



## On The Earie

by Tom Powell, OABA News Ambassador

Attendance records were broken at both the **Minnesota State Fair**, St. Paul, and **New York State Fair**, Syracuse, as 2,046,533 turned out in Minnesota, and 1,279,010 in New York.

The old saying goes that if they get the weather, carnivals and fairs will do well. At both of these fairs, the weather was not the best, to put it mildly, but the people still came out. "Our weather, for the most part, was not good, but it didn't matter," said Jerry Hammer, who finished his 22<sup>nd</sup> year as director of what is referred to as The Great Minnesota Get Together..

"It was the third year in a row for both fairs to topple old records. As a reward, in Syracuse, Troy Waffner, who had held the title of interim director for the last two years, was named director by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo. Like St. Paul, Syracuse also endured some rainy and cold days.

Hammer said the food gross was up \$2.2 million from that of 2017 and reached the astounding figure of \$42 million. "That does not include beer or any other beverage sales." He also said the true attendance figure was probably 2,150,000 "because we don't count free kids or employees, only those who purchase tickets. An all-time single day attendance record of 270,426 was set the final Saturday. Five other single day attendance records were established. The fair has an independent midway.

Looking at food grosses, Hammer, who said the fair went by like a blink, noted totals were \$5.2 million the first Saturday, \$5.4 million the second Saturday, and \$4.3 million the second Sunday, "People ask what's next. They want to know if we'll increase the number of days, which we have no intention of doing. Everything is more spread out, and it's less crowded here than it was 30 years ago. We built up the north end and we intend to do the same in other areas. We started on the west end in 2014."

Grandstand acts at Minnesota included Niall Horan: Flicker World Tour 2018 with special guest Maren Morris, Sugarland, with Frankie Ballard and Lindsay Ell, Trampled by Turtles, with Lord Huron and Lissie, Earth, Wind and Fire, with Sinbad, The Beach Boys, with John Stamos, and The Righteous Brothers, Jason Mraz and Brett Dennen, Old Dominion, with Neil McCoy and Morgan Evans, truTV Impractical Jokers, starring The Tenderloins, 311 and The Offspring, with Gym Class Heroes, Hairball, with Kat Perkins, Boy George and Culture Club, The B-52s, and Thompson Twins' Tom Bailey.

Attendance records were set at seven of the 13 days between Aug. 22-Sept. 3, including the first four at Syracuse. The second Saturday crowd of 134,115 was the biggest and the second highest was 127,394 on the first Saturday. The Labor Day total was 125,748. Frank Zaitshik's **Wade Shows** provided the midway, with help from Les (Corky) Powers and his wife, Debbie, of **Powers Great American Midways**. Wade returns the favor at the **North Carolina State Fair**, Raleigh.

Earlier this year, Lifetime Passes that gave the owner admission to the **New York State Fair** every day for the rest of their life, went on sale for \$200, and were sold out on etix.com in 14 minutes. Daily admission tickets are typically \$10 for most days. This year's fair featured \$1 gate admission on opening day and Labor Day, plus \$3 on Thursdays, Aug. 23, and Aug. 30.

Free acts at New York's Chevy Court included Mir Fontaine, Dave Mason and Steve Cropper, Tedeschi Trucks Band, Rayvn Lehae, Ludacris, who had an overflow crowd; Live, Counting Crows, Jackyl, Hunter Hayes, Peter Noone of The Hermits, Smokey Robinson, The Temptations, The Drop Kick Murphys, who substituted for Dickey Betts of the Allman Brothers Band, who was ill; Moriah Formica, Lil Yachty, Jukin'

Bone, Hanson, The Spirit of Johnny Cash, Big & Rich, Collective Soul, ZZ Top, Brownskin Band and Joe Driscoll, A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie, Marin Morris, and Niall Horan.

Governor Cuomo said recent improvement to the fairgrounds helped attract more visitors. Among those is a new **Expo Center**, which boasted a temporary ice rink and free public skating.

The 114<sup>th</sup> annual **Kentucky State Fair**, Louisville, drew attendance of 614,470 for its Aug. 16-26 run, according to David Beck, president and chief operating officer of **Kentucky Venues**. "My first fair leading Kentucky Venues was a special experience and I enjoyed speaking with guests from all over about their own fair experiences and memories." The attendance was the second best since 2009.

Beck said the new free concert series, respectable weather, special discounts, unique exhibits, and new experiences were strong incentives to visit the fair. **North American Midway Entertainment** again provided the carnival midway, with some rides booked in from Michael Parks's **Paradise Amusements**.

With acts booked by Dave Snowden's Triangle Talent of Louisville, the lineup for the Texas Roadhouse Concert Series included Gary Allan, 112, with Midnight Star, Great White, The Oak Ridge Boys, with Larry Gatlin and The Gatlin Brothers, Casting Crowns, Happy Together Tour, Chris Janson, with Carly Pierce, Chevelle, Josh Turner, with Dillon Carmichael, The Commodores, and MercyMe.

It has been a tough time lately with the deaths of Terry Schmidt, owner of **T. J. Schmidt Amusements**; Bill Luehrs, who had been with **Luehrs Ideal Rides**; Morris Vivona, patriarch of the **Amusements of America** carnival, and Ward Hall, who was the ultimate showman even though we joked that no matter what feat he ever accomplished, I would always refer to him as a veteran sideshow operator.

They all deserve more attention than I can render in this space, but perhaps I can expand on their legacies in **OABA's** upcoming **ShowTime Magazine**. Needless to say, they all left indelible marks on the carnival industry, along with incredible memories.

I'll share one about Hall, 88, who was partnered with Christ since 1966. A prolific story teller, I interviewed him many times when I was editor of **Amusement Business**, but the first time we got together is the one this story is about. Hall listed his staff, which was lengthy, and I printed it. In later years, he confessed there was no ticket seller named Bill Christy, but he gave me his name to make it seem his show was larger than it was. Well, the next story I wrote had Bill Christy retiring. The next one had him coming back out of retirement. Then he retired again, etc. You get the idea.

We're going to miss all these great men. May they rest in peace, while we keep recalling stories about them. The show, now called **World of Wonders**, has been sold to Thomas Breen, who is keeping the tradition alive. A free act now, it was set up at the **Hubert Bullard-managed Cumberland County Fair**, Fayetteville, N. C., Aug. 31-Sept. 9. Christ added that Hall was ready to go, at the end.

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