

Finer Fair Featured for Oklahomans

FOR the 18th time, Sandy Saunders, president of the State Fair of Oklahoma, is promising visitors a bigger, better exposition.

Somehow, it has always worked out that way, although in his first year (1961) his promises may have been more hope than solid expectation. This year looks like a certain success, with more advance ticket revenue than the fair grossed in 1960.

The Oklahoma City event, to be held Sept. 22-Oct. 1, still has a long way to go to become No. 1 in the nation, so emphasis is on quality of exhibits, popular entertainment and educational values.

The State Fair of Oklahoma moved into third place in attendance in 1977, with 1,321,094. Texas has 3,176,028 and Ohio was second with 2,624,584.

Close rivals of Oklahoma for third are the Minnesota, Iowa, Tulsa, and Los Angeles County, each with more than one million visitors.

Eighteen other fairs reported at-

tendance of from 500,000 to one million. The oldest state fair in continued operation is the New York fair at Syracuse, running since 1841. It reported 526,011 visitors last year.

Most such events are state or county operations, receiving some tax money in addition to revenue. The State Fair of Oklahoma is different. It is a public institution that operates like a private business enterprise — and makes a profit!

Net earnings are reinvested in improvements, which is how some \$5.5 million worth of new facilities have been paid for over the years at the State Fair Grounds.

The State Fair Board is negotiating with the Oklahoma City Council for year around management of the grounds. Saunders says he believes that such an arrangement could "do more things for the citizens of Oklahoma City, who own the grounds, than could be done otherwise." Outcome of that proposal is pending.

Major additions made this year include a distinctive flower and gar-

den building, an addition to the Travel and Transportation Building, new stalls and wash racks at the livestock buildings, and a new conference room for meetings and functions.

Some 316 commercial exhibitors and 275 concessionaires have rented spaces. The few remaining spaces are expected to be filled before opening ceremonies are held Friday, Sept. 22. Advance ticket sales for grandstand and arena events are up 31 percent.

The international show will include displays from 30 countries, with government exhibits from 14 nations. An international trade symposium is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 28.

The fair will be great, but not the end. Long range plans are being developed to carry into the 21st century, when Sandy Saunders still may be promising "A bigger and better fair!"