

Ferdie J. Deering

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Fairgrounds Control Needs Study

THE Oklahoma Racing Association (ORA) raised a hub-bub about auto races at the fairgrounds just prior to the State Fair of Oklahoma, which has the largest attendance of any event held in the state.

The ORA also raised a question as to whether the time has come for the City Council and directors of the State Fair of Oklahoma to review and perhaps revise the agreement for management of this facility to improve harmony and efficiency.

The racing dispute is a newcomer to a problem that has been brewing since the State Fair was moved from its location on Eastern Avenue to the present commodious tract. The question is who should operate the facilities the year around.

In 1948, the State Fair, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma City schools and other organizations staged a spectacular "Farm Built in a Day." It transformed a square mile tract of former state school land into a new fairgrounds, demonstration farm and educational facility that have added features and buildings almost every year since.

Before the move, the State Fair owned its grounds, buildings and equipment. When the dust had settled on West Tenth, the city held title to the land as a public park and the fair was running in the red. Attendance didn't boom as quickly as had been hoped. OSU held separate ownership of its part of the land.

In April 1957, the city took over management of the fairgrounds, except for 30 days of joint use and 30 days of exclusive use allowed the fair annually. The council and the fair board each may have thought it would come out better financially this way.

This is a point that needs to be studied. Under the present arrange-

ment, each maintains personnel year around that devotes part of its time to running the fairgrounds.

Executive personnel of the fair are required to plan and prepare for the next fair, which is getting bigger year by year. The city's public events department schedules rentals of the buildings, including concessions, while the city park department is responsible for maintenance and police for security.

The agreement provision that the city will not conduct or permit the operation of any events normal to fairs during the stipulated joint use period is a point of friction. This year, both ORA and Mar-Car racing will be staged during this period, while the fair has contracted with

International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) for auto racing during the fair.

The State Fair has invested heavily in buildings and improvements for the fair grounds, and would like to have a longer period of preparation for upcoming fairs.

City officials have been placed in a somewhat ambivalent position, since the new downtown convention center offers facilities for events that formerly used the fairgrounds.

Council and fair board members alike want both facilities to succeed and pay off bonds due. A review of the present agreement by these civic and business leaders could very well result in a new arrangement that would benefit all concerned.

Smith Homestead