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OUR GUIDE FOR GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

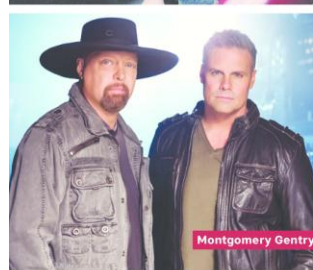
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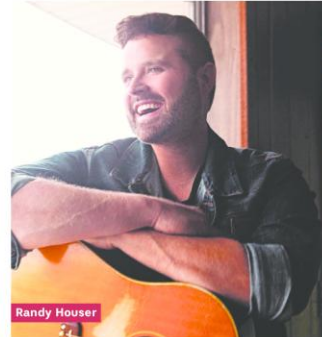
Country Summer harkens back to Sonoma County's agricultural roots

by GABE MELINE

COUNTRY MUSIC GETS misunderstood around these parts. If all you read are tourism brochures, you might think Sonoma County doesn't know its Wrangler jeans from its Swarovski wineglasses. Those who've been around awhile, though, know that farming was here long before fermentation — and in certain pockets of the county, rural culture still thrives.

Which is part of what makes Country Summer so unique, and indeed, necessary. Running June 16-18 at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds, the fourth-annual festival boasts 14 acts, with headliners Darius Rucker, Montgomery Gentry, Thomas Rhett and Justin Moore. As with most festivals, though, it's about more than just the music. It's about a lifestyle. Cold beer served beneath a pickup parked on a 10-foot platform to people in Stetson hats near the livestock pavilion? You got it.

That's not to discount the musical acts, of course — especially those lesser-known opening acts in this year's lineup. Of particular note are Cam, who parlayed an East Bay career on the dive-bar circuit into Nashville success



with the brilliant 2015 album "Untamed"; A Thousand Horses, who are among a recent country crop bringing Allman Brothers-style rock to their twang; and Randy Houser, with songs like "Goodnight Kiss" that feel like full-bodied cinematic indie rock until his Mississippi-born baritone kicks in.

All of these acts push country music in new directions, but while some things change, country mostly stays the same. Between sets, you'll be able to count the pearl snaps on plaid shirts, the worn Copenhagen circles on back pockets. Sponsors include tow-truck companies, hardware stores and agricultural equipment suppliers.

You might even find some fans with a little soil under their fingernails, or fertilizer under their boot heels — reminders that we're still a little workin' class around here.

June 16-18. One-day passes start at \$79. Sonoma County Fairgrounds, 1350 Bennett Valley Road, Santa Rosa, countrysummer.com

photos courtesy Country Summer, Darius Rucker photo by Chris Owyong