogen as other crops and can be planted on rough ground. According to McConnell, buckwheat is well suited for organic production. It requires no herbicides to control weeds and can be used as a “smother crop and also a green

manure crop” in vegetable rotation.

In 2018 and 2019, the first two buckwheat cake eating contests were held in the Mill Room at the community building. Attorney David Brown was chairman of the event. There was a \$10 fee to participate in the contest, and was limited to 12 participants. Each contestant has a cup of coffee, a bottle of water, syrup and butter and 12 buckwheat cakes. The winner is the one who finishes all 12 cakes first.

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## FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

### TUESDAY

9 a.m.-3 p.m., Market steers, market lambs and market goats arrive  
 6-10 p.m., Market swine arrive  
 2-8 p.m., Exhibits entered in Memorial North  
 3-4 p.m., Market steer weigh-in and photo-taking  
 4-5 p.m., Lambs/goats weigh-in and photos

### WEDNESDAY

7 a.m.-1 p.m., Market swine weigh in and photos  
 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Judging of exhibits in Memorial North (closed to public)  
 8 a.m.-3 p.m., All remaining livestock arrive  
 8 a.m., Sheep Showmanship Contest and Market Lamb Show  
 1 p.m., Goat Showmanship Contest and Market Goat Show  
 1-2 p.m., Weighing of feeder calf and prospect market steer  
 4-8 p.m., Buckwheat cakes and sausage dinners (Community Building)  
 6 p.m., Carnival opens  
 6-9 p.m., Bingo  
 6:30 p.m., Judging of market steers

### THURSDAY

8 a.m., Swine Showmanship Contest and Market Swine Show  
 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Buckwheat cakes and sausage dinners (Community Building)  
 Noon-10 p.m., Arts and Crafts Buildings open  
 Noon-10:00 p.m., Exhibit Buildings open  
 Noon, Carnival opens  
 2 p.m., Judging of feeder calves and prospect market steers  
 5-10 p.m., Beerfest (next to music stage)  
 5:30 p.m., Purebred Sheep Show/Breeding Goat Show/Dairy Goat Show  
 6-10 p.m., Bingo (games pause during parade)  
 7:30 p.m., Firemen's Parade  
 5-11 p.m., Local Band Night (music stage)

### FRIDAY

8 a.m.-7 p.m., Buckwheat cakes and sausage dinners (Community Building)  
 8 a.m., Ladies & Shepherds Lead  
 9 a.m., Royalty Breakfast (by invitation only)  
 9:30 a.m., Judging of cattle  
 10 a.m., Carnival opens  
 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Arts and Crafts Buildings open

10 a.m.-10 p.m., Exhibit Buildings open  
 Noon, Coronation of Queen Ceres and King Buckwheat  
 Noon-6 p.m., Buckwheat Waffle Cones (Community Building – Mill Room)  
 2 p.m., School Day Parade  
 2-10 p.m., Beerfest (next to music stage)  
 3:30 p.m., Lamb Dressing Contest (Cow Palace)  
 4-10 p.m., Bingo  
 4:30-10 p.m., Concert (music stage)  
 6 p.m., Beef Showmanship Contest, followed by Supreme Champion Showman

### SATURDAY

7:30-9:30 a.m., Ag Olympics  
 8 a.m.-8 p.m., Buckwheat cakes and sausage dinners (Community Building)  
 10 a.m., Carnival rides open  
 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Arts & Crafts Buildings open  
 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Exhibit Buildings open  
 Noon, Buckwheat Mile  
 Noon, Farmer's Day Parade  
 Noon-6 p.m., Buckwheat Waffle Cones (Community Building – Mill Room)  
 Noon-10 p.m., Beerfest (next to music stage)

2 p.m., Youth Livestock Award Ceremony  
 4 p.m., Youth livestock sale in Cow Palace  
 3-10 p.m., Concert (music stage)  
 6 p.m., Big Bucks Bingo (Craig Civic Center)  
 9-11 p.m., livestock removed from barns

### SUNDAY

8 a.m.-3 p.m., Buckwheat cakes and sausage dinners (Community Building)  
 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Exhibit buildings open  
 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Arts & Crafts open (base-ment of Community Building and The Rhododendron Building)  
 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Buckwheat Festival Car Show registration (Civic Center)  
 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Car Show public viewing  
 10 a.m., Buckwheat Cornhole Tournament  
 10 a.m., Bikes on Brown  
 Noon, Special performance on music stage  
 Noon, Carnival rides open  
 1 p.m., Irish Road Bowling (registration, Pleasantdale Road)  
 1-4 p.m., Bingo  
 4 p.m., KVFDF commemorative rifle drawings  
 4:30 p.m., \$10,000 cash giveaway

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# Music stage bigger — in size and performances

**BY JENIFFER GRAHAM**  
DPNews@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — This year's Buckwheat Music Stage is literally larger, according to Buckwheat Festival General Chairman Evan Hardesty.

But, he said the size of the stage is not all that has changed. This year there will be more national musicians than in the past.

The music stage is located on the fairgrounds and all of the performances are free.

Hardesty said music is not all that will be offered there.

Check out the BeerFest, where you will find crafted buckwheat beer. Hardesty said Highland Brewery, Screech Owl Brewery and other local brewers will be featured with their brews.

"We'll be putting out menus," Hardesty said.

What do you do to top the performances provided by the musical artists?

You have a lineup on Brown Avenue featuring the Kingwood Volunteer Fire Department, the U.S. Army and Batman.

Hardesty said Batman (John Buckland, with Heroes for Higher) is the winner of the Distinguished West Virginia Award, the highest honor a citizen can receive from the state.

He said Batman will also be participating in the Friday parade.

### Stage schedule

- Thursday, local musicians from 5-10 p.m.
- Friday, Clay Justice, 5 p.m.; Jordan Harvey, 6:30 p.m.; and Tyler Braden, 8 p.m.
- Saturday, Zona Hester, 3 p.m.; Grace Campbell, 4:30 p.m.; Tucker Knisell, 5:30 p.m.; Justin Williams, 6:30 p.m.; and Alana Springsteen, 8 p.m.
- Sunday, Christian singer Leanna Crawford at noon.

**BATMAN (JOHN BUCKLAND) IS THE WINNER OF THE DISTINGUISHED WEST VIRGINIA AWARD.**



Batman (left), John Buckland, with Heroes for Higher — photographed with a young fan — will be at the Preston County Buckwheat Festival this week. Above, Grace Campbell will perform at the music stage at the festival at 4:30 p.m. Saturday. Musical acts will be on stage Thursday through Sunday as part of the festival.

Photos from Buckwheat Festival and Campbell social media

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# Buckwheat cones, vanilla ice cream a tasty treat

BY JENIFFER GRAHAM  
DPNews@DominionPost.com

KINGWOOD — Prepare for a treat.

Buckwheat cake batter is not the only thing made from this grain that will be offered during the upcoming Preston County Buckwheat Festival.

Buckwheat Festival General Chairman Evan Hardesty said this year, ice cream cones made from buckwheat flour and filled with vanilla ice cream and toppings will be sold at the community building.

“I came up with the idea when I was trying to find something different than the usual buckwheat cakes,” Hardesty said. “Something sweet made from buckwheat flour for the younger visitors.”

The cone wasn’t the only thing he considered. Hardesty said he also considered buckwheat bowls filled with ice cream, cannoli, cookies and even pizzelles.

“I thought the ice cream cones would work the best,” he said. “You can carry an ice cream cone around on the grounds and look at stuff while you eat it.”

Hardesty said all it takes to make the

buckwheat cones is a little sugar and some thicker batter.

“I was pleasantly surprised. Each cone is like a snowflake, a little different,” Hardesty said. “I like them topped with caramel.”

He said a 5-pound bag of buckwheat flour will make about 75 cones, and they are gluten-free.

“It will only take about five volunteers to take care of the ice cream cones,” Hardesty said. “We want to start out with 1,000 cones and we’ll continue to make them during the festival.”

“We can only store so much ice cream in certain places,” he said. “If it’s a success, we will lean into it more. Mountaineer Country Ice Cream on Point Marion Road donated 66 gallons of Hershey vanilla ice cream to us.”

He said local businesses such as Shop & Save said they would order a little more vanilla ice cream than usual in case he runs out.

“If they go over well, we’ll continue making them at future Buckwheat Festivals.”



Jeniffer Graham/for The Dominion Post  
Buckwheat Festival General Chairman Evan Hardesty (left) pours buckwheat batter into a waffle cone maker. Above, one of the cone holders with a festival logo.

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## BUCKWHEAT FESTIVAL COURT



William Wotring/The Dominion Post photos

The Preston County Buckwheat Festival Royalty Court was introduced earlier this month. They include Queen Ceres LXXXII Julia Phillips and King Buckwheat Connor Gibson (at left) and above, from left: Maid of Honor Ella Seese and escort William Estep, Phillips, Gibson, Maid of Honor Olivia Coombs and escort Kaden Hayes.

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# 82nd Queen Ceres honors community efforts, acts as an inspirational beacon for the younger generation



Queen Ceres LXXXII  
**JULIA ANN PHILLIPS**  
 Daughter of  
 TJ and Bridget Phillips  
 of Masontown, WV

Submitted photo

Queen Ceres Julia Ann Phillips will participate in many Preston County Buckwheat Festival activities and be on the festival grounds throughout the week. The Royalty Breakfast will be at 9 a.m. Friday and is by invitation only. The public can celebrate the queen and king at the coronation at noon Friday.

**BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER**  
 Keichelberger@DominionPost.com

Julia Phillips can remember the Buckwheat Festival days of her childhood spent looking up to Queen Ceres, but never imagined herself standing in the queen's place, waving to a crowd of starry-eyed youth from a purple, silver and gold parade float.

This week, years later, that's exactly what Phillips will do as Queen Ceres LXXXII.

From a young age, Phillips has spent many of her Buckwheat Festival days in the fair's livestock barns, a passion shared with her family. Phillips has previously shown goats, market steers, breeding heifers and, more recently, market pigs.

Hard work paid off and led to one of Phillips' favorite Buckwheat Festival memories: winning Grand Champion Steer in 2017 with the first steer she raised herself.

Outside of the barns, Phillips' family has inspired her in other ways. During his senior year at Preston High School, Phillips' father served as King Buckwheat, while her sister served on the Buckwheat Festival Royalty Court just last year.

Although Phillips felt her shy demeanor might not suit the role, the time for Royalty Court applications rolled around and she was inspired to try out — a few months later, she was crowned Queen Ceres LXXXII and has cherished every memory made and lesson learned.

"It was something where, if I didn't do it, I knew I would regret it," said Phillips. "Having grown up in the [agriculture] industry, I thought it was important that someone in the industry tried out to be Queen [Ceres]."

As part of the Buckwheat Festival Royalty Court's duties, the group travels across north-central West Virginia to attend parades, charity benefits, youth

outreach events, fairs and more — interspersed with stops for ice cream, of course.

From these experiences, Phillips has appreciated a firsthand look at the hard-working shoulders on which the festival stands. The court's responsibilities have also been great practice for time management skills, she said.

"It's been very rewarding, seeing all sides of the community pull together to help make the festival run," said Phillips.

At the 82nd Buckwheat Festival, Phillips looks forward to seeing the efforts of the community come to fruition and the ways the festival continues to grow and evolve year after year. She also intends to keep up her somewhat unconventional Buckwheat Festival tradition featuring two key components: French fries and vinegar.

"My favorite thing to do at Buckwheat is, I go up to the fry stand, and I get French fries — and I drench them in vinegar," said Phillips. "I know some people might think it's disgusting, but it's my favorite."

Above all, though, during this week's festivities, Queen Ceres LXXXII looks forward to being a role model for the younger generation just as the Buckwheat Festival Royalty Court acted as an inspiration to Phillips as a child.

"It's a great feeling. The kids look up to us, and I know when I was younger, I always looked up to the Royalty Court and Queen Ceres," said Phillips. "It's an honor to be someone they can look up to."

As a senior at Preston High School, Phillips is part of National Honor Society, the Preston County Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter, Interact Club and has earned her FFA state degree.

**"IT'S A GREAT FEELING. THE KIDS LOOK UP TO US, AND I KNOW WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I ALWAYS LOOKED UP TO THE ROYALTY COURT AND QUEEN CERES. IT'S AN HONOR TO BE SOMEONE THEY CAN LOOK UP TO."**

Julia Phillips  
 Queen Ceres LXXXII



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# King Buckwheat proud of agricultural roots in Preston County; raises, processes own buckwheat



King Buckwheat LXXXII  
**CONNOR GIBSON**  
Son of  
Shawn & Julie Gibson  
Terra Alta, WV

Submitted photo

King Buckwheat Connor Gibson has been showing market steers since he was 10. A senior at Preston High School, he aims to pursue a career in cattle grading or agricultural equipment mechanics.

**BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER**  
Keichelberger@DominionPost.com

For this year's King Buckwheat, the 82nd Preston County Buckwheat Festival will no longer be just an opportunity to compete against friends in the fair's livestock barns, but a chance to represent his county and the agricultural industry.

Since age 10, the Buckwheat Festival has been an occasion for Connor Gibson to show market steers and eat buckwheat cakes. Encouraged by his family and teachers, competing for the title of King Buckwheat felt like a natural next step in his agricultural career.

Built upon the foundational experiences on his family's 750 acres of farmland in Cranestown, Gibson has recently launched Gibson's Livestock LLC, his own agricultural business currently composed of a British White Park cattle herd, pigs and a flock of 40 chickens.

In preparation for his reign as King Buckwheat, Gibson took it upon himself to be as authentic a King Buckwheat as possible — that is, he raised and processed his very own buckwheat crop.

He then processed the grain into flour to be sold to his friends, family and community.

"It was definitely new. I'd never really grown a crop by myself before, so it was definitely a learning experience. It was cool to see it from start to finish," said Gibson. "I just wanted to try it. That way, if I got King Buckwheat, I'd be able to say, 'Hey, I did this,' and be able to talk to someone about it."

His reign as King Buckwheat has been a similar adventure of new experiences and learning opportunities.

One of his key takeaways? Always be ready to meet new people.

Witnessing the Buckwheat Festival's vast impact has also been a rewarding surprise, as the fair receives the esteem of not only Preston County residents but attendees from all across north-central West Virginia and beyond.

"I definitely feel like I've achieved something," said Gibson. "It's been an eye opener to see how well-known [the Buckwheat Festival is] throughout not only Preston County but West Virginia itself and into Maryland."

During this week's festival, Gibson looks forward to adding even more pieces to the puzzle of how the Buckwheat Festival comes to be the icon of fall fun that every Preston County resident knows and loves.

"I never really ventured out of the barns over the past few years, but this year I'm going to get to see exactly what the Buckwheat Festival is, instead of it just being for buckwheat cakes and sausages," said Gibson.

As a senior at Preston High School, Gibson is part of the Preston County Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter, National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society and the Preston County Livestock Association. He aims to pursue a career in cattle grading or agricultural equipment mechanics.

**"IT WAS DEFINITELY NEW. I'D NEVER REALLY GROWN A CROP BY MYSELF BEFORE, SO IT WAS DEFINITELY A LEARNING EXPERIENCE. IT WAS COOL TO SEE IT FROM START TO FINISH. I JUST WANTED TO TRY IT. THAT WAY, IF I GOT KING BUCKWHEAT, I'D BE ABLE TO SAY, 'HEY, I DID THIS,' AND BE ABLE TO TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT IT."**

Connor Gibson  
King Buckwheat

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# First runner-up to King Buckwheat emphasizes festival's community spirit

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER  
Keichelberger@DominionPost.com

In previous years, William Estep has admired friends who served on the Preston County Buckwheat Festival's Royalty Court and saw the ways their experiences on that court enriched their lives. For the 82nd Buckwheat Festival, Estep decided to step away from the sidelines and put himself out there — and it paid off.

This year, Estep serves as the Buckwheat Festival Royalty Court's first runner-up to King Buckwheat and escort to First Maid of Honor Ella Seese.

Competing for a place on the Royalty Court was an easy decision for Estep. After seeing firsthand the excitement and unique lessons of his peers, Estep saw only a benefit in embracing a role in the festival that has been so paramount to his upbringing and regional culture.

"I figured I'd give it a shot myself, and I'm glad I did, because it's been a lot of fun," said Estep.

It's not the first time Estep has played a part in the festivities. At age 8, Estep acted as a crown bearer for pageant ceremonies, alongside second runner-up to King Buckwheat Kaden Hayes.

During these same childhood years, Estep often watched festival parades with a front-row view seated outside of his father's office in Kingwood. His love for the parades hasn't changed much, other than an upgrade from front-row seating to a personal spot in the parade itself.

Taking part in the parades has been one of his favorite parts of his Royalty Court responsibilities, enjoying the opportunities to meet new people and basking in the lively parade environment. That, and getting ice cream with the rest of the court after events.

"We've met a lot of people through going to these different parades, and I know it has been a great experience for me as well as everybody else," said Estep.

For this week's festival, Estep looks forward to one of the fair's newest additions: a real-life superhero.

Youth empowerment initiative Heroes 4 Higher will attend the festival on Friday with firefighter and veteran John Buckland playing the role of Batman to use both the superhero persona and the heroic realities of his own experiences to inspire bravery and hope among his audience.

"I'm looking forward to Batman," said Estep. "There are a lot of new things coming this year, but I can 100% say that Batman will be my favorite."

As a senior at Preston High School, Estep has earned his Future Farmers of America (FFA) state degree.



Submitted photo

William Estep is first runner up to King Buckwheat. He will escort Maid of Honor Ella Seese.

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# Second runner-up to King Buckwheat continues family legacy spanning 6 decades

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER

Keichelberger@DominionPost.com

Photographs fill the homes of Kaden Hayes and his family depicting his uncle, aunt and cousins during their reigns on the Preston County Buckwheat Festival's Royalty Court as various chapters of King Buckwheat and Queen Ceres.

For this year's 82nd Buckwheat Festival, Hayes will join the family photo collection as the second runner-up to King Buckwheat and escort to Second Maid of Honor Olivia Coombs.

Family involvement in the festival for nearly 60 years was an inspiration for Hayes as he made his decision to compete for a role in the Royalty Court, but the Buckwheat Festival has also been a consistent hallmark of the community throughout Hayes' life.

"It's something that brings the community together, so it's just cool to be a

part of that," said Hayes. "Growing up, I've been at the Buckwheat Festival since I was able to walk, and just the environment there with everybody knowing everybody, and just that family feeling with everybody there."

Hayes isn't just following in the footsteps of his family, but continuing his own history with the festival. In second grade, he served as a crown bearer for pageant ceremonies alongside first runner-up to King Buckwheat William Estep.

During his time as second runner-up to King Buckwheat, Hayes has enjoyed sharing the value and beauty of both the Buckwheat Festival and Preston County. Between promoting the festival across the county and state lines, the paintball trips and ice cream breaks have certainly been a bonus of the role.

Across his years at the festival, Hayes' favorite memory is eating classic Preston County buckwheat cakes and sausage

with his parents and grandparents.

This year, though, Hayes most anticipates meeting attendees of the festival and experiencing some of the festival's newest additions and special guests, including Alana Springsteen and Tyler Braden on the Buckwheat Music Stage.

"I'm just [looking forward to] interacting with everybody, teaching everything about what the court has done and trying to get more kids to come out and [compete in the Buckwheat Festival pageants] next year," said Hayes.

As a senior at Preston High School, Hayes participates in football, basketball and the Preston County Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter.



Submitted photo

Kaden Hayes, second runner-up to King Buckwheat, will escort Maid of Honor Olivia Coombs.

**IN SECOND GRADE, HE SERVED AS A CROWN BEARER FOR PAGEANT CEREMONIES.**



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# First maid of honor from family of royalty

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER

Keichelberger@DominionPost.com

Ella Seese grew up as one of five princesses in her family. That is, she and her four sisters have served on the Preston County Buckwheat Festival's children's court, reigned as junior and senior princesses alike, and now, Seese will serve as the First Maid of Honor to Queen Ceres LXXXII.

As she spent time on the various courts of the festival's pageant, Seese looked forward to one day competing for a spot on the Royalty Court. Now that the day has come, the experience has proven just as gratifying and eye-opening as she anticipated.

Traveling across north-central West Virginia and beyond to attend parades, fairs, charity events and more is all part of the Royalty Court's responsibilities as representatives of the Buckwheat Festival and Preston County. In doing so, Seese has witnessed firsthand the sprawling impact of the festival.

Even as she's broadened her horizons, though, Seese's mind has drifted back home to the ever-clearer ways the Buckwheat Festival is built upon the passionate efforts of the community for the community.

"You get an insight into a lot of things that maybe you don't realize before working in the festival," said Seese. "Being able to go into other parts of north-central West Virginia, and into Maryland, and see how much reach the festival really has is just very exciting."

Handling the responsibilities of her role has also shown Seese the value of being ready to meet new people, visit new

places and understand the traditions of other communities.

In past years, Seese's involvement in the festival has been through volunteering to assist with parade floats and playing a role on sports floats. For the 82nd Buckwheat Festival, Seese looks forward to new elements of the fair's activities, including the recent addition of a music festival, and getting an all-inclusive experience of the fair's many areas.

The first maid of honor also anticipates a full-circle moment connecting her upbringing to that of the festival's youth attendees.

"The festival is a very exciting time because I've lived in Preston County my whole life," said Seese. "I've worked in the festival with my family, so just growing up and looking up to people who are on the court and who work on [the festival], and now being old enough to be part of that and to be able to help put the festival together, it's a very honorable and rewarding experience."

As a senior at Preston High School, Seese is part of National Honor Society, plays on the school's soccer team and is executive officer of student government with hopes to run for student body president this year.

**"THE FESTIVAL IS A VERY EXCITING TIME BECAUSE I'VE LIVED IN PRESTON COUNTY MY WHOLE LIFE."**

Ella Seese  
Maid of honor



Submitted photo

Ella Seese grew up as one of five princesses in her family. She and her four sisters have served on the Preston County Buckwheat Festival's children's court, reigned as junior and senior princesses, and now, Seese will serve as the First Maid of Honor to Queen Ceres LXXXII.

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# Buckwheat Festival's second maid of honor fulfills dream

BY KAITLYN EICHELBERGER

Keichelberger@DominionPost.com

A young girl at the Preston County Buckwheat Festival stands next to her mother, sharing a funnel cake. As they watch the Royalty Court's parade float pass by, the girl turns to her mother, declaring, "I want to be one of the princesses!"

Barely a decade later, Olivia Coombs has followed through on her promise and taken on this year's second maid of honor to Queen Ceres LXXXII.

Attending events and traveling the state with the rest of the Royalty Court has been just as thrilling as Coombs imagined. The opportunity to stand on that float and wave out to a crowd of young, ambitious minds like she was all those years ago was a rewarding moment of synchronicity.

"It has definitely been a dream come true," said Coombs. It's been bittersweet at times, as her grandfather, one of her greatest supporters, died before the pageant. "Some days I just really miss him, but I know that he would want me to keep going and have that smile on my face."

Although Coombs has lived in Preston County for just five years, her family has lived in the area for far longer, and ensured Coombs never missed a Buckwheat Festival. Taking part in the festival that has played a longtime role in her life as well as her family's has been an opportunity to share a legacy.

"My grandfather was a volunteer at the fire department in Reedsville, and my grandma served buckwheat cakes and sausage," said Coombs. "They served, and now I'm serving."

Coombs' annual Buckwheat Festival

tradition is spent with her mother. The pair typically visits the fair early Friday morning to explore the craft barns and appreciate Preston County's classic fair food. This year, though, Coombs looks forward to seeing the festival from a different perspective.

Regardless of her role in the festivities, Coombs, above all, appreciates the ways the Buckwheat Festival brings together people from Preston County and beyond. It's well-known as an opportunity to catch up with former teachers, classmates, old friends, family and more.

"It's really uniting for everybody," said Coombs.

More than just an opportunity to mingle with familiar faces, the Buckwheat Festival encourages the formation of community connection in every corner of its operations. Coombs' time serving on the Royalty Court has offered just that: a chance to bond with the other court members and form persevering friendships.

"[Serving on the Royalty Court] has taught me that family comes from different people," said Coombs. "Being surrounded by everybody has brought just so much joy and we get to have these fun experiences with parades, and being able to just have conversations and laugh is the most memorable part."

Coombs is a senior at Preston High School, where she is part of the National Honor Society.

**OLIVIA COOMBS APPRECIATES THE WAYS THE BUCKWHEAT FESTIVAL BRINGS TOGETHER PEOPLE FROM PRESTON COUNTY AND BEYOND.**



Submitted photo

Olivia Coombs, second maid of honor to Queen Ceres LXXXII, has known for years that she wanted to be a princess and is fulfilling that dream and family legacy at the Preston County Buckwheat Festival.



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## BUCKWHEAT FESTIVAL IN PHOTOS



These photos provide a look at the 2023 Preston County Buckwheat Festival. Clockwise from far left: Braeton Hayes cleans his steer Knight in the barn prior to showing him. This goat expresses delight at the festival. Preston High Band performs during the 2023 School Day parade. Parade-goers enjoy the Pride of West Virginia during the Farmers Day Parade in Kingwood. The 82nd Buckwheat Festival begins this week and will feature the animals, rides and games, parades, concerts and, of course, buckwheat cakes and sausage dinners.

The Dominion Post file photo



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### *Special Thank You*

The Preston County Livestock Association would like to extend a special thank-you to the Kingwood Volunteer Fire Department, the Preston County Extension Office, Farmers Day Chairman, and the countless volunteers and businesses that support our organization. Without monetary contributions, in-kind donations and manpower, the show and sale would not be possible. We thank you and look forward to seeing you all at the 82nd Annual Preston County Buckwheat Festival.

The Preston County Livestock Association, in cooperation with the KVFD, the FFA chapter, and the 4-H Clubs, are proud to sponsor the annual Buckwheat Festival Junior Livestock Sale.

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