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Butter Sculpture Facts

In the early 1900s, The Ohio State University and the dairy processors of Ohio sponsored butter sculpting contests at the Ohio State Fair. The subjects of these contests were not restricted to specific themes.

Eventually, the butter cow, and later the calf, found a permanent “home” in the Dairy Products Building, which was constructed in the 1920s. New cow and calf sculptures are sculpted each year, thus becoming a fair tradition.

Additional butter figures were added to the cow and calf display in the 1960s, and the subject changes every year.

The Dairy Products Building and the butter sculpture display are sponsored by the American Dairy Association Mideast, Ohio’s dairy-farmer funded marketing and promotion program.

Each year, the American Dairy Association Mideast selects an icon or theme to feature in butter that is non-political, non-controversial and reflects optimism and broad audience-appeal.

A group of three Cincinnati-based technical sculptors, engaged primarily in the toy industry, completed this year’s display in 543 hours, which includes 378 hours of sculpting and 165 hours of designing and planning. The trio, who has been sculpting the display since 1999, enlisted the help of three other artists, including a dairy farmer from Shelby County, and two interns from Ohio State to assist them.

This year’s display is made from approximately 2,000 pounds of butter, donated in part by Dairy Farmers of America.

The butter sculptures are displayed in a new, larger cooler, where the temperature is maintained at 46 degrees. The energy-efficient refrigerated display case is 36 feet long by 11 feet wide and also houses Ohio’s Blue Ribbon Cheeses from the Ohio State Fair cheese contest.

More than 500,000 fairgoers visit the Dairy Products Building annually to see the butter sculptures and enjoy ice cream, shakes and cheese sandwiches.

Previous butter sculptures include:

- Astronaut Neil Armstrong
- Golfer Jack Nicklaus
- Star War's Darth Vader
- A Tribute to the Arts
- A Tribute to Milk Delivery
- Indy 500 Winner Bobby Rahal
- Jack Hanna and the Columbus Zoo
- The Modern Dairy Farmer
- Boxer Buster Douglas
- A Salute to the Armed Forces
- A Tribute to the Olympics
- A Tribute to 4-H
- The Anniversary of the Ice Cream Cone
- Wendy’s founder Dave Thomas
- A Salute to Dairy Product Development
- The Ohio State Buckeyes
- Space Pioneer John Glenn
- Retired Butter Sculptor Dan Ross
- A Day at the Fair with Hasbro Toys
- The Columbus Crew
- A Salute to America
- Aviators Orville and Wilbur Wright
- Great Explorers Lewis and Clark
- America’s Favorite Treat - Ice Cream
- Cincinnati Bengals and Cleveland Browns
- Ohio as the Nation’s Leader in Swiss Cheese
- Tribute to Ohio’s U.S. Presidents
- The People Behind the Product – a Salute to Ohio Dairy Farmers
- Fuel Up to Play 60 school wellness program
- A Tribute to the Nation’s Space Program
- A Salute to the Columbus Bicentennial