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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Steele County Free Fair to Launch “Spring Into Summer,”  
Expanding Beloved Smokin’ In Steele Tradition**

**Owatonna, Minnesota** — After 18 years of hosting the popular “Smokin’ In Steele” spring event, Joe Elbert of the Knights of Columbus has announced the organization will no longer produce the event. In a show of community partnership, the Knights of Columbus offered the opportunity to continue and grow the event to Scott Kozelka and the Steele County Free Fair.

The Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors carefully considered the offer and unanimously voted to take over the event. With a vision to build on its strong foundation, the Fair will keep the traditional dates while expanding the experience into a dynamic, community-wide celebration titled Spring Into Summer.

“Spring Into Summer” will serve as a must-see launch point into the busy fair and festival season, bringing together families, local businesses, and visitors for a weekend packed with entertainment, competition, food, and fun.

The expanded event will feature a mix of returning favorites and exciting new additions, including:

- 16-team softball tournament
- Live music from local, regional, and potentially out-of-state entertainers spanning blues, country, rock, pop, and more
- Flea market
- Backyard barbecue competition
- 10–12 food trucks and food stands
- 5K fun run sponsored by Tom Thumb Donuts

“A Timeless Tradition: The 2026 Edition” – August 18-23, 2026

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- Bourbon and cigar sampling evening fundraiser (ticketed, limited capacity)
- Cornhole tournament
- And much more

The Steele County Free Fair is committed to ensuring the event remains community-centered and community-driven, a showcase of local talent, expertise, and pride. The Fair will call on area volunteers and subject-matter enthusiasts to help lead elements such as the softball tournament and backyard barbecue competition.

“This event is about bringing people together and showcasing the best of our community,” said Fair leadership. “Just like the Steele County Free Fair itself, Spring Into Summer will be free to attend and family-friendly.”

While most of the event will remain free and open to the public, the Bourbon and Cigar Sampling Evening will be a limited-ticket fundraiser, similar to other successful specialty events previously hosted at the fairgrounds.

In keeping with the tradition of giving back, the Fair will partner with another local nonprofit organization, with a portion of funds raised benefiting that organization. The nonprofit partner will be announced at a later date.

Spring Into Summer is expected to provide a positive economic impact for local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and vendors as the community transitions into the busy summer event season at the fairgrounds.

Community members, businesses, and organizations are encouraged to get involved. Those with ideas, interested in volunteering, or looking to help sponsor this free community event are invited to reach out directly to the Steele County Free Fair office at 507-451-5305 or [steelecountyfreefair@scff.org](mailto:steelecountyfreefair@scff.org)

For more information and announcements about the Steele County Free Fair’s Spring Into Summer event, visit: [www.scff.org/spring-into-summer](http://www.scff.org/spring-into-summer)

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