

The Midway & Memory Lane

BY KARA HUMPHREY

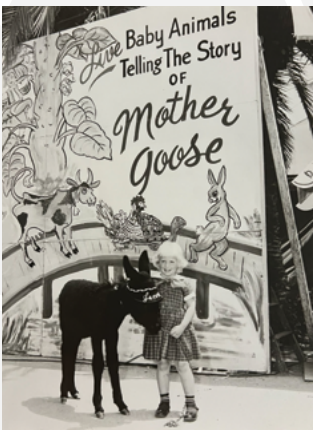
PHOTOS COURTESY OF
FOUR STATES FAIR & RODEO

COMMUNITY REVENUE IMPACT BY THE FOUR STATES FAIR AND RODEO

This amount is hard to pinpoint due to the fact that vendors on the independent area (the food vendors and commercial vendors around the circle area who are not local) stay in area hotels, eat in area restaurants, and purchase their food and supplies from local merchants.

The fair pays out over \$85,000 for security, police, fire, and event staffing for the ten day event. This money goes directly back into the local community.





**(2022)
AVERAGE
SPENT PER ATTENDEE ON
CARNIVAL RIDE TICKETS**

\$35

1940

First recorded year of rodeo.

1945

Fair organized, and charter established.

1954

Fair set at six days with a five-day rodeo.

1970-80s

Four States Fair held at Spring Lake Park where baseball complex is today.

1977

The Anheuser-Busch Clydesdale horses participated in parade and performed in the rodeo arena.



FOUR STATES FAIR 1947 DAILY PASS

NAME					
Sept. 30	Oct. 1	Oct. 2	Oct. 3	Oct. 4	Oct. 5
No. 1					



TOP FIVE MOST POPULAR CARNIVAL RIDES

Giant Wheel, Himalaya, Air Max, Alien Abduction, and Carousel.*
**according to Jason Wagner, Owner of Wagner Amusements, which is now known as AMP (Amusement Midway Provider) Carnival*

1979

104 acres of land located on the West side of Loop 245 and South of I-30, a 20-acre parking lot, and 88 acres were deeded to the Four States Fair for relocation at no cost.

1982

Groundbreaking for new fairgrounds on Loop 245.

1985

Lease expired in June on the old fairgrounds (Texarkana, Texas, Spring Lake Park site).

1986

First year at Texarkana, Arkansas, site which included 104-acre fairgrounds, a graveled parking lot, and an entertainment center.



AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT ON CARNIVAL GAMES BY PARTICIPANTS

\$10

FERRIS WHEELS & FAMILY TRADITIONS

Blinking colored lights, the sounds of carnival rides, crowds, and rodeo announcers, and that strange mix of smells that includes fried corn dogs and funnel cakes, smoking meats and livestock...These are the sights, sounds, and smells ingrained into some of the most cherished childhood memories of Texarkana residents. They officially ignite our senses and remind us once again that it is time for the Four States Fair and Rodeo, and for some, its reappearance on each year's calendar is eclipsed only by the return of Christmas and Santa Claus. This year's 78th annual event began March 31 and will run until April 9, and children and adults alike have been waiting with excited anticipation.

For one local family, the fair has been much more. It has become a legacy passed down from one generation to the next, morphing into a way of life for Lisa (Barr) Garner, who now acts as Executive Director. Garner's grandmother, Betty Nix, spent 51 years working at the fair, followed by her mother, Danette Perkins, whose 38 year tenure inspired her own dedication. "My grandmother came to the Fair in 1971 to work part-time to assist her best friend, Marion Reed, who was General Manager," said Garner. "She also had my grandfather, Bobby Nix, involved. He was an electrician with AA Electric, and they took over the electrical work on the fairgrounds. So, growing up, it was truly a family event." From one family member to the next, the torch has been handed off proudly and accepted willingly, as if in natural evolution. "I love to tell the story that I came to help my grandma for a weekend event, answering the phones because their office manager had left unexpectedly, and 25 years later, I am the Executive Director."

After decades of involvement, one would assume Garner has developed favorite aspects of the fair's festivities. "Goodness, that is like asking me which one of my kids is my favorite!" she jokingly confessed. While she loves watching the bull riding during the rodeo, riding the Ferris Wheel, and playing a little Skee-ball, it is not easy for her to narrow it down. "If I had to pick one thing," she decided, "I think it would be watching the kids showing their livestock and seeing them win their first ribbon on something they've entered into the fair."

As with everything, moving forward means adjustments are inevitable. "Things have changed so much over the years, even

Betty Nix and Lisa Garner



photo courtesy of Lisa Garner

in my 25 years here," said Garner. But when your family is so intertwined with the fair's history, the changes that stand out most are about far more than the addition of an exciting ride or the subtraction of a favorite treat. These changes mark the handing down of a familial legacy that Garner now holds with pride. "While there are a lot of things I miss that traditionally took place during the fair, it really has so much history and tradition, and each year it takes me back to being a kid. Even though my grandma has retired from the fair, she comes out every year to ride around the midway and get a corn dog and funnel cake and visit with the vendors who have been here for many years. She is pretty much a staple part of the fair, and you cannot really mention the Four States Fair and not think of Betty Nix."

"My most vivid memory growing up is that my Papaw would always come to pick me up from school and drive me over to the fairgrounds in his electrical truck so we could watch them put together the Ferris wheel," Garner remembered. "We lost him in 2006, but every year you will still find me sitting on the grounds watching them put up the Ferris wheel. I know when the lights come on, it is really fair time!" **1**

1989

Fair increased to seven days with success.

1992

The first ten day fair.

1998

Fair changed from ten days to eight days with a preview night.

2006

Ag Learning Center opened. The ALC is the first facility of its kind in the state of Arkansas—focusing on educating children about the importance of agriculture in everyday life.



LONGEST RETURNING LOCAL FOOD VENDOR

The longest running food vendor would be Luther Ray and Debbie Westmoreland from Hughes Springs, Texas, whose family has participated in the fair for over 40 years. They are part of the second generation. Luther is the son of Margaret and Luther Westmoreland. Their granddaughter, Tracy Duck, also from Hughes Springs, Texas, with Tracy's Concessions has participated in the fair for over 30 years. Bobby Lane and Josh Lane from Linden, Texas, run Lane Concessions and have also participated for over 30 years. Locally, Elve's Peanut Patties has also been a fair favorite for many, many years.

BARNYARD ANIMALS PRESENT DURING THE FAIR AND RODEO

The rodeo has horses, bulls, and the sheep which are ridden during the Mutton Bustin'. The barnyard features pigs, goats, horses, longhorn cattle, chickens, roosters, and even miniature bulls!



BESIDES THE RODEO, THE ALL-TIME MOST POPULAR ATTRACTION AT THE FAIR

Demolition Derby!





**TOP
5 MOST POPULAR
FOOD VENDORS**

Westmoreland Concessions, Tracy's Concessions, Lane Concessions, State Fair Funnel Cakes, JR's Catering, and Wondersticks.

2020

Fair postponed due to COVID-19 regulations. With easing of some restrictions the Livestock Show was held in September. The fair was postponed until a later date.

2021

The Fair was allowed to reopen April 1-9, and the Spring Fair was born.

2023

The decision was made after 2022's successful event that spring would become the permanent time. Some people really enjoy the fair being in the spring, others feel like it goes against tradition. Now that the event has been held in the spring for two years, this is the new tradition. ①

**AVERAGE
AMOUNT OF
PRIZE MONEY AWARDED
AT THE FAIR AND RODEO**

\$14,000 is awarded for the rodeo alone. Other types of prizes awarded for livestock, home arts, fine arts exhibitors, and more through the April Fair and the September Livestock Show total \$75,000.

