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The Reactor

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County fair needs more than fowl

The San Mateo County Fair set some attendance records this year. With 60 years under its belt, it can be fun, but it also shows signs of creaking age. It needs new ideas, changes in approach. The Santa Clara County Fair has had some severe financial pains. San Mateo's spectacle needs to step carefully to avoid similar problems.

San Mateo County is changing. This was evident from many of the professional plant exhibitors in the big expo hall. They came from as far afield as Modesto and Sonoma County. Their plants are fine, but at San Mateo County Fair, we should be showing off our own nurseries and growers.

The commercial booths appear on the decline. Either that or the hall is too big. To give a feeling of excitement you need a crowd and crowded booths, not the appearance of frantically filling empty space with hot tubs that would have been better dis-

played outside.

The fair appears to be stuck in a 1946 mode. Nowhere was there a sign that one of the county's largest employers is SFO. It would be difficult to get a 747 into the grounds, but that would add to the excitement. Just up the road from Ames Research Center at Moffett Field, in the center of Silicon Valley Norte, in the precise location of some computer shows and exhibits at other times of the year, you would think the silicon revolution was a thousand leagues away.

It's wonderful so much space is devoted to honeybees and their product, but computers deserve 100 times the space reserved for bees.

The major industrial revolution of our time happened in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, and you would not know it from our major annual exposition. Please don't misunderstand. I don't expect Computer guru Jim Warren, who lives in San

Mateo County, or Jef Raskin, the Macintosh designer, who lives in Pacifica, to take over the fair and dump the fuchsia display or the John Deere tractors. But how about one building devoted to San Mateo County's contribution to this worldwide revolution? How about some simple exhibits to acknowledge the 21st Century. Hey, I love history, but I know also that the future was invented right here on the Peninsula.

A county fair is a place to show what a county is about. I love to see the late Mel Mello's rusting farm machinery. I'm all in favor of the 4-H kids learning by doing. Two of my kids got a big head start toward their life's careers because of San Mateo County 4-H. But a San Mateo County Fair that doesn't acknowledge Silicon Valley is mired in the past.

Next year I'd like to see a wind tunnel from Moffett, a homegrown computer display, an Ampex Corporate exhibit that shows how San Mateo County led the world in sound. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that lots of rocket scientists live and work not far away.

If the Modoc County Fair can feature horseradish, and the San Joaquin Fair tomatoes, then San Mateo can play up recording tape, computer chips and aerospace for all they're worth.