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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The State Fair

Citing the surge of coron
event for the first time si

By **Michael Granberry**

July 7, 2020



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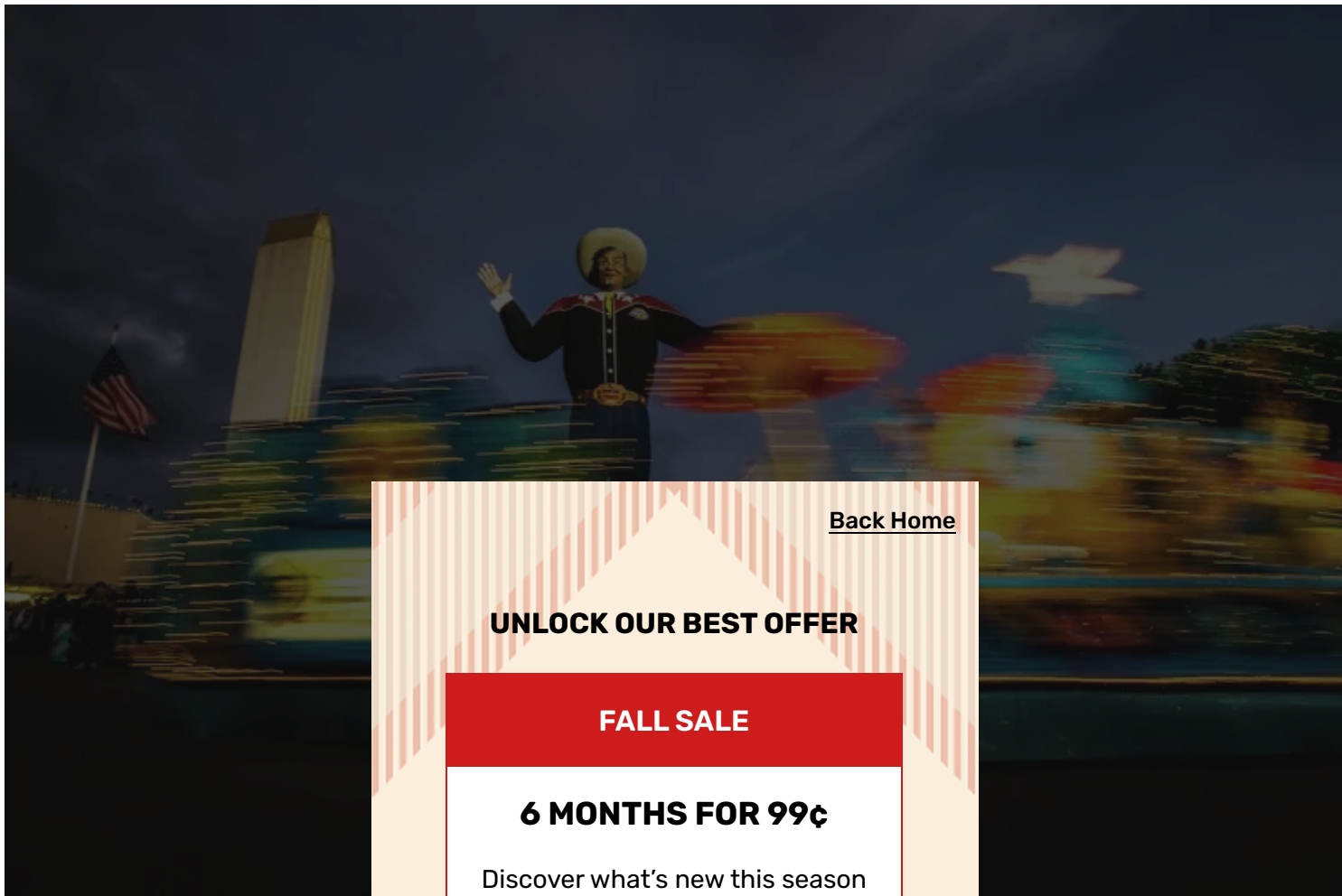
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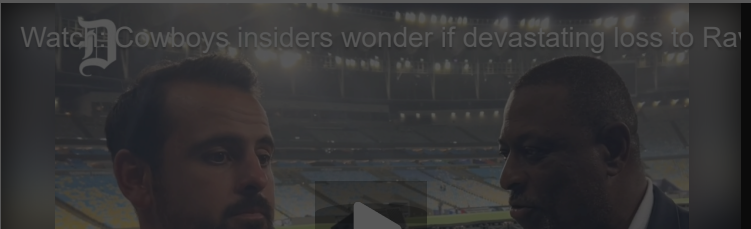
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Floats roll past Big Tex during the parade
(Carly Geraci/The Dallas Morning News)
Carly Geraci/Staff Photograph

Dallas on Sept. 30, 2018.

The State Fair of Texas, which has been canceled only eight times during its 134 years, and even then primarily because of two world wars, will not take place during 2020, fair officials announced Tuesday.





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The reason, of course, is that the virus has spread like wildfire throughout the United States.

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al News.

"In the current climate, proper precautions in place, we cannot predict when the recent surge in positive cases will subside. The safest and most responsible decision we could make for all involved at this point in our 134-year history is to take a hiatus for the 2020 season."

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n September, the
The safest and most

Texas has suffered more than 210,000 confirmed cases, and across the state, more than 2,700 people have died from COVID-19. In the U.S. as a whole, there have been more than 3 million confirmed cases and more than 133,000 deaths.

"I love the State Fair and I am saddened that I will not be able to experience the safe and responsible fun that the State Fair made so important in our community, and public health measures are necessary to slow this virus so we can save lives and return to the fun that we enjoy."

statement, "and I am saddened that the State Fair made so important in our community, and public health measures to slow this virus so we can save lives and return to the fun that we enjoy."

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A gold leaf Tejas Warrior statue
on March 1, 2019 at Fair Park
Exposition, will soon begin a

The fair was canceled
military encampment;
Exposition and the Park
1945, during World War
American armed forces.

Historic Hall of State building
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For Dallas, the loss of the fair carries with it a devastating economic impact. Based on a 2017 study conducted by the University of North Texas, the fair delivers an annual economic impact of \$410 million to \$499 million, making it one of the premier events in the nation. By comparison, the Super Bowl has in recent years delivered to the host city an economic impact of about \$400 million.

Last year alone, the fair drew 2,514,637 people during its nearly monthlong run, and it's not uncommon on peak days for the fair to draw more than 200,000 people.

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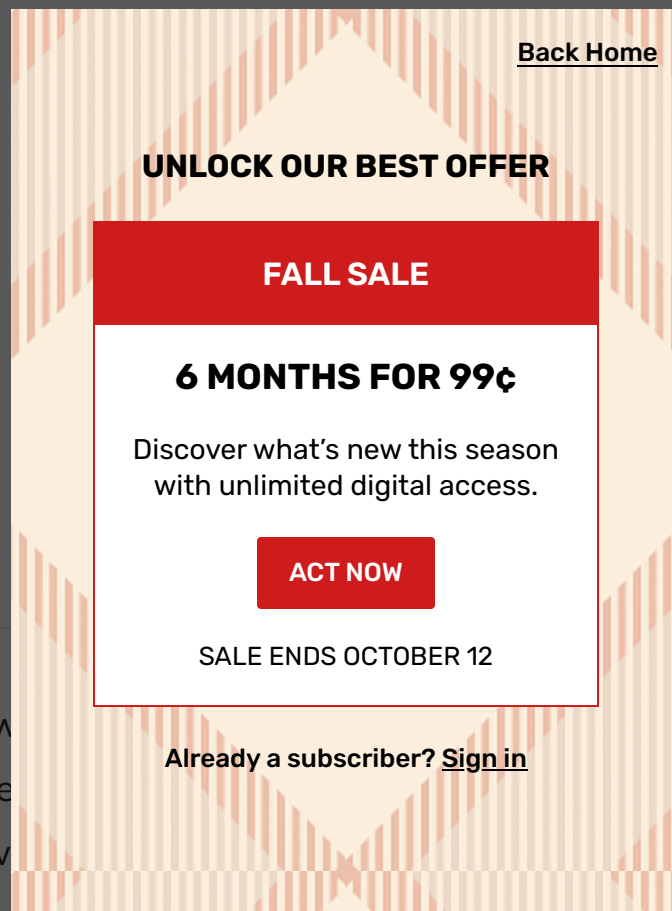
Mustard is applied to a Fletcher's corn dog at the State Fair of Texas in Dallas. (Ashley Landis/The Dallas Morning News) Ashley Landis/Staff Photographer

Food is a vital component of the fair, from Belgian waffles to cotton-candy tacos. The fair's most popular food is, arguably, Fletcher's corny dogs. Even the folks at Fletcher's issued a statement Tuesday, lamenting the loss of the fair.

"For 78 years, the Fletcher's family has served their original corny dogs to attendees of the State Fair of Texas. While they are heartbroken that the State Fair of Texas will not take place this year, they take the health of their employees and customers

seriously and understand the decision that was made to protect the public at large from COVID-19."

Still left in limbo is the fate of the 2020 Red River Showdown between the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma, a marquee game that routinely draws more than 90,000 people to the Cotton Bowl, as well as a national television audience.



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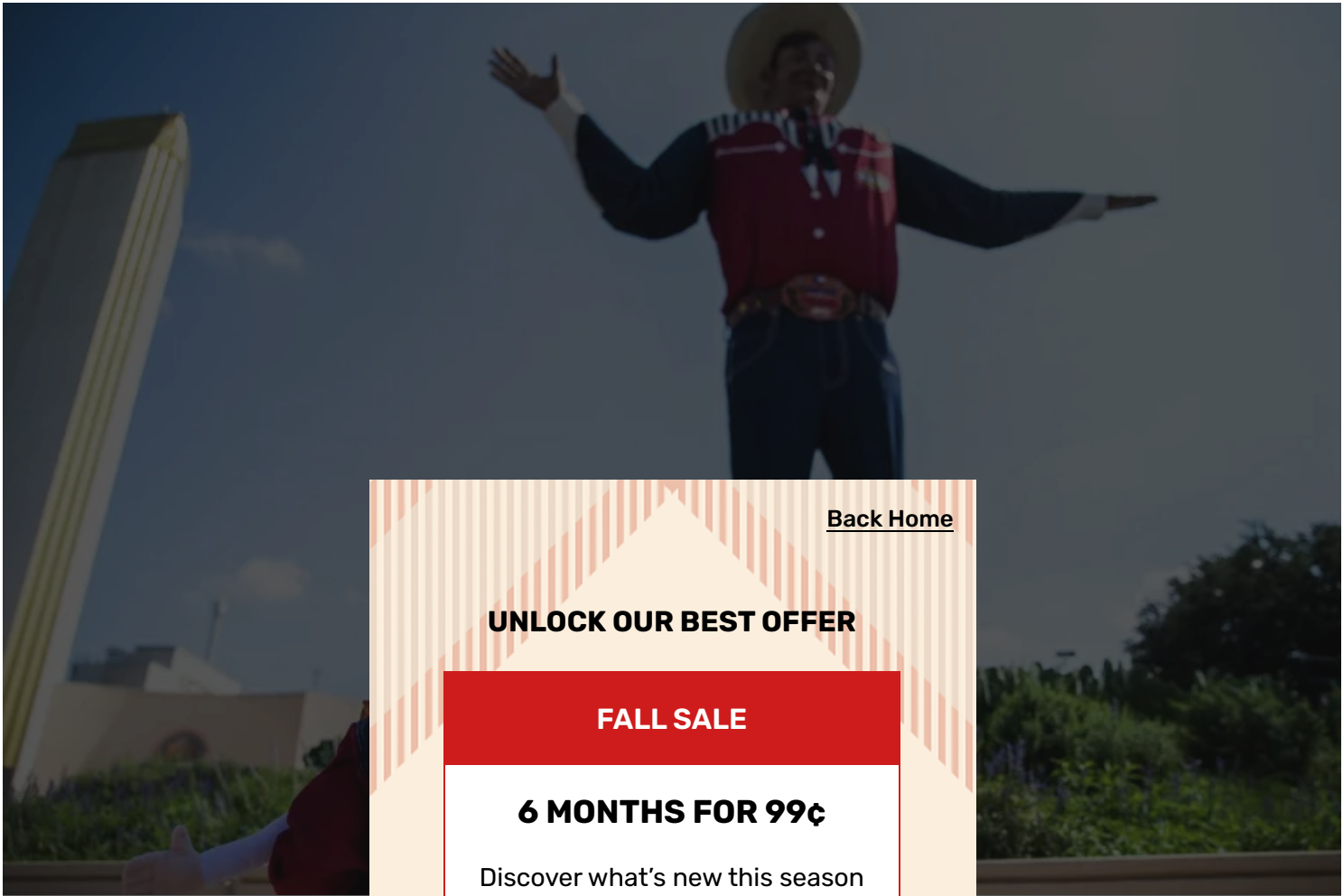
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"If football moves forward, the game will be scheduled, despite the pandemic," she said. Karissa Condoianis, who is the executive director of the fair, said she understands the decision. "Whether it happens or not, she added, will be decided by the NCAA, [athletic] conferences, schools, government" and other stakeholders. The same situation also applies to the State Fair Classic, played each year in the Cotton Bowl - during the fair - between Grambling State University and Prairie View A&M.



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Isaiah Lee, 6, of Weatherford
Park in Dallas. (Ashley Landis/
Ashley Landis/Staff Photograp

day, October 4, 2019 at Fair

The loss of the fair now
forced the 2020 cancella
2019 report commissi
million. Officials for So
event was insured, [their policy omitted coverage for a global pandemic.](#)

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Comic-Con, one of the country's biggest draws, held annually in San Diego, notches
economic-impact figures of almost \$500 million. But Comic-Con is also among the
many events across the country that is choosing to forego 2020.

There is also this element: the Dallas mayor said in May that potential cancellation of
the State Fair of Texas would tax the city with an even bigger financial challenge,

coming as it does after [\\$2 billion in estimated insured losses](#) in the wake of nine tornadoes that swept across North Texas in 2019. The tornadoes had already inflicted sizable financial losses in form of "lost sales tax revenue, hotel occupancy tax revenue, etc."

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The 2020 edition of the fair is set for Sept. 18. In its statement, the fair said it "has already purchased insurance on your behalf." For additional information, email tickets@bigtex.com

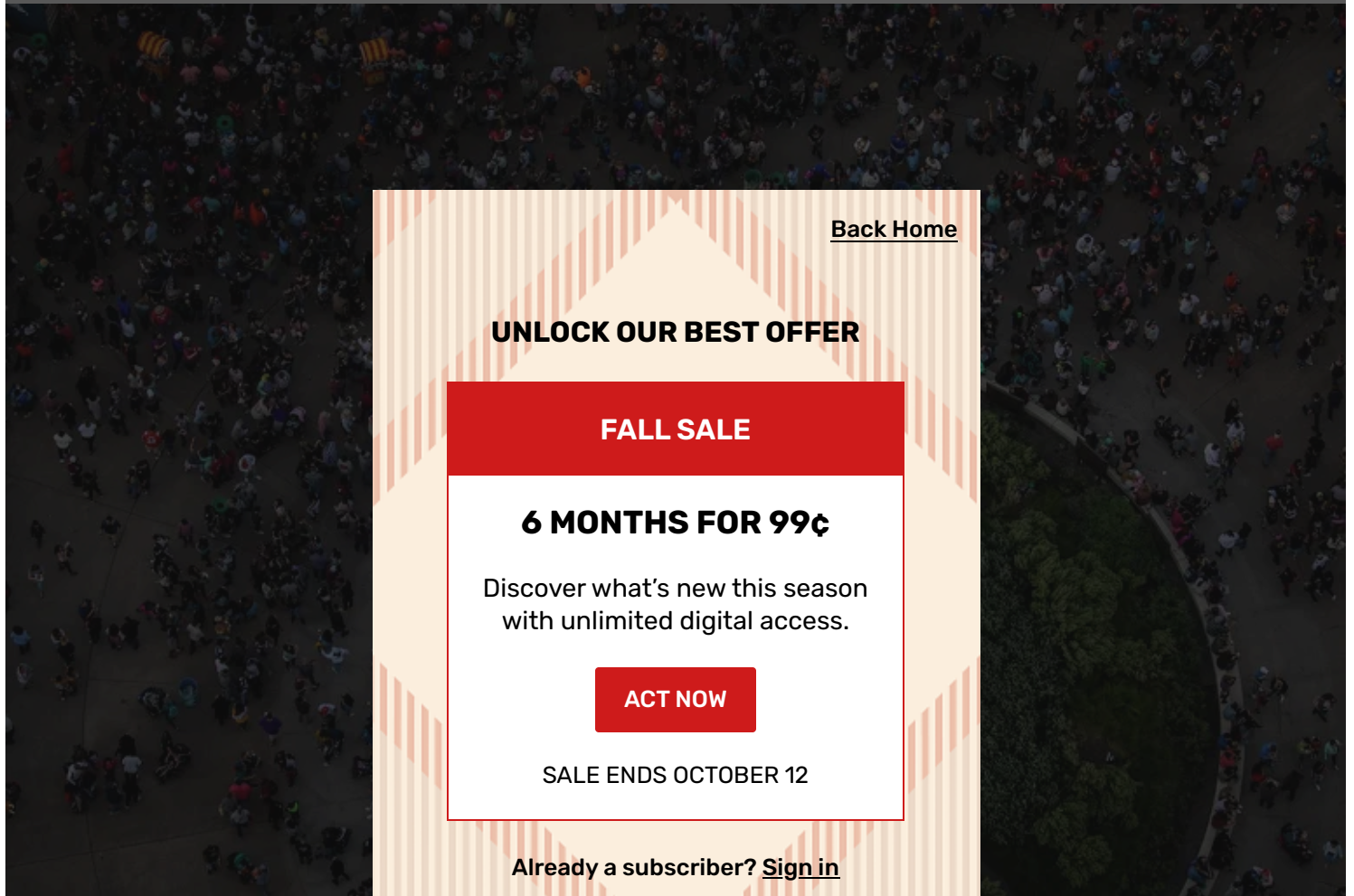
pt. 25 through Oct. 18. Funds for those who have not yet purchased tickets are required on Oct. 12. To purchase tickets, visit bigtex.com or

Mitchell Gieber, president of the State Fair of Texas, said in May that the fair is insured, but like South by Southwest, its policy does not cover a pandemic. The fair has about \$13 million in what he called a "reserve fund," as per its contract with the City of Dallas.

Those funds remain in place. He isn't sure at the moment, however, whether the fair will be forced to use even a portion of the \$13 million. From a financial standpoint,

the fair benefits, he said, from a run of successful years that will help it weather the storm.

And yet, it didn't make cancellation easier.



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The last rays of sunlight fall on the fair grounds at Fair Park on Saturday, Oct. 20, 2018, in Dallas. The fair is the last of its kind in the city. (Smiley N. Pool/Staff Photographer for The Dallas Morning News)

"As you can imagine, it was a very difficult decision. Our team worked really, really hard to put together a plan that we thought we could have executed with reduced attendance."

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The board began discussing the issue in April, but as July rolled around and the health situation worsened, it became clear that it was in the cards," Glieber said.

Adding to the difficulty was the fact that whether it be the fairgoers or the thousands of workers, that's the heartbreaking part," Glieber said, "knowing we could not do anything to ease the struggle that Texas and other states are facing."

He said the fair had 2,000 employees, many as 7,000 others who were seasonal workers, operators and exhibitors.

Is there any way for those people to be compensated for the loss of work?

"We don't really have a mechanism to be able to address that," Glieber said, noting that such people work on a seasonal basis only, and so far, none had been hired for 2020.

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"This pandemic has been a challenge for many businesses," he said.

Texas is hardly alone in this. Major state fairs in the Midwest.

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The final ray of hope is the Cotton Bowl, where, G during World War II, w

"We just had discussions with the athletic directors at both schools, and both of them said, 'Look, if there's college football, we're going to be playing this game, and we're playing it at the Cotton Bowl.'"

Lingering questions remain, of course, "about how many fans they might be able to have. They'll have to work that out themselves."

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since 1929 - even

So, really, the only question left is: What about 2021? Will there be a State Fair of Texas in 2021?

"Nobody has a crystal ball on this thing," Glieber said. "I know as much as what I study and read about, and all indications are that there will be a vaccine in place. We completely expect to have the 2021 State Fair running as scheduled. We will absolutely make it a special year. We intend to come back bigger, stronger, better than we ever were before."

Sarah Blaskovich continues

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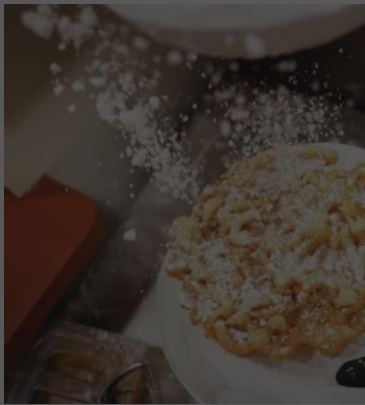
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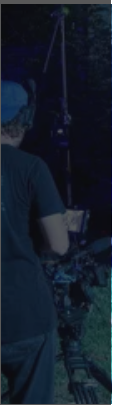
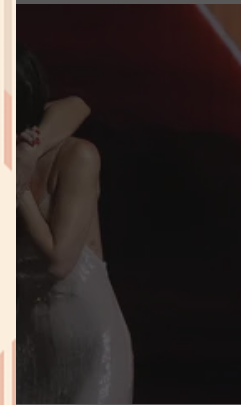
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