

## **The Minnesota State Fair**

### **Our Great Minnesota Get-Together: One Story and One in a Million**

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Most days in the news or on the street, you can read or hear stories about events, meetings or greetings that positively changed lives. Some of these stories might qualify for Ripley's Believe it Or Not. Other stories are casual tales about experiencing the latest and greatest, celebrating accomplishments, or seeing other people.

When it comes to creating and exchanging memorable stories, the Minnesota State Fair is one great stage where the stories and experiences positively change lives. This is where, with an almost 150-year history, there are millions of stories from young, old, rural and urban that are told or re-told every year. The storytellers are you, me and even Garrison Keillor who wrote that "to be in a crowd is the crucial motive for coming to the State Fair." He continued, "We live insular lives, working in cubicles, riding around in cars, hanging out with people a lot like ourselves and the fair is where you can see, at long last, who else lives in Minnesota other than you and your family."

Our State Fair has inspired one generation after another to embrace agriculture, art, science, music, industry and history. It is where we learn about civic engagement, avocations, and careers while at the same time fostering our connections as citizens, families and friends. Reaching almost 1.8 million visitors in 2009, the State Fair continues to grow in popularity as a place that connects all parts of who we are.

From its agricultural beginnings before Minnesota was even a state to its current success-on-a-stick, the State Fair is engrained in the cultural fiber of Minnesota. It is an independently funded organization with no government appropriations. In addition to the 12-day State Fair, close to 100 other organizations use the fairgrounds for other events like the Green Living Expo, car shows, and equestrian and livestock exhibitions.

Minnesotans from all walks of life are part of the Great Minnesota Get-Together. Despite growing popularity, the State Fair faces the challenge of aging facilities, and keeping educational

programs contemporary and relevant. This is why a few years ago the State Fair formed the State Fair Foundation to help preserve and create the State Fair experience for the next generation.

With generations of involvement, several histories have been written about the State Fair by Minnesota authors. Most recently Kathy and Linda Koutsky introduced their State Fair history book in this way: fairs are the cornerstones of American tradition where we promote the rich bounty of our lands and the magnificent talents of our citizens. Their story about our State Fair goes like this: “Even in its earliest days when men wore top hats and women wore crinolines, the rides were spectacular, the food was hearty, produce was Paul Bunyan-size, livestock were well-groomed and the fairgrounds buzzed with the latest in technology.”

Today’s Minnesota media also help fan a multitude of memorable State Fair stories that revisit the past or tell about who is at the fair or what’s new at the fair today. A 2007 Minneapolis Star Tribune article re-iterated the importance of the State Fair in this way: “... the State Fair brings out Minnesotans’ deepest sense of place. It’s where they relive first dates, and eat from a menu of nostalgia.” Our great State Fair stories and memories give storytellers plenty to talk about. Some will tell about the significant economic impact of the State Fair and others will relate stories about blue ribbon peach pies, living in the 4-H Hilton, seeing Frank Sinatra perform some years back, or finding out that in the 1880s you had family that took sweepstakes honors for best herd of Herefords owned in Minnesota.

The State Fair of yesterday and today has touched generations of Minnesota lives in every county and corner of our state, from Ada to Zumbrota. As we visit our county fairs and we prepare to visit our great State Fair at the end of summer, think about what the State Fair has meant to you and your family. Think about the next generation experiencing State Fair traditions. Then take a moment to visit the Minnesota State Fair Foundation at [www.msffoundation.org](http://www.msffoundation.org) to tell your own State Fair Story. *Frank Parisi is a volunteer serving on the Board of Directors for the Minnesota State Fair Foundation 501(c)(3), the nonprofit entity supporting the State Fair for the next generation.*