

Ochsner's Medical Facility, Giant Heart Are Two World's Fair Successes

For the Ochsner Medical Institutions, the much-maligned Louisiana World Exposition was anything but a disappointment. From Ochsner's perspective, it was a resounding success.

Ochsner provided an unprecedented level of medical care for the fair and also had the first World's Fair pavilion ever built by a single medical entity — the 48-foot-high "Heart of the Fair." Post-fair assessments of both aspects did nothing to generate any regrets about participation.

The giant heart drew just under 800,000 visitors, while Ochsner physicians and nurses treated 31,000 fairgoers for everything from minor bumps and scrapes to major heart attacks.

Dr. Michael Sullivan, who headed the exhibit task force, says the attendance "was greater than we could have reasonably expected. Our attendance amounted to eleven percent of the gross attendance at the fair — much more, experts tell us, than a 'small' pavilion had a right to expect."

"In fact, if the fair's predicted eleven million visitors had materialized, we could not have handled a proportionate increase in visitors. We were that close to reaching our theoretical capacity," he added.

The "Heart of the Fair" is also probably the only exhibit which will survive, intact, as a continuing exhibit. It is scheduled to be transplanted to the Louisiana Science Center as a permanent exhibit later this year. The heart's designer, Marty Gabor of Lester Associates, says that, so far as he knows, the only world's fair exhibit other than the heart to remain intact is the scale model of the City of New York from the 1964 world's fair there.

The heart, which drew international publicity and even a feature in "Ripley's Believe It or Not!", had two offers of future homes, the Louisiana Science Center and Omniplex Science Museum in Oklahoma City.

The hundreds of clinic and hospital employees who volunteered to take time away from their regular jobs to staff the exhibit came in for high praise from Dr. Sullivan.

"Their dedication and enthusiasm was a big part of the exhibit's success," he said. "They made people feel welcome, and that's not an easy thing to do when you are greeting almost 400 people an hour."

Dr. McConnell, who is director of emergency medical services at Ochsner and who headed the precedent-setting medical facility at LWE, says 600 of the people treated at the fair were sick enough to require transportation to hospitals. Patients were free to select any hospital they chose. But 85 percent came to Ochsner.

The medical facility at LWE was the first world's fair infirmary offering on-site, physician-level care. And it appears to have established a lasting precedent. Dr. McConnell says that representatives from upcoming expositions in Japan, Chicago, South Africa, Australia and Canada have already approached him seeking information on staffing, equipment and other matters relating to on-site medical care.

The LWE medical facility was a complete emergency room in every respect, except for laboratory and X-ray capabilities. And most of the medical facility's capabilities were invoked at some time during the fair.

"The major problems were in three primary categories — cardiac, neurological and orthopedic. We treated 80 to 100 heart attacks and angina episodes alone. We also saw a full share of arrhythmias, strokes, broken bones — the full gamut of emergency room cases."

But the vast majority of those reporting to the fair's medical facility were there for relatively minor complaints — exhaustion, mild heat-related problems, bumps, bruises and blisters. For them, the care was likely to come from one of the team of Ochsner Clinic and Ochsner Foundation Hospital nurses at what came to be known as "the Band-Aid desk."

Between the "Band-Aid desk" and the more serious cases, Ochsner nurses logged 8,000 hours of work, said assistant hospital nursing director Anne Champion, R.N., who directed nursing services at the fair.

The philosophy of the medical facility, Dr. McConnell said, was to help the ailing fairgoer continue his or her visit to the exposition, if medically feasible.

"People didn't come to the fair expecting to become ill," Dr. McConnell explained. "They had their day all planned — sometimes *too* planned — and a medical problem was more than an inconvenience. It was a disappointment. In some cases, just one elderly or frail member of a family group would find the pace too exhausting and need a place to rest in comfort for an hour or so. We recognized and answered that simple need many, many times.

Dr. McConnell also had high praise for the staff of unpaid volunteers who contributed 7,000 hours of work at the medical facility.

"The volunteers were amazing. We really couldn't have done it without them," he said. "They were a marvelous cross-section of Ochsner people. There were guys from our maintenance department, for instance, who would put in a full day of work, go home, get dressed in their volunteer uniforms and come down here to work all evening. It was their night out — helping people."

The efforts of the physicians, nurses, clerks and volunteers didn't go unnoticed. Dr. McConnell has more than 400 letters of appreciation from people all over the world who received care at the medical facility.

"I'd certainly do it again," he says. "It taught us a lot. It gave our people a chance to do something innovative and brought them closer together."