

Saying goodbye to the fair

The Santa Cruz County Fair is a highlight of my year, a showcase for the best of Pajaro Valley and rest of the region.

Every year I look forward to showing off to my family the things and the people I experience throughout the year. I am deeply proud of the community in which I work and the hardworking people who live here.

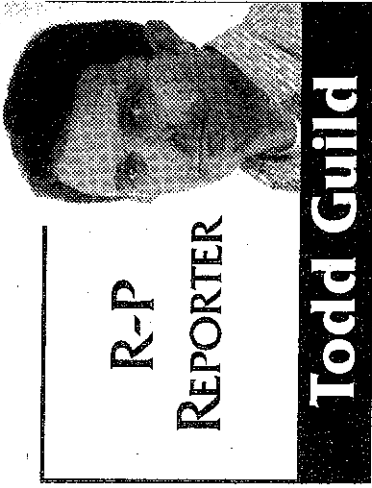
I love watching my boys spend up to an hour marveling at the spectacular train display, laughing at the pig races and looking at the collections in the JJ Crosetti Building, most notably gazing the Legos they both love.

The farm animals catch their attention for a spell, as does the fleet of tractors on display.

I don't even mind spending a little extra money for the fair food, a sugary, greasy Bacchanalia that is one of the bright spots of my culinary year.

But sadly, after this year's event, I will not be returning with my family.

My reason has almost nothing



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ing to do with the Santa Cruz County Fair, which is run by a group of passionate people who care deeply for the annual event and for the people who attend it.

Instead, it is by principle that I refuse to go back: the Fair Oaks-based company that runs the rides and games, Midway of Fun, charges so much for their services that it borders on criminal.

The trouble began when my boys, age 4 and 7, wanted to go on a couple of rides. We found, however, that such an endeavor is nearly untenable.

Ride tickets cost \$1.25 apiece, and each ride costs a minimum of 4 tickets, meaning a minimum charge of \$5 per ride. The Ferris wheel cost five tickets each, and so for my

wife and older son to go it cost \$12.50.

The drop tower, meanwhile, cost seven tickets, meaning that anyone wishing to go was out \$8.75. For one ride!

There are some discount offers. A 50 ticket package cost \$50, but that would quickly be used by a family of four, and a \$30 unlimited ride wristband would have set my family back \$120.

The games are no less unreasonable, with players out \$3 to \$5 per game, with only a slim chance that they might win a cheap stuffed animal.

Worse, we paid \$15 for two extremely cheap toys, one of which worked only half the time and for which I was refused a replacement by a hostile vendor.

I find it tremendously offensive that we are expected to shell out so much money for services and products, which I am certain cost the company nowhere near what they are charging.

There are people who will argue that such costs are simply the way things are, that

one should expect to pay extra at fairs and similar events.

But why must that be the case? Why must we accept that we are going to be gouged at the county fair?

In bringing in this company and allowing them to overcharge the attendees, the Santa Cruz County Fair organizers are hurting the community they are serving.

I know this much is true: if everyone refused to pay these high rates, the company would lower them, or a new one might be brought in.

But that is not likely to happen. Midway of Fun has been a part of the fair since I started coming more than a decade ago.

While I will happily continue to cover it for this newspaper, my only option is to bid a sad adieu to my family's annual trip to the Santa Cruz County Fair. And to hope that one day the organizers will stand up to this company that would plunder the community.

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Issuing a clarification

When I wrote in Tuesday's edition about my frustrations with the pricing of rides and games at the Santa Cruz County Fair, I was expressing my own opinion, not that of the Register-Pajaronian or its employees.

It's also important for me to explain that I was not calling for anyone to boycott the fair, nor would I want anyone to do so.

As I said in my previous column, the fair is an extraordinary event, and the eight-member board that oversees it cares deeply for the community. I look forward every year to covering the event, and I love



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combining through the food stalls, exhibits and exhibitors looking for new angles to write about.

Fairground Manager Dave Kegebein, and Agricultural History Project CEO John Kegebein amaze me, keeping the place running and working so hard that it is rare to catch them in an office,

let alone away from the grounds.

Rather, I was saying — perhaps badly — that consumers have the power to speak out against companies such as Midway of Fun, the company that operated the rides and games, when they feel they are being overcharged or are unhappy in any other way.

I contacted each member of the Santa Cruz County Fair Board Directors approximately two years ago expressing my concerns about what I felt were high prices charged by Midway of Fun. I still feel the same way.

I have continued to attend the fair with my family,

saddled as we are with a Santa Cruz County-size mortgage, two children who need braces and a house recently treated for termites. But we cannot justify rides that can cost \$12 each and games that can cost \$5. And we are reluctant to battle two young boys who vociferously demand those things.

I believe that choosing not to attend an event due to financial difficulties and concerns over high prices is a far cry from calling for a boycott.

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