

STAFF ANALYSIS

DISCUSSION AND ACTION BY THE BOARD TO APPROVE THE REQUEST BY HUMBOLDT COUNTY FAIR ASSOCIATION FOR RACE DATES IN 2025.

Regular Board Meeting
April 17, 2025

ISSUE:

On or about February 28, 2025, the California Horse Racing Board (“CHRB” of “the Board”) received a request for racing dates from the Humboldt County Fair Association (“HCFA”). HCFA has requested race dates for three successive weekends between August 13, 2025, through and including September 1, 2025. If approved, HCFA will run its race meet independently of the California Authority of Racing Fairs (“CARF”).

ANALYSIS:

Business & Professions Code § 19440(a)(6) authorizes the Board to allocate racing dates and CHRB Rule 1430 requires that the Board allocate racing dates in a way that “will best subserve the purposes of the Horse Racing Law and which will be in the best interests of the people of California in accord with the intent of the Horse Racing Law.” The Board is authorized to allocate fractional racing weeks of four days or less. See Bus. & Prof. Code § 19414.5. The Board may, at any time, change, limit, restrict, or reallocate racing weeks. Bus. & Prof. Code § 19530(b).

Should the Board decide to award these race days and approve this race meet, HCFA will have the right to simulcast and collect wagers for both out-of-state races as well as other races happening simultaneously in California in the southern and central zones. See Bus. & Prof. Code § 19596.2 (permitting simulcasting of out-of-state thoroughbred races) and § 19601 (permitting simulcasting of in-state races). If the Board does not award HCFA with the above-proposed race dates, the active race meet in the southern zone during these dates will be deemed to be operating in the northern zone for the purpose of simulcasting and related wagering. Bus. & Prof. Code § 19531(d)(3).

BACKGROUND:

Authority:

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19440 (in part): (a) The board shall have all powers necessary and proper to enable it to carry out fully and effectually the purposes of this chapter. Responsibilities of the board shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

(6) Allocation of racing dates to qualified associations in accordance with law.

CHRB Rule 1430 (Board Allocation of Racing Dates): The Board shall allocate racing weeks and dates for the conduct of horse racing in this State for such time periods and at such racing facilities as the Board determines will best subserve the purposes of the Horse Racing

Law and which will be in the best interests of the people of California in accord with the intent of the Horse Racing Law. Upon a finding by the Board that the allocation of racing weeks and dates for any racing year is completed, the racing weeks and dates so allocated shall be subject to reconsideration or amendment only for conditions unforeseen at the time of the allocations. The allocation of racing weeks and dates does not commit the Board to the granting of a license to conduct a horseracing meeting to any specific racing association nor for the allotted time period nor at the racing facility scheduled for such racing weeks and dates.

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19414.5 (Racing Days, Weeks, and Fractional Weeks): (a) “Racing days” are days on which a licensed racing association or fair is authorized by the board to conduct horse racing.

(b) “Racing weeks” are seven consecutive days during which a licensed racing association or fair is authorized by the board to conduct horse racing for a minimum of five racing days. The board, however, upon joint petition of the association or fair and the organization representing horsemen participating in the meeting of that association or fair, may authorize the conduct of horse racing for less than five racing days. Fractional racing weeks of four days or less may be authorized by the board at the beginning and end of any horse racing meeting. Fractional weeks may also be authorized during weeks containing holidays and during periods of overlap with thoroughbred meetings and fairs if the total number of weeks authorized by the board in any calendar year for each breed does not exceed the maximum annual allocation of racing weeks provided for in Article 6 (commencing with Section 19530). If a licensed racing association holds a split meeting, each part of the split meeting shall be deemed a horse racing meeting solely for the purposes of authorizing fractional racing weeks.

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19530: (a) The board shall have the authority to allocate racing weeks to an applicant or applicants pursuant to the provisions of this article and Article 6.5 (commencing with Section 19540) and to specify such racing days, dates, and hours for horse racing meetings as will be in the public interest, and will subserve the purposes of this chapter. The decision of the board as to those racing days, dates, and hours shall be subject to change, limitation, restriction, or reallocation only by the board. No municipality or county shall adopt or enforce any ordinance or regulation that has or may have the effect of directly or indirectly regulating, limiting, restricting, or reallocating the racing days and dates of horse racing meetings.

(b) The board may, at any time, change, limit, restrict, or reallocate racing weeks, days, or dates that are allocated pursuant to this section regardless of whether a condition giving rise to that action is foreseen at the time of allocation or whether a license is issued to conduct a horse racing meeting during an allocated week, day, or date. The board's exercise of authority pursuant to this subdivision is not a revocation subject to the proceedings required by Section 19461, regardless of any effect on a license issued under this chapter.

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19531 (in part): (d) (1) Notwithstanding any other law, if the board does not license a thoroughbred race meet to be conducted by a racing association at a racetrack located in the cities of Berkeley and Albany after July 1, 2024, a thoroughbred racing association, or racing fair, in the southern or central zone licensed by the board to conduct a thoroughbred race meet or fair meet shall, during racing weeks not allocated by the board for a race meet in the northern zone, be deemed to be operating in the northern zone for the

purpose of conducting all permissible forms of wagering in the northern zone pursuant to this chapter and making and receiving required distributions from those wagers in accordance with this chapter.

(2) Required distributions described in paragraph (1) shall be made in accordance with the requirements applicable to a racing association in the northern zone and any consent or approval rights shall be exercised by the appropriate racing association or racing fair in the central or southern zone conducting racing.

(3) The amounts generated for purses and commissions pursuant to this subdivision shall be used to pay simulcast funding requirements and board support that the thoroughbred racing associations and racing fair in the central or southern zones are required to make under Section 19616.51. Any remaining funds after those payments are made shall be distributed to each thoroughbred racing association and racing fair in the central and southern zone proportionally based on their respective handle in the central and southern zone during the previous fiscal year and that money shall be divided between purses and commissions in the same relative proportion as was generated in the central and southern zone during the previous fiscal year.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented for Board discussion and action.

MOIRA KENNY, CEO

HUMBOLDT COUNTY FAIR ASSOCIATION

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February 28, 2025

Sent via email to: cschaney@chrh.gov

Scott Chaney
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Sent via email to: oscargonzalesjr@gmail.com

Oscar Gonzales, Jr.
Chairman, Racing Dates Committee
California Horse Racing Board
1010 Hurley Way, Suite 300
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Re: Humboldt County Fair Association Application for Racing Dates in 2025

Dear Executive Director Chaney and Racing Dates Committee Chairman Gonzales:

The Humboldt County Fair Association, has elected to perpetuate its tradition of offering a live race meet for the benefit of owners, trainers, breeders, horsemen, employees and live racing fans in the Northern California region. Specifically, we are requesting race dates for three successive weekends between August 13, 2025, through and including September 1, 2025.

In making this request the HCFA is cognizant of the challenges in running a race meet outside of CARF, the horse population, the funding of related expenses and the variables required to run an entertaining, safe and self-sustaining race meet. Prior to making this request representatives of the HCFA have consulted with industry professionals affiliated with the Sonoma County Fair when it ran a meet outside of CARF, horsemen interested in returning to Ferndale, representatives of Monarch, NOTWINK, and those providing services necessary to conduct a race meet.

In determining that Humboldt is able to conduct a successful meet when awarded the requested race dates please consider the following:

1. Race Dates from August 13 and September 1, 2025

These dates, inclusive of Humboldt's traditional dates, were carefully chosen to maximize horse population, on-site fan participation and to sync seamlessly in between other racing venues in the region.

The requested dates are wedged purposely and perfectly between regional race meets after Tillamook and before Grant's Pass late summer meet. This was done after discussion with Oregon racing officials and horsemen. These dates fill a void in that racing calendar and ensure a significant horse population in addition to horses already located in California. Humboldt shall continue to offer horsemen incentives, bonus plans, special events and hands on assistance with workers compensation issues, as needed. These horses are primarily California Breds, not able to successfully compete with the upper echelon horse population running at Del Mar. These horses still exist and have nowhere else in California to run. Humboldt is confident it can attract enough horses to provide an exciting live racing product running two days a week (Saturday and Sunday) its first two weeks and three days over the Labor Day weekend.

2. Financial Viability

The HCFA board is aware of the expense involved in conducting a live horse race meet and replacing the services previously provided by CARF. With that in mind, contact has been made with prominent California based owners, breeders and live horse racing supporters who have confirmed an intent to assist with the meeting of expenses once HCFA is awarded the dates it requests.

Last year the Humboldt raced for three weeks without overlap for the first time in its history. The results were astounding and establish a track record of precedent that live racing at Ferndale can self-sustain.

The 2024 meet generated \$353,000 in underpayment of purses. All other CARF venues were overpaid. The Humboldt meet generated enough purse money to wipe out the overpayment from other fair venues. In 2025, that established record will enable Humboldt to offer even higher purses and entice additional horses to participate in its three week meet.

In addition, the 2024 meet generated over \$900,000 in commissions. This amount is enough to sustain the fair and its live horse racing activities. It is also assurance that those who advanced funds to cover the pre-meet expenses will be able to be paid back out of commissions once received.

The HCFA in recent years has invested in retrofitting its Grandstand, Re-roofing its barns, widening its track, improved railings/fencing and otherwise investing in its racing facilities.

Unlike the fair race meets that came before Humboldt in 2024, Ferndale was able to generate purses and commissions for CARF and itself.

3. Staffing a Live Race Meet

HCFA is collaborating with appropriate industry professionals including those involved in conducting a live race meet at Santa Rosa outside of CARF and those within CARF to provide an outline of the services needed to conduct a live race meet. The fine tuning of those expenses and retention of staff and services necessary for our race meet shall begin in earnest once HCFA is awarded the requested race dates. There is no shortage of industry professionals eager to help in any way they can in perpetuation of live racing in Northern California.

4. Conclusion

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of live horse racing to the Humboldt County Fair and the citizens of Humboldt County. Ferndale has been the site of the Humboldt County Fair since 1896. As a spectator sport, horse racing flourished in Ferndale and is a mainstay of the fair. The popularity of our August fair to locals and tourists alike brings in millions in revenue to the shops, restaurants, hotels and attractions throughout our county.

It is not only horse racing that takes you back to “yesteryear” in Ferndale. The entire community, with its unique atmosphere of Victorian structures, bountiful shops and friendly residents, recreates a sense of times past. This unique treasure of a live racing venue was aptly summarized by the CALIFORNIA THOROUGHBRED in its article “Escape to Ferndale...Racing As Its Meant to Be.” (copy attached).

The HCFA Board along with the residents of our county continue to strongly support live racing with strong attendance and a determined resolve to perpetuate our historic live racing tradition. Humboldt is no stranger to having to self-advocate for its race dates. The year 2024 was our best year ever and we anticipate 2025 can be even better still. As an important by-product of our meet we continue to foster new race fans, respectfully embrace horsemen who have no other place to race, provide a competitive venue for Cal Breds and to assist the California Horse Racing industry.

Scott Chaney
Oscar Gonzales, Jr.
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February 28, 2025

We respectfully ask that you consider the factors above and allow Humboldt to perpetuate its live racing tradition by granting our requested dates.

Sincerely,

Moira Kenny, CEO
Humboldt County Fair

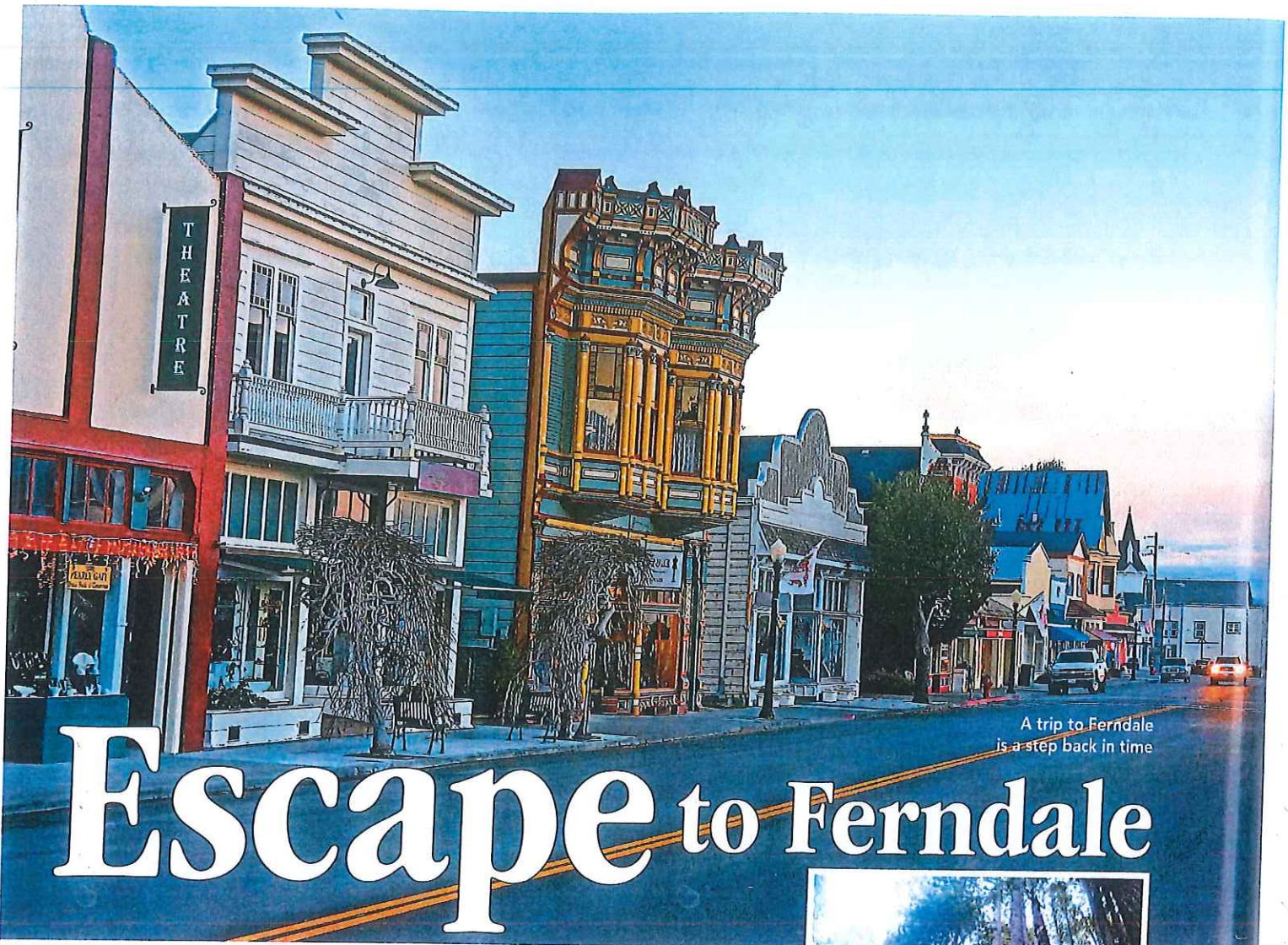
Attachments: Proposed Racing Calendar 2025
"Escape to Ferndale...Racing as Its Meant to Be"

Humboldt County Fair - 2025 Proposed Racing Dates

| August | | | | | | |
|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | | | | | | |

| September | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
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| 28 | 29 | 30 | | | | |
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| Ferndale | 7 |
| Simo Only | 9 |



A trip to Ferndale is a step back in time

Escape to Ferndale

RACING AS IT'S MEANT TO BE

BY JACK SHINAR

I didn't know if Ferndale would be the cure-all for my troubles; but as the misery index in Sacramento clicked up to 107 degrees just a few days after my ailing father had passed away, I knew it was worth a try.

And so we packed up the Ford and made the six-hour drive to the remote coast (seven hours if you use State Route 36—DON'T DO IT!), arriving at the northwest corner of the state in mid-August for the opening weekend of the 2019 Humboldt County

Fair racing meet.

This half-mile oasis in the redwoods about 17 miles southwest of Eureka had been on my bucket list for decades: Ferndale, jokingly called the "Saratoga of the West."

Horse racing friends and colleagues had regaled us with the joys of turning back the clock—way back—in this charming Victorian-era hamlet on the edge of California's Lost Coast. I've been to racetracks big and small all over the map; this summer, I would, as it turned out, finally add Ferndale to the places where I failed to cash a ticket.

Who needs to pick a winner? At the



GETTY IMAGES PHOTOS

Humboldt County Fair the fields are generally small (the starting gate holds eight, but is rarely full) and the gambling is secondary. Ferndale has something more.

What I found in Ferndale was exactly what I had hoped for. The weather was great and the air clean. There was pure joy in the crowded grandstand, which can hold about 2,000 fans. Friendly faces crowded together on the track apron while still others camped out on blankets and portable chairs on the grassy area bordering the saddling paddock. The track, which sits on the edge of town next door to Ferndale High School, and the grandstand face mountains in the distance, dense with gigantic redwoods. To call it picturesque is an understatement.

And people there love horse racing.

This was a feeling I hadn't had since probably in the 1980s, back before simulcasting and, later, account wagering from home pretty much emptied the tracks of fans except for only the biggest of race days. At Ferndale the buzz between races from the crowd of close to 6,000 never stopped. It was electric, invigorating, and a whole lot of fun.

"On a big weekend race day we'll have 7,000 come through here," said Richard Conway, the Humboldt County Fair general manager for the past seven years and a former horse trainer himself. "It's a different feel; it's a community event. Horse racing is a huge draw for us. On a non-race day, our attendance is light. Racing's an annual event, and it's huge. You'll have people who've been coming here for 30 years, and you'll see the same people in the same spot every day."

The Saratoga comparison is tongue-in-cheek, of course, although both tracks date back to the 1800s with grandstands to match. At Ferndale, they usually run a mule race, an Arabian race, and five or six Thoroughbred heats, mostly in the \$4,000 claiming range or thereabouts. It hardly compares to upstate New York, where world-class runners contest races at some of the highest purse levels anywhere. But Ferndale's old wooden grandstand and the betting area below with wooden floors do remind one of, say, a small slice of Saratoga.

"You run at Aqueduct or Belmont, that's one thing," Conway said. "They have important races, and they run for big purses.



Cal-bred Thoroughbreds make important contributions to Humboldt County Fair's race meet



Like Saratoga's, Ferndale's grandstand dates back to the 1800s

But when you are in Saratoga (during the race season), you get the sense that everyone is there for a reason. That's Saratoga.

"But that's kind of the same thing in Ferndale. The whole town comes to life. It's funny—it's hard to describe. But if you walk through the grandstand, you kind of pick up on it. It's more about the attitude."

Conway said the two-week fair puts about \$8 million into the local economy. Everywhere you go in town, businesses posted signs advertising the fair. Still other signs announced: "Racing starts at 2 p.m." The town seems nearly empty while racing is in progress.

"The local businesses really step up," Conway said. "Whether it's giving away gift certificates or gift cards for gasoline, the community supports this event."

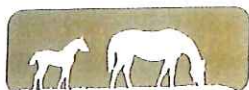
There was more at stake this year, noted Conway, because cuts in state funding had left the fair with a \$300,000 shortfall that had to be made up through local sponsorships and community support.

"This year will be the highest ever for our sponsorship program. We will cover the entire \$300,000. For a community of 100,000, that's pretty good."

I wasn't the only visiting racetracker to make the pilgrimage. Veteran trainer Art Sherman of California Chrome fame was on hand, not to saddle a horse but to experience the Ferndale magic for the first time. He and track announcer Chris Griffin regaled about 1,000 fans with old war stories prior to the races, and Sherman stuck around for most of the afternoon posing with fairgoers for pictures and signing autographs.

"I said, 'This time, I'm going to make time' because I don't know how long these tracks are going to be around," said 82-year-old Sherman. "I said, 'I've got to come up here.' And I'm so happy I did. I'm having such a good time. We were walking around town—we had a ball. This is fun. It really is."

Griffin, now the voice of California fair



Racetracks

racing and who also calls the winter meet at Sam Houston Race Park in Texas, got his start at Ferndale five years ago.

“(Prior race caller) Frank Mirahmadi was a very close friend of mine at the time, and I was transitioning from the Harlem Globetrotters (as their public address announcer) and they had an opportunity for the track announcer at Ferndale,” Griffin recalled. “They said, ‘Well, we haven’t heard you make a race call, but Frank says you can call a race and we’ll believe you can call a race.’ So that was my opportunity to debut. It was a great two weeks.”

Longtime Southern California turf writer Kevin Modesti, whose parents lived in Eureka for several years, first came to Ferndale to cover the fair meet’s 100th anniversary. That was 23 years ago, and he’s come every August since.

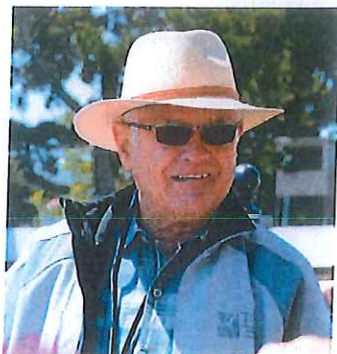
He said he is captivated by the whole scene and finds it refreshing compared to what he’s used to at bigger tracks. One thing you’ll notice, Modesti pointed out, is very few of the patrons carry the *Daily Racing Form* or past performance printouts.

“They don’t really know much about racing, and they don’t care about the odds,” Modesti said. “They just want to have a winner.”

A friend from Sacramento who has attended the races at Ferndale several times spent his August at both Saratoga and Del Mar this year. He enjoyed the big-time racing, he said, but missed the atmosphere and feeling he got by attending the Humboldt County Fair. A visit to Humboldt always warmed his heart.

“Ferndale never disappoints,” he surmised.

That attitude has been at the heart of fair racing since the 1930s, and it remains an important part of making and keeping fans today. Each year, Ferndale struggles to hang onto its race dates in the face of greater handle potential elsewhere. The just-concluded meet was conducted while fully overlapped with summer racing from Golden Gate Fields, which surely didn’t help the fair meet with field size or handle.



“This time, I’m going to make time [to come to the Ferndale races] because I don’t know how long these tracks are going to be around.”

— Art Sherman

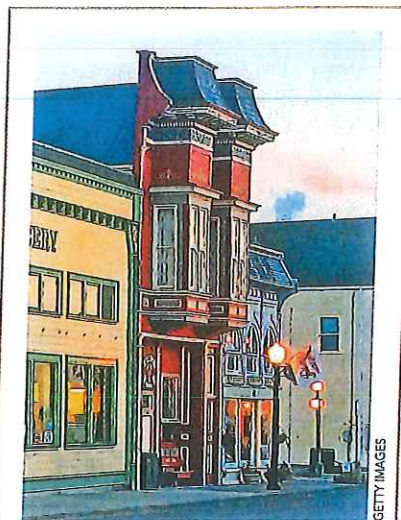


The Ferndale folks love their horse racing

DEBBIE ARRINGTON PHOTOS

that we stay relevant and can continue,” Conway explained. “If you take that away (simulcast hosting), we’ll collapse. So the thing we hope to do is find some even ground somewhere.”

A lot of summer racing fans agree. In its own way, Ferndale is special. I saw that for myself. 🐎



GETTY IMAGES

Palace Bar in downtown Ferndale

Things to Do in Ferndale

California racing steward Will Meyers has been assigned to the Ferndale meet nearly every year since 1984. Here he lists five must-do things in the region that he enjoys whenever possible.

1 Have a drink at the Palace Bar in downtown Ferndale. It claims to be the farthest west watering hole in the continental U.S.

2 Visit the Loleta Cheese Factory just outside Ferndale, the best cheese in California. If you have the time, order a grilled cheese sandwich from the kitchen and stroll the lush garden adjacent to the store.

3 Hike the Elk River trailhead, including the ghost town of Falk walking tour. It’s off Herrick Boulevard toward Eureka, an easy one-mile walk on a paved path, then goes on for miles of dirt path.

4 Visit Samoa Cookhouse for breakfast. It’s across the bay from Eureka. It features old lumberjack (family)-style service, where the food is passed around on platters. The lobby is like a small museum. The uniqueness of the experience is worth the trip.

5 Visit old-town Eureka and eat at the Sea Grill or Cafe Waterfront for amazing seafood.

Bonus pick: Farther north past Arcata on Highway 101 is Trinidad, featuring astounding ocean views.