

PRINCETON, Ind. — One of the nation's oldest Labor Day celebrations — dating from 1886, or eight years before the national holiday was declared — takes place at the Gibson County fairgrounds here Friday through Monday.

It's Princeton's turn to host the 123rd annual Labor Day Celebration which rotates between Evansville, Princeton and Boonville each year.

Parking is free, but some events charge a fee. A ticket for unlimited carnival rides each day is \$15.



MOLLY BARTELS / Courier & Press archives Rooster the clown gets hugged by a parade goer at the 2008 Labor Day Parade in Petersburg, Ind. Rooster and Flapjack, left, entertained spectators by spraying them with water, making balloon animals and giving out prizes. This year's parade will be in Princeton, Ind., on Monday.

The lineup ranges from a demolition derby and motocross to gospel singing, car and talent shows, a tractor pull, queen contest, a parade and the official Indiana State Picking & Fiddling Championships.

The event is like a county fair, except for the call for solidarity among union workers and the fact that most events are subsidized by a combination of labor unions, business and civic organizations.

Carnival rides begin at 5 p.m. Friday, along with food booths, vendor displays and contests such as cutest baby.

At 6:30 p.m. Friday there's the tractor pull (\$3 for age 7 and older), followed at 7 by the queen pageant and the start of the picking and fiddling championship (\$5-\$7 or

\$10 for a two-day ticket).

The picking and fiddling event continues at 10 a.m. Saturday. A talent show begins at noon and the rides at 1 p.m., plus a washers tournament and the motocross race at 6 p.m., which charges \$8 for ages 7 and older.

Live entertainment at 7 p.m. Saturday includes the Localmotion Band.

On Sunday the cutest baby contest continues, plus a car show at 11 a.m., the rides at 1 p.m. and a talk at 2 p.m. about "The Miners Angel" by Rosemary Feurer.

The talent show is at 4 p.m. Sunday and the demolition derby at 5 p.m. Admission to the derby is \$8 for age 7 and older. Those 14 and older can get a pit pass for \$10.

According to the Labor Day Celebration Association, the original event in Princeton in 1886 (just 10 years after Custer's Last Stand at the Battle of Little Big Horn) was sponsored by the Knights of Labor, one of the largest labor groups in Indiana.

A train from Chicago brought four coaches of unionists who were met at 3:30 a.m. by Princeton's high school band. At 10 a.m., another train brought six coaches full of Knights of Labor members along with two bands. A parade and speeches followed.

By the 1930s film crews were covering the annual event in Princeton. Attendance peaked at 75,000 in 1949.

From 1950 to 1992 the celebration alternated between Princeton and Boonville, with Evansville added in 1993. For about 30 years, until 1980, the United Mine Workers sponsored the event by itself.