

Ferdie J. Deering

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## State Fair Among Biggest, Best

**O**KLAHOMANS love a fair! That's why the State Fair of Oklahoma is one of the biggest and best held anywhere.

This extravaganza of exhibits from around the world opens Friday and O.O. "Sandy" Saunders is expecting 1 1/2 million visitors to swarm through the gates to enjoy the "Third Century Expo." This would top last year's record attendance.

In 1976, some 17 million visitors turned out for these top 10 fairs: Toronto, 3.6 million; Dallas, 3 million; Columbus, 2.3 million; Vancouver, 1.3 million; St. Paul, 1.3 million; Oklahoma City, 1.2 million; Tulsa, 1.2 million; Indianapolis, 1.2 million; Pomona, 1.1 million; Calgary, 1 million.

Toronto ran for 20 days; Dallas, Vancouver and Pomona for 17 days, and the others from 6 to 11 days each.

Fairs originated as places where rural people came to buy, sell or

trade; to show off their crops and livestock, and to enjoy whatever entertainment happened along.

Fairs still are all of these things, but so much more that they attract people with all sorts of interests. Fair attendance in Oklahoma is several times as large as farm population. The total for Oklahoma City and Tulsa, plus Oklahomans who go to the Dallas fair, exceeds state population.

Saunders is president of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions this year. He is respected as a showman and as a manager, but what officials of many other fairs envy most is the independence of the State Fair of Oklahoma.

Our fair does not depend upon state appropriations, political favors or donations to keep it going. It is a nonprofit, self-supporting institution. Its board members are chosen because they are willing to help promote the state and its ac-

tivities, not because they have political prestige.

The fairgrounds are property of Oklahoma City and are leased for the big event for a few weeks. The rest of the year, buildings are available for other activities.

However, the state fair adds to facilities on a year-around basis. Earnings are invested to make future fairs more varied, more attractive and more interesting.

For example, the 1978 fair, already in planning stages, will feature a new building for flower exhibits. Saunders says, "The money to pay for it is already in the till."

Looking farther ahead, discussions have been started regarding a plush auction pavilion, with seating for 1,800 and a high-class restaurant on the second floor.

The State Fair of Oklahoma has something for everyone, and as long as visitors keep coming, there will be more to see the next year.