

'Round and around she goes

Ride has 30 years of service

By MARY LOU OLSON

When the Decatur County Fair opens on Tuesday, Aug. 8, the merry-go-round — one of the last rides added to the original home-grown carnival — will be giving rides to youngsters for the 30th consecutive year.

A headline in *The Oberlin Herald* in April 1976 read, "Carnival to get merry-go-round" after the Decatur County Amusement Authority learned that Ward Sauvage, owner of Sauvage Gas Service, had offered to contribute \$15,000 to purchase the ride.

Floyd Lotker, president of the authority at the time, said that he was sitting at home eating dinner when the phone rang. He said it was Mr. Sauvage, an Oberlin businessman and friend, who he said he had known since he was a child.

Mr. Sauvage said, "Floyd, can you buy me a merry-go-round?"

"Well, of course, I about fell out of my chair because out of the clear, blue sky, Ward asked me a question like that," Mr. Lotker recalled.

"I told him, 'Yes, I know of a merry-go-round that I think would be very beneficial to our carnival,' and told him that I would check and let him know."

Mr. Lotker said that when the authority bought its first ride, the 40-foot Ferris wheel, in the spring of 1973, from William T. Collins, Minneapolis, Minn., they had looked at a merry-go-round on the same lot, but the group felt the price was prohibitive.

Mr. Lotker said he called Mr. Collins, the retired owner of the largest motorized midway in the world, just in case he still had the ride. His wife answered, Mr. Lotker said, and assured him that the ride would be available.

"It's been dear to us," Mrs. Collins told him. "We've held onto it until something special came along."

When Mr. Collins returned the call, he set the price at \$15,000. He told Mr. Lotker that he and his wife had kept abreast of the workings of the home-owned operation and supported the success of the project.

"After talking to Mr. Collins, Ward gave us the go-ahead over the weekend," Mr. Lotker recalled. "When it came time for us to go up and pick up the merry-go-round, we needed a tractor, so we asked Ward if he would furnish us with a tractor and driver to bring it back, which he readily agreed to do. The amusement authority paid for the fuel and driver."

"Wes Gaumer, Don Stapp and I, members of the authority, left Oberlin and followed the driver, James Boettger, in the car to Minne-



A FATHER ENJOYED a ride on the merry-go-round with his daughter during the Decatur County Fair. Members of the

Oberlin Lions Club have operated the ride since it was purchased for the Amusement Authority in 1986. — Herald file photo

apolis. "When we arrived there, we found that the fifth-wheel on the moving van was too short for the fifth-wheel hook-up on the tractor, so we had to call Ward to see what we could do. Mr. Collins knew of a place that we could get the fifth-wheel moved back. It was riveted to the frame, so we couldn't cut the rivets off or put any heat to the frame because it would weaken it, so we had to pull the rivets off and move the fifth-wheel back so that it would fit the van.

"And of course, when we got home they were able to move the fifth-wheel back and rivet it into its original location. After doing that, it was no problem to hook up this

moving van onto the tractor and after going to Collins' bank, and paying him for the ride, we headed for home.

"The trip was very uneventful and was a rather enjoyable one, mainly because what we were bringing home was the highlight of any of our expectations.

"After getting home, we didn't know where to put the ride, but we decided to place it at the entrance (to the carnival), where most people came in, as a showpiece ride.

"The county Lions Club was assigned to take care of the merry-go-round. It was their responsibility each year during fair time to remove it from the van. They did this for several years until the carnival board

decided to place a building over the ride. Wayne Golt's Construction Company designed the building. Using the pipe left over that Koch Oil Company had given the county for the grandstand, he erected the building over the merry-go-round.

The electrically operated merry-go-round is 36 feet in diameter, with 30 aluminum horses sitting three abreast, plus two chariots. The ride also sports a canvas-covered top, lights, and decorations. Allen Hereschell built the ride in 1954.

"It's the kind you'd find in an amusement park," explained Mr. Lotker. "New price for a similar model at that time would be approximately \$60,000.

"After the merry-go-round was

put in place, I was on the street and talked to a lot of people. Most local opinion was that the carnival was now complete."

"For adults, the carnival boasts the Ferris wheel, Looper and chair plane. Kids have pony rides, kiddie cars and small chair planes.

"Now we had something for the in-between age group as well as for the older fun-goers who can sit on the chariots," said Mr. Lotker.

Since then, the authority has added a Tilt-a-Whirl, Octopus and train, along with many games, all of which are manned by volunteers from Decatur County groups and businesses during the fair.



THE MERRY-GO-ROUND (left) was donated by Ward Sauvage for the Decatur County Fair. It was purchased 30 years ago by the Decatur County Amusement Authority from William T. Collins of Minneapolis, Minn., after Mr. Sauvage offered to pay \$15,000 for the ride. Two young boys (above) hang on tight to their ponies as they go around and around — Floyd Lotker photo