

ARAMCO WORLD magazine

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THE WORLD'S FAIR 1982
**A Special
Report**

In Knoxville,



fun, flags and fireworks...



FAIR PLAY

WRITTEN BY SYBIL THURMAN PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID LUTTRELL

They're used to it now—the crowds, the bands, the laser beams raking the sky at night, the brilliant bloom of fireworks – but back in May, Knoxville's people were openly and unabashedly excited as the guns went off, the balloons went up and a presidential cavalcade swept up to the Court of Flags to open the 1982 World's Fair.

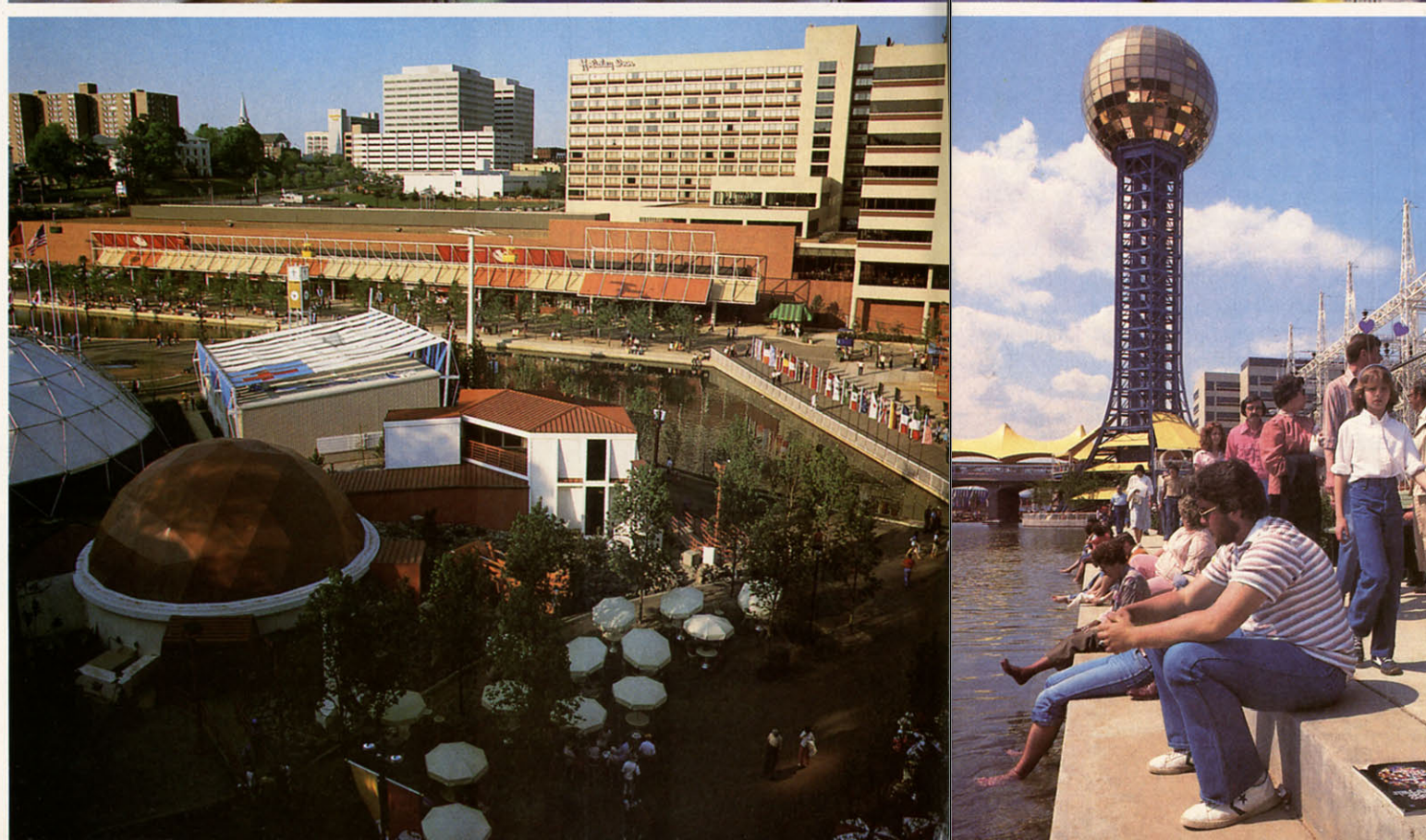
To an extent, this sense of excitement still permeates the city. Despite early fears of failure, and fierce opposition, most of Knoxville has come to agree with what Joe Rodgers, commissioner of the U.S. pavilion, said about the fair: "The focus is on the fun."

To the promoters and backers of the fair, of course, the pressure and problems of the fair were hardly fun. They, after all, were responsible for what the *Economist* later described as Knoxville's "cheeky" gamble: the \$800-million effort to hold a genuine world's fair in a small, relatively unknown southern city. And during the first weekend, when opening day crowds seemed to sag a little, cab drivers and the owners of motels and inns were heard to inquire – with just a faint note of concern – "What did y'all think of our fair?"

Most of Knoxville, however, just took it as it came, doing what they could and shrugging if they couldn't. The night before the opening, for example, as construction crews raced to complete unfinished exhibits and pavilions, clusters of visitors and what seemed to be most of Knoxville's population gathered on the green slopes of the University of Tennessee above the fairgrounds or strolled casually along Broadway – where a great billboard had, for 1,000 days, ticked off the days remaining until the fair opened. Others dined leisurely in such places as the balcony of the old L&N (for Louisville and Nashville) railroad station, a huge, 19th-century monument of red bricks and granite slabs converted, by imaginative architects, into a warren of shops and restaurants for the fair.

From such perches, and from the bridges that cross the ravine where the fairgrounds lie, these early crowds patiently watched and waited. They were amiable. They were casual. They were relaxed.

Since then, this easy-going attitude has become an outstanding feature of the fair. On opening day, for example, when tight security for President Reagan kept thousands waiting outside the fairgrounds in the sun, most simply shrugged and waited while the bands played, the majorettes marched, the choirs sang and – a spectacular finale – thousands of multi-colored balloons went soaring into the sky – a symbol that the fair, after seven years work to get it off the ground, was aloft at last.



It had, nevertheless, been a race against time. From the moment the Bureau of International Expositions okayed Knoxville, fair officials were never really sure they could do it. Even while Dinah Shore sang and President Reagan spoke, a woman in heels was still vacuuming the rug at North Carolina's exhibit, while a carpenter noisily piled strips of aluminum paneling into a cart.

Some exhibits had worse trouble than that. Panama, for some reason, simply didn't open its pavilion at all. A rare Rembrandt scheduled to headline an art



U.S. President Ronald Reagan opens the 1982 World Fair.

exhibit was delayed five weeks because of insurance troubles. And, across the fairgrounds, the Peruvian pavilion faced a crisis: a leak in the ceiling that occurred when waiters in the 140-seat Peking style restaurant above the exhibit spilled a 20-gallon vat of won ton soup.

The next day there were still more problems. Ticket sellers at the gates ran out of change and thousands of visitors piled up at the gates in the sun getting angrier by the moment – until quick-thinking fair officials decided to let them in free.

In the small, but well-appointed press center in a brand new hotel adjacent to the fairgrounds, some of the more than 1,500 reporters who poured into Knoxville for the opening were also given a run-down on the kind of troubles the fair could expect during the long, hot summer ahead: police spotted and roused six pickpockets; emergency squads treated a man with a heart condition and firemen extinguished three small fires.

Later, as the nation's schools let out and the tourist tide began to break over the Great Smoky Mountains National Park the problems worsened. But though the traffic did get a bit heavy and the prices just a mite too high, the people of Knoxville continued to delight in the fact that their small, green city had actually gotten itself a real world's fair.

It is true that fair officials and world press coverage have stressed the playful aspects of the fair – and they should. Each day has offered a marvelous variety of sparkling entertainment: marching bands, strolling magicians, mimes and jugglers. Big hits include Appalachian folk dancing, the arts of basket-making, woodcarving, quilting and blacksmithing. Above the south end, America's largest ferris wheel swoops visitors 148 feet above the ground and each day the famous Anheuser-Busch Clydesdale horses, known for their elegant carriage and fleecy white "stockings," lead parades through the fairgrounds. Finally, every evening, the festivities culminate with spectacular fireworks, and a laser show billed as "the largest laser sky show in history" – swirling colors and sheets of lights visible for miles.

But the pavilions – sponsored by 23 countries and 91 corporations – do not neglect the fair's serious theme either. And though the topic – "Energy Turns the World" – may seem dry, scientists, graphic designers and technicians from around the globe have, with imagination and taste, humanized the most sophisticated technology.

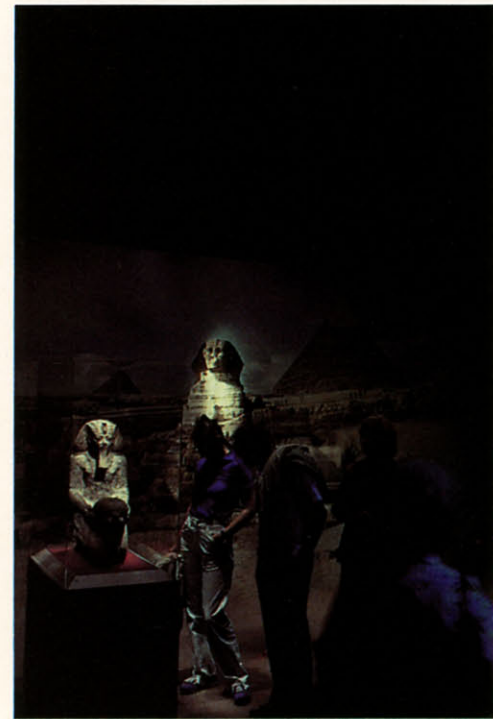
The U.S. pavilion, for example, offers a debate on energy that includes Jane Fonda; China provides river rides in a 20-foot solar-powered dragonboat; the Tennessee Valley Authority allows visitors to try to match energy demands with available supply in a simulated load-control center; and France shows the core of its nuclear breeder reactor. There is also a look at oil shale, a glimpse of the bottom of the North Sea – via a British oil drilling rig – and an uncomfortably realistic coal mine from West Virginia.

The fair also provides a forum for every exhibitor to show off its state-of-the-art technology. Talking robots discuss energy topics in Japan's pavilion, France presents an electrified model of the Bullet Train – the world's fastest – and Australian windmills up to 75 feet tall pump water to irrigate eucalyptus trees and ferns inside the pavilion.

One of the more memorable attractions is the IMAX theater – with a screen 67 feet high and 90 feet wide – in which the U.S.A.

offers an enormous, three-dimensional film on the story of America's energy—past, present and future. Elsewhere in the six-level cantilevered pavilion, visitors can push buttons on 33 "talk-back" computers to get answers to their energy-related questions, and stroll among 12-foot murals and artifacts from six previous fairs and museums in the United States.

Some exhibits mix energy with culture. Korea, for example, demonstrates an ancient floor-heating system called "Ondol"—along with folk dance performances, Tae Kwon Do karate exhibitions and a restaurant serving traditional Korean cuisine.



Pharaonic treasures are shown in the Egyptian pavilion.

Germany showcases an 18th-century waterwheel; the Italians pay tribute to the 40th anniversary of the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction; and the Canadians operate a 22-foot working model of the world's largest wind turbine.

Although the Hungarian Pavilion addresses world energy problems too, it will be remembered primarily for its Rubik's cube, a giant version of the puzzle invented by Hungarian architect Dr. Erno Rubik. The huge cube, which solves itself mechanically every few seconds, is the focal point of Hungary's presentation, but a restaurant serving Hungarian goulash, cabbage rolls, and strudel may be equally memorable.

History, art and culture are also stressed at the fair, particularly at one large pavilion housing China, Egypt, and Peru. The Chinese, who see the fair as an opportunity to establish a cultural dialogue with the

A Welcome to the World

Author John Gunther called it the ugliest city in America. The Wall Street Journal called it a "scruffy little city on the Tennessee River." Nevertheless, Knoxville, Tennessee — to the surprise of virtually everyone — became the home of the 1982 World's Fair.

Until a few years ago, the very idea of a World's Fair in Knoxville was unthinkable. Small, seemingly undistinguished, Knoxville also had more than its share of urban blight: empty, dilapidated buildings, a depressed business district and — remnants of its industrial past — abandoned warehouses, factories and rusting railroad tracks.

Worse, perhaps, Knoxville's traffic was such a mess that Saturday home-football crowds often brought the city to a halt. Its poorly-designed and obsolete highway system, in fact, was notorious from coast to coast; truckers dubbed one particularly awful bottleneck "Malfunction Junction."

The question then is inescapable: why Knoxville?

One answer is that Knoxville's leaders wanted a World's Fair as a vehicle for urban revitalization that the city itself simply couldn't afford. But there were other, more persuasive arguments, too.

Knoxville, for example, lies athwart the tourist route to Florida from the midwest and the northwest and is only one hour away from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park — the most visited park in the United States. Fair promoters also pointed out that the city sits smack in a rich lode of potential fairgoers: more than 52 million people live within 400 miles of the Fair site.

Another argument turns on the theme of the fair. As sanctioned by the Bureau of International Expositions in Paris, the theme is "Energy Turns the World," and Knoxville, though many people forget it, can make a respectable case for its contribution to U.S. energy needs.

Knoxville, for example, is at the heart of a region that one leader described as the "Saudi Arabia of Coal." This region — Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia — produces 200 million tons of coal annually.

In addition, Knoxville is the home of the world-famous — and once controversial — Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a 1930's experimental New Deal agency that tried to show how planned development of natural and energy resources could transform the economy of an entire region.



To a large extent TVA succeeded. Now the third largest electrical utility in the world, TVA operates a system of 49 hydroelectric dams, 12 coal-fired steam plants, two nuclear plants, one hydroelectric pumped-storage project, and four combustion-turbine units.

Thirty miles from TVA offices in Knoxville is still another famous installation: Oak Ridge, known for its role in the World War II "Manhattan Project," and the center today of such highly sophisticated Department of Energy research projects as the Clinch River Breeder Reactor, which produces more plutonium than it consumes. Though it is under attack from some who consider it obsolete, and others who fear nuclear proliferation, the \$3.2 billion project is, according to DOE spokesman Wayne Range, "...on the leading edge of this technology."

One of the world's largest research centers, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory also works on improvement of the fission process, does environmental research on power plant

opinion leaders, but also obtain seed money from local banks and win political support from both Tennessee's senators and President Carter.

Later, with growing international interest in a Knoxville fair, they were also able to obtain larger amounts of money from national and international sources and the taxpayers, assured that they would not have to foot the bill, began to offer support.

One key problem — "Malfunction Junction," where two interstate highways met in downtown Knoxville — was solved early. Though improvements had been on the drawing boards at the Tennessee Department of Transportation previously, the fair's deadline — May 1, 1982 — forced completion of 10 years of work in two years: \$225 million worth of highway construction, much of it for a bypass.

Almost simultaneously, commercial interests started construction of three more downtown hotels: a new Hilton, a Holiday Inn, and a Quality Inn. Together with the older Hyatt Regency, that gave Knoxville 1,352 rooms. In addition, dozens of new motels were opened, other buildings were renovated or converted — one a tobacco warehouse partitioned into cubicles — and a fleet of houseboats was moored along the riverbank.

The expectation of quick profits, of course, spawned abuses — as the national press has made abundantly clear. Parking lot fees commonly jumped 200 percent; some motels hiked prices 400 percent; and some landlords even evicted tenants from their apartments. Yet, surprisingly, Knoxville, by opening day, had rallied behind the fair.

Local citizens, for example who had once sneered at the idea of a fair, now bristled when national reporters questioned how a "scruffy little city" could even think of hosting a World's Fair. Furthermore, with the city's reputation at stake, a remarkable spirit of enthusiasm surfaced. In nearby Clinton, three-quarters of the businesses painted their buildings and in Knoxville itself the business community cleaned up downtown alleys, fixed storefronts and sidewalks, planted trees, ordered benches and even steam-cleaned downtown buildings.

At the same time, private individuals, garden clubs, Girl Scout troops and others have planted spruce up the city through the "Adopt-a-Spot" program in which volunteers, assigned one spot in the city, not only cleaned it, but also planted flowers and trees on their adopted property.

The results? A bustling, eager Knoxville that, all summer, has been offering a Tennessee welcome to the world — with no apologies.

effluents, develops solar and geothermal energy and — the greatest challenge in energy technology — nuclear fusion, which has been called the "next generation experiment."

The University of Tennessee is also involved in energy — by frequent participation in Oak Ridge efforts and experiments, but also on its own in solar, wind, geothermal, tidal power and fusion experiments. Energy, as a result, is responsible for one obscure statistical fact about Knoxville: on a per capita basis, it ranks 11th in the world in residents with Ph.D. degrees.

Even the scholars were skeptical, however, when civic leaders first proposed Knoxville as the site of a World's Fair. Who, they asked, would pay for the fair? How — with only one downtown hotel — could Knoxville possibly house millions of visitors — and solve its traffic problem?

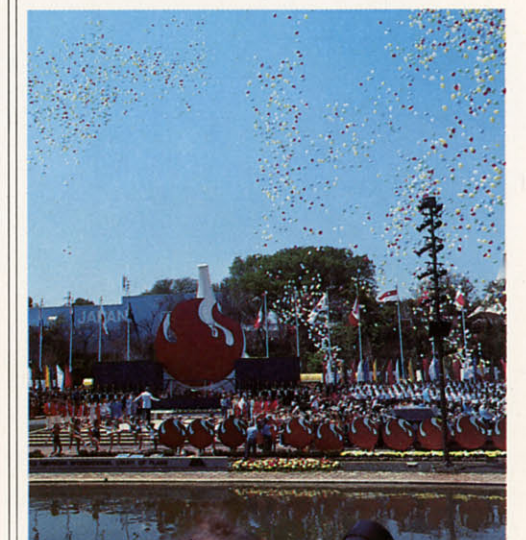
Anticipating many of those questions, proponents of the fair had studied the experience of Spokane, Washington — a city much like Knoxville — in hosting the 1974 World's Fair, and were able to not only reassure local

world, offer a portion of the Great Wall of China, along with scores of soapstone and jade carvings, modern and antique porcelain, rattan and silk goods, furniture, and tapestries woven with pearls. The pavilion does not neglect energy entirely, however; in addition to the solar boat, it offers a display on the collection of marsh gas for conversion into propane gas. The fair's biggest hit, China's pavilion has crowds waiting up to three hours.

Egypt's exhibit also focuses on history — with a collection of treasures from the Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic periods. Similarly, Peru celebrates its past with gold and silver relics and a 3,000-year-old mummy.

Some of the exhibits are quite candidly sales promotions — but enjoyable anyway. Many U.S. states make pitches for their tourist attractions with "visual vacations" to Tennessee's Grand Ole Opry, North Carolina's Kitty Hawk, South Carolina's Myrtle Beach, the Kentucky Horse Park, and the Mississippi and North Florida Gulf Coast.

Several states, though, go a step past strict promotion. West Virginia is one, with an exhibit on coal mining that has received international recognition for its accuracy and fairness, and Tennessee, taking its role as host to the world seriously, built a \$4 million open-air amphitheater in the center of the fair, where an extravagant music and dance production called "Sing Tennessee" is performed; the amphitheater is a futuristic fiberglass tent, one of the few permanent structures on the site.



Aloft at last: thousands of balloons — and the fair as well.

Outside the fair, Knoxville is offering still more entertainment. At the Knoxville Civic Auditorium and the Civic Coliseum, for example, seats are already booked for October with such drawing cards as Rudolf Nureyev, dancing with the Boston Ballet,

The Saudi Pavilion

المملكة العربية السعودية



Kingdom of SAUDI ARABIA

ETERNAL VALUES

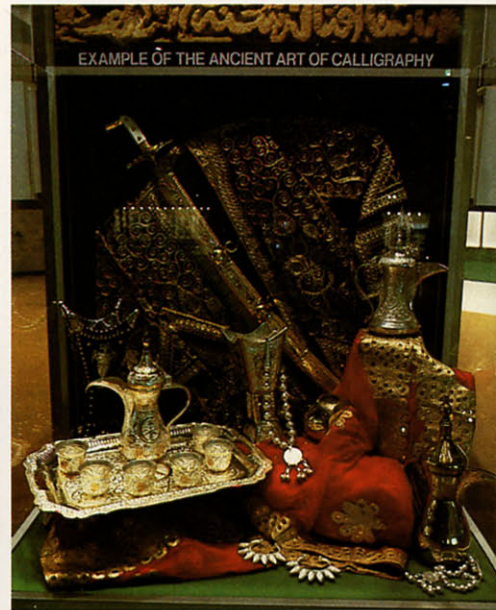


in a DYNAMIC NATION

Increasing America's awareness of the Islamic world



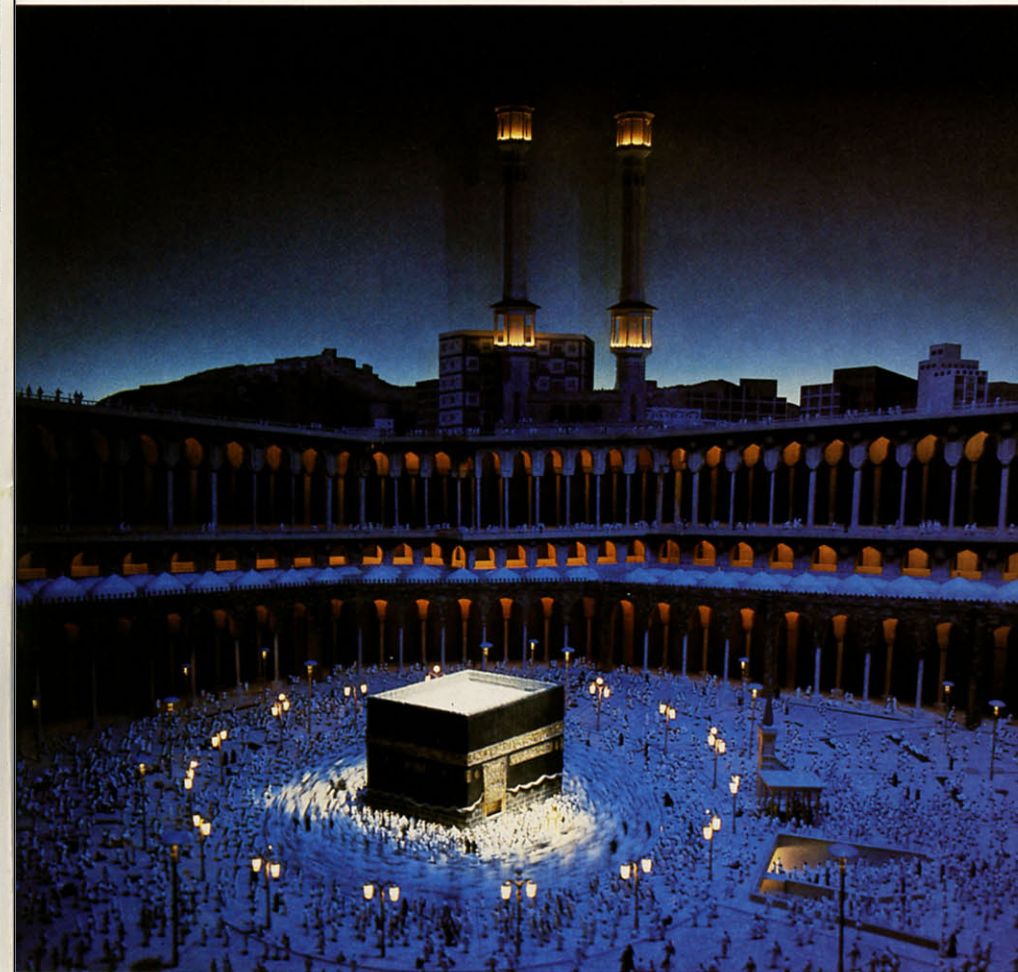
The Kiswa, the gold-embroidered covering from the Ka'ba, a cubical stone structure at Makkah (Mecca), holy to Islam.



Swords and coffee pots — artifacts from Saudi Arabia's past.



Display panels depict progress in present-day Saudi Arabia.



The center-piece of the Saudi Pavilion: a handsome, detailed scale-model of the Ka'ba and Grand Mosque at Makkah.



A smiling welcome from a Saudi guide for a young visitor.



Minister Solaiman al-Solaim visiting the Pavilion.

In its first appearance at a world's fair, Saudi Arabia won plaudits and drew crowds with a modest pavilion that featured some sand from the dunes at Dahna and a glass oil well. Now, in its second try, the kingdom is achieving still greater success with a more serious theme—the eternal values of Islam.

The first exposition was Expo '70, Japan's extravagant mix of fantasy and futurism in Osaka. The second — much smaller, but also more fun — is Knoxville's international energy exposition.

Like the rest of the Knoxville exposition, the Saudi pavilion is an understated, low key effort. It touches lightly on such subjects as Saudi Arab-United States trade, education in the kingdom and, in keeping with the fair's theme, includes a modest mention of petroleum, especially the use of petroleum revenues.

Quite deliberately, these exhibits try to counteract the numerous misunderstandings in the United States about Saudi Arabia, and, says Commissioner General Ibrahim F. Khoja, to show that "Saudi Arabia is a friend and a partner of the

United States."

The focus, however, is summed up in the pavilion's motto — "Eternal Values in a Dynamic Nation" — and is represented in the pavilion's centerpiece: a painstakingly detailed scale-model of the Grand Mosque in Makkah (Mecca), the Holy City of Islam.

"Because the nature of Islam, with its 800 million adherents, is so seldom a topic of conversation in America, we felt that a dramatic presentation was called for," explains Commissioner General Khoja. "Now, a brief, stimulating portrayal of worship in Islam's holiest place is available to the estimated 10 million who will attend the Fair."

Not all the visitors, certainly, will take in the Saudi pavilion, but so far attendance has been surprisingly high. "There were 80,000 people here to see Reagan on opening day," said one of the pavilion's 35-man staff, "and I think most of them visited the Saudi pavilion."

In a sense, the Saudi Arab pavilion provides an oasis in the midst of the busy sunlit fairground. Under a flat black ceiling, amid carpeted silence, visitors find

neat, well-lit green and white panels and a modest collection of artifacts: a sword, a *ghutra*, the traditional Arab headgear, a *khanjar* — the handsome decorated curved dagger — a camel saddle and other items from what was once a largely nomadic culture.

In sharp contrast to that phase of history, there is also a panel pointing out that every billion dollars of Saudi imports from the U.S. creates 35,000 American jobs, a fact that commissioner Khoja elaborated on during an interview with *Aramco World*: "We are friends; we're not a burden on you. We prefer a low profile, but sometimes we need to let our friends know these things."

On display too are graphs, photographs and models — such as a reconstruction of the University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran — suggesting the vast program of education and modernization now underway in Saudi Arabia.

Pavilion manager Jean Abinader made it clear that Saudi Arabia's goal was a modest

one. "If visitors leave the pavilion knowing the country is named Saudi Arabia and not 'South Arabia,' he said, "we'll be happy."

"But," he adds, "we also hope that they'll leave knowing that we share certain fundamental values." Among them, he says,

are a "strong sense of individuality, hospitality, a desire for peace, opposition to Communism, belief in one God, and dedication to the sacredness and dignity of life."

On opening day, it was instantly apparent that Islam was the big draw. Crowds lined up immediately, for example, in front of the Kiswa. A great black cloth with verses from the Koran embroidered in gold, the Kiswa is a covering for the Ka'ba, a cubical stone structure in Makkah called the House of God. And even bigger crowds lined up at the Grand Mosque exhibit; visitors, in fact, waited in line for up to 90 minutes and were pleased that they had. As one girl put it, "It sure beats the other exhibits."

The exhibit is impressive. As visitors enter the curtained enclosure in which the Grand Mosque diorama is placed, the enclosure is dark and silent. Then, as the sky lightens, the voice of a muezzin is heard chanting the dawn prayer and suddenly the pavilion crowd is transported to the great courtyard outside the Grand Mosque

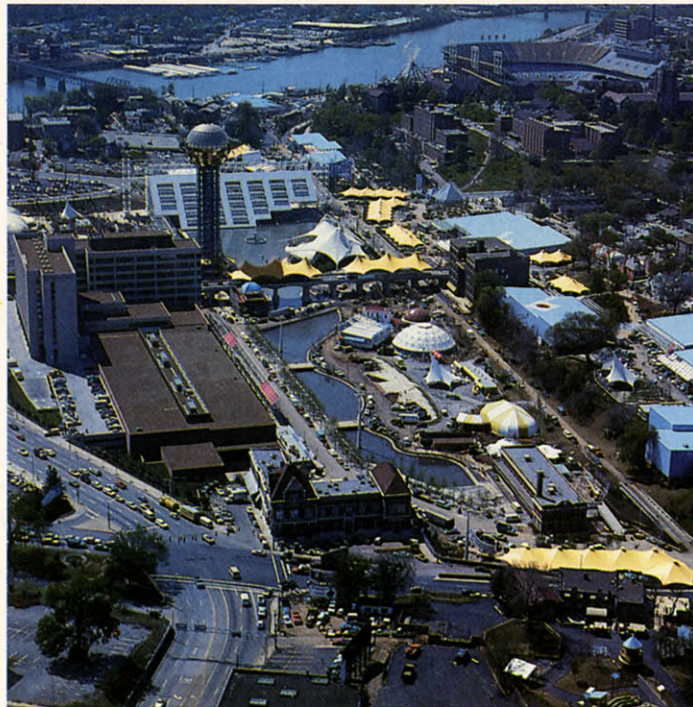
in Makkah. There they plunge into the throngs of white-robed pilgrims circling the Ka'ba; this is the *Tawaf*, one of the first rituals in the pilgrimage to Makkah.

Traditionally, exhibits are supposed to be fast and fun; fairgoers, it is thought, don't have time for lectures. But at the Saudi pavilion the crowds came, saw and listened to an explication fully 15 minutes long, of the faith of Islam, and the reaction has been attentive interest. "A fine exhibit," said a couple from Florida. "Very interesting," said a teenage girl. "Best thing I've seen so far," said a man with glasses.

To the staff, the pavilion manager and the Ministry of Commerce, the pavilion sponsors, this reaction was important. As the Minister of Commerce, Dr. Solaiman al-Solaim, said in an interview with *Aramco World*: "In the United States, there has been a substantial change in knowledge and awareness of the Islamic world. U.S. understanding is slowly catching up with the realities and if this pavilion can help increase that understanding, it will have been worthwhile."



An ornate camel saddle serves as a reminder of desert life.



A bird's eye view of the fair, and (top) closeups of the dancers, carousels and clowns.



◀ The U.S. pavilion is shaped like a solar reflector; (above) the great "sunsphere," the fair symbol, dominates the grounds.

the Royal Tahitian Dance Co., Carlos Montoya, the Scottish National Orchestra, the Prague Symphony, Al Hirt and Pete Fountain, the Dance Theater of Harlem, and The Grand Kabuki of Japan.

In a spirited effort to offer something for everyone, the fair also scheduled 19 sporting events, including a round-robin baseball tournament with teams from the U.S., Korea, Japan, and Australia, and a round-robin basketball tourney with teams from the U.S., China, Canada, and Yugoslavia. Among other events are a National Football League exhibition game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the New England Patriots, a National Basketball Association exhibition game, and PGA Cup matches pitting nine U.S. golf pros against nine pros from Britain and Ireland.

The list goes on, with rowing, canoeing, kayaking, boxing, cycling, gymnastics, hockey, racquetball, rugby, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, volleyball, weightlifting, wrestling, and road racing. And if that weren't enough, four University of Tennessee home football games will be played during the fair in U.T.'s 91,249-seat Neyland Stadium.

Then there's food. For people who have dreamed of eating and drinking their way around the world, the fair is the answer to a prayer. Fair officials call the site "the largest restaurant in the world," with 81 eating locations. Fourteen restaurants, other than the four operated by Mexico, China, Hungary, and Korea, offer homemade pasta, fresh fish (flown in daily), and such Bavarian fare as sauerbraten and wiener schnitzel. Visitors on the move can choose

from an enticing assortment of snacks, including stuffed potatoes, fried catfish, baklava, Filipino egg rolls, bagels and lox, New Orleans jambalaya, French pastries, Belgian waffles, country ham and biscuits, and muffins of every description. Fair management predicts that more conventional appetites will tackle some 500 tons of hamburgers, 250 tons of hot dogs, and a million ice cream bars.

From the start, the mood in Knoxville was festive. Color is everywhere. Flags, streamers and banners span the spectrum. Aerial gondola chairs are painted in vibrant reds, oranges and yellows, and the facade of the pavilion housing the European Economic Community is alive with a sunburst mosaic. Even a Knoxville Utility Board substation, located on the site long before anyone dreamed of a World's Fair, has dressed up with bright colors for the occasion.

Knoxville, of course, won't know the results of its "cheeky" gamble until the gates close in October. But higher than expected attendance has given the city – and its creditors – hope that they may not only recoup their investments but recoup them early. If so everyone will have gotten their money's worth – in cold cash, national attention and fun.

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