

Veteran fair manager to retire

Central Wash. Fair

12-8-72

Local History

For a man who came to Yakima in 1920 to die of war wounds, Central Washington Fair Manager J. Hugh King has brought a lot of life and excitement into the community.

Some of the celebrations and celebrities King has brought to Yakima will be talked about tonight at a retirement dinner-party in Cosmopolitan-Chinook Tower for the veteran organizer and his wife. Many date before 1940, when King took over the fair's management.

There were the "Indy-type" car races King staged in the early 1920s, and the Gyro Club drill team he captained, that took third place in international competition. There was the colorful grandstand show of Washington State Fair that King put on from 1926-28.

There were the great patriotic celebrations King organized, like the American Heritage Parade of March 24, 1948, that coincided with arrival of the Freedom Train loaded with historic U.S. documents. There was Rededication Week in Yakima, in which the late Kiutus Jim, subchief of the Yakima Nation and World War I sergeant led a mounted contingent of Indians in full regalia.

It takes a talker to organize celebrations—the caliber King was when, at 16, he "talked his way into uniform" for duty in France with the famed 1st and 32nd Infantry Divisions. A wound King received at Chateau-Thierry in July 1918 brought him to Yakima two years later with "six months to live."

King said he got so involved with community celebrations he "didn't have time



J. HUGH KING

to die." In 1929, he combined patriotism and promoting skills to put on Yakima's first all-day Armistice Day celebration which included parade, football game and dance—an event he headed for 12 years.

Neither Yakima nor King can forget the 1950 Central Washington Fair, when the

Hawaii Calls and famous Mills Brothers singers entertained. By prearrangement, a small plane of Yakima Indian leaders arrived at Yakima Airport to welcome the Hawaii Calls when they deplaned before a crowd of 12,000. Then, Indians and Hawaiians rode to fairgrounds by covered wagon.

In 1951, Geronimo II, a parachuting sheep made four jumps into the fair arena in 58 minutes and earned himself a lifetime of grass. Geronimo I wasn't so lucky the previous year. He drew a streamer.

Attendance soared from 35,000 to 65,000 in King's first year as fair manager. Big time entertainers, and an RCA (Rodeo Cowboys Association) rodeo which began in 1950, kept kicking attendance up to 1972's five-day turnout of some 200,000.

Show people of international fame have come and gone in 32 years. King, his wife, Helen, and their daughter Mrs. Jo Ann Mills—who will be at his side tonight—still receive letters from some. A special friend has been Rex Allen, Western singing star who was here twice in the 1960s with his Men of the West.

There were also the original Hoosier Hotshots, Zaccchine double human cannon act, Eddie Peabody and his banjo and Bob Crosby and his Bobcats to name a few.

For Mrs. King, tonight may be her biggest thrill since 1959 when orchestra leader Clyde McCoy had her hold his \$55,000 diamond ring during the performance, for "safe keeping."

Yakima's "Man of Spectaculars" will formally retire Dec. 31, succeeded by Greg Stewart, his assistant for the past year.