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Floyd and Dottie Lotker

# Volunteers' work built the carnival

By MARY LOU OLSON  
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When it comes to the home-owned carnival at Decatur County Fair, Floyd Lotker of Oberlin, a longtime member of the Decatur Amusement Authority, said he still remembers well the hours of labor that went into making it one of the best in the area.

As many return to Oberlin to enjoy the rides, games, concession stands, 4-H and open class entries, grandstand shows and more, little do they know the work that volunteers from all over the county put into making it a dream come true.

Mr. Lotker said that it all began back in 1972 when it became apparent that carnivals would no longer come to smaller communities. At that time the authority, with Mr. Lotker as president, decided it was time to do something about it.

"During the late 1960's the Decatur County Fair had slipped from what it used to be until it was about only a 4-H livestock show with no rides or other activities. It was not the fault of anyone; it was just one of those things that occurred," he said.

After the Decatur County Fair Board went to Topeka every year to sign contracts with carnivals and shows and then they never showed up, Wesley Gaumer, president of the fair board, and others decided this negative situation had to stop.

After learning of a home-owned carnival in Hydro, Okla., he said that he and several others decided to go there and check it out. Other members of the amusement board were Mr. Gaumer, Elmer Lindemann, Stuart Euhus, Merlin Anderson, Jim Gaumer, Herb Shirley, Don Stapp, J.R. Betts, John Juenemann, Ann Ooton and Kent Reinhardt.

By Feb. 8, 1973, the newly-incorporated Decatur County Amusement Authority was making plans for a kiddie car ride and a set of small revolving swings. Then the group went to Minneapolis, Minn., to check out a Ferris Wheel, which they purchased for \$6,500.

The 1973 fair brought in over \$4,500, which was used to pay off the debt in building the

rides and helping to expand it. After the fair, the amusement board decided to try to get more rides. They learned about a Looper ride and were able to buy it and that winter, authority members ordered blueprints on how to build rides, then hired Bill Matchett to build an adult swing ride.

"Koch Oil Co., which held its family picnic at the fairgrounds that summer and were able to enjoy the rides, donated \$5,000 worth of pipe to build a new grandstand," Mr. Lotker said.

At the close of the 1974 carnival, \$6,542 had been spent by carnival-goers during the four-night run and Mr. Lotker called the community's response to the home owned-carnival, "fantastic."

The authority continued to search for a merry-go-round. Mr. Lotker said that he felt that the Lord was watching over the group as each ride became available.

He said a prayer was answered when the phone rang at his home one day and Ward Sauvage offered to buy a merry-go-round.

"I about fell out of my chair, but I managed to tell him that I knew of a merry-go-round that would be great for our carnival," he recalled. "Arrangements were made and the new ride was brought to Oberlin."

The group had always thought it would be great to have a train and were blessed again when Harry and Betty Schrammel offered to pay for it. It was built in Strasburg, Colo., and delivered at the fair in 1980. Gov. John Carlin came to dedicate the new ride and Mrs. Schrammel christened it with a bottle of champagne.

Several other rides have been added to the carnival since that time, including the tilt-a-whirl, octopus, bumper cars, slide and more games.

Although Mr. Lotker is now a resident of Cedar Living Center, he said he hopes to attend the fair again this year.

Volunteers are needed to help with rides and games and even families who return to enjoy fair week are urged to call (785) 475-3341 if they are willing to help.

See you at the fair!



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