The familiar blowing of a whistle and turning of wheels signals an approaching train. As it pulls into its station at the Kansas State Fair, riders dismount and the conductors stop to chat near the little yellow ticket booth as the next round of passengers board. The seven to eight minute train ride fills a small portion of a busy day at the fair, but the staff works hard to make sure their customers have a ride to remember.

The train once traveled to fairs in Kansas, Iowa, and Arizona, but now resides solely at the Kansas State Fair. While traveling increased popularity, the Schmitt family began their endeavors with the railroad long before then. Tom and Bob Schmitt, the current owners, learned the ropes from their father.

"My father put [the train] in during 1970 when I was eight years old," Bob Schmitt said. He owned a small little amusement park in Hutchinson. He had amusement rides and he brought the train up [to the Kansas State Fair] one year just to try it and it was and it was an instant hit."

Today, train rides remain a popular attraction for fairgoers. Children and adults alike are enthusiastic about riding around the fairgrounds and taking in the sights.

"I'm excited to go fast," Eli Yoder said as he sat with family and school friends while waiting for the train to depart.

Rides are given regularly throughout the week, and a leisurely trip around the tracks appeals to many. While these routine trips are commonplace throughout the week, Sunday morning visitors will find the opportunity to partake in a unique experience.

"Every year, we do a special Sunday morning ride before it gets really busy," employee Mark Butterfield said. "We let highway patrol officers ride for free with the kids to help that bond between law enforcement and the public. The kids get to ride the train and then look over and realize they have a highway patrol trooper sitting beside them and [realize] that they're human too."

All of the work that the Schmitt’s have put in since they began running train rides has led to a ride that brings joy to people from all over.

"It's one of those rides that everyone can ride," Schmitt said. "We have babies to 95-year-old people ride. I think that's been part of the success. It's something that all ages enjoy."

Hannah Holladay
Vibrant sunflowers, spectacular sunsets and roaming buffalo, this is just some of what the beautiful state of Kansas has to offer. According to National Bison Association, the male American buffalo, also known as a bull, can weigh up to 2,000 pounds and a female, or cow, may reach 1,100 pounds.

The American buffalo, also known as bison, population has grown substantially since their near extinction in the 19th century due in part to organizations like the Kansas Buffalo Association (KBA). Although the national bison population is now at a sustainable number of 381,064 as of 2012, according to the National Bison Association, that was not always the case. Prior to 1600, it is estimated that there were 30-60 million bison in North America. Then, in the late 1800’s it was estimated that their were less than 1,000 bison left on the continent. After realizing bison were near extinction, an effort to “preserve and restore the species” was made.

“The goal of the association is to help people interested in bison learn about the animal,” KBA member Eva Yearout said. “We provide them with information so that they don’t make the same [overhunting] mistake, Bison, which can run at speeds up to 35 miles per hour, live and move in herds and “have a distinct pecking order from top to bottom”.

Between the 104 members of KBA, a combined number of 6,500 buffalo can be accounted for. The KBA, who has held a booth at the Pride of Kansas Building annually for the past 20 years, works hard to "improve the buffalo industry in Kansas, educate about all aspects of buffalo, and preserve this part of our Great Plains heritage", according to the Kansas Buffalo Association.

“Our neighbors had [a bison] in 1983, so we bought it,” KBA member Keith Yearout said. “[Now] we have 62 [bison]. You fall in love with them, it doesn’t take very long. They are magnificent animals.”

Lauren Prehn

Patrons bought raffle tickets at the KBA booth in the hopes of winning a Bison cooler. The KBA booth contains many contacts and information for those interested in learning more about buffalo.

Mikaela Schmitt

**Buffalo vs. Bison**

- Reside in Asia and Africa
- Large, curved horns
- Endangered
- Undomesticated

- Reside in North America
- Small horns frame head
- Increasing numbers
- Increasing domestication

**Kansas State Animal = American Buffalo (Bison)**

Information shared from www.bisoncentral.com
While fairs are known for scores of cattle, horses, pigs and sheep, in the Prairie Pavilion, a lesser known animal causes fairgoers to smile and take a second look.

Each year, the Golden Plains Llama Association showcases more than a half dozen llamas, performs wool spinning demonstrations and sells products made from llama wool.

Betty Holmen, who has been a member of the organization for 10 years, owns nine llamas. In addition to the joy that her llamas bring, they also serve a practical use.

“I make hats, scarves, mug rugs, floor rugs, ear warmers, and I have made some slippers and cozies,” Holmen said. “There are all kinds of things. Sometimes I sell them but mostly I make them to give away and just do it to use the fiber.”

The process to convert llama wool to yarn is a multi-step, time-consuming process.

“First you have to brush them out then you shear them and tumble,” said llama owner Glenna Obermiller. “After you wash the wool and card it, then you have to spin it. The process takes a long time.”

The process is difficult enough without factoring in the llama’s own personality.

“I don’t want them kicking or spitting,” said Holmen. “I have one llama who spits at me because he doesn’t want me cleaning him. You train them to let you touch their legs by increments and working with them in a small pen.”

Although each llama brings its own set of unique challenges, it’s not the wool that keeps Obermiller and Holmen engaged in the llama community, it’s the love for the animals.

“They’re just such unique animals that you fall in love with them,” Obermiller said. “I’ve been doing this for a little over 30 years now. They’re wonderful.”
Henna artists provide unique body art while sharing culture.

Sejal Shah’s own hands are covered in her intricate designs as she waits for fairgoers to show up. Shah shares both a unique art experience, and new culture to the fair-goers daily.

Mikaela Schmitt

Dye, designs, and detail are all a part of Sejal Shah’s daily life as a Henna tattoo artist. The human body serves as her canvas to express a special art that is a part of her culture. Although henna is a unique part of several cultures’ ceremonies and celebrations, it is now a popular form of body art recognized globally.

Shah started to draw as a young school girl in India, which led her into drawing henna. With over 20 years of henna experience, she brought the art over to America.

“It is a part of Indian culture, and I think it’s a way to connect two different cultures,” Shah said.

Although this is Shah’s 17th year at the fair, she comes back yearly because she enjoys expressing her art and spreading her culture with those she encounters.

Her experience at the fair is different every day as she meets many different people who are excited to receive henna tattoos.

“It depends on the days, but on the weekends, I give over 100 tattoos to people,” Shah said.

Shah noticed that henna started to gain popularity in the United States as it serves as a safe alternative to permanent tattoos.

“Many people here are fascinated with tattoos, so I decided to combine my own designs with what was popular here.”

While Henna is widely sought after for the designs, it is also an environment-friendly product for all to use.

“Henna is completely organic, so it’s a very good product that doesn’t have any chemicals in it, so it’s good for every age,” Shah said.

Shah not only offers Kansans a unique way to express art, but she spreads an unfamiliar culture to many and a smile that follows each piece of art she finishes.

Chelsea Park

Owner of Beauty by Sejal, Sejal Shah begins to draw a dragonfly on a wrist of an excited fair-goer. A dragonfly is only one of the thousands of designs she expresses through henna.

Mikaela Schmitt

Trevor Klipp -- Hanover, Kansas

The fair is filled with livestock from over the state. One individual has been working with cows for 12 years.

“I live on a dairy farm so it’s all I know,” Klipp said.

Owning 15 of the 60 cow operation, he has worked with the cows his entire life. He enjoys the entire process of raising cows.

“Just seeing the cows grow from a young heifer to a big cow, and just seeing how much they change,” Klipp said.

He is spending his sixth year at the Kansas State Fair showing his family’s cows.

“We get here on Friday and get everything set up…” Klipp said. “From Friday, Saturday and Sunday, we just show off to the public what we have. Monday, which is today, we had our show. We get them all fitted and showed and now we are in the clean up process.”

Mikaela Schmitt