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SPOKANE---Skid row is gone and in its place rises an environmental world's fair--Expo '74, which runs from May 4 to Nov. 3 of next year.

Several major nations, including Russia, Japan, Mexico, Korea, Taiwan and Canada, will exhibit at the fair. So will firms like General Motors, Ford, Kodak and Pacific Northwest Bell.

They will all have space on two small islands in the Spokane river and along its banks, in a 100-acre, half water-half land area that once typified inner city decay.

All this has disappeared.

Where once society's outcasts lurched bleary-eyed on Trent Avenue on the south bank of the river, bulldozers and cranes push and lift.

Where once locomotives chuffed into two obsolete stations on a sprawl of tracks, an opera house and new pavilions and a new city park are materializing.

Russell Train, director of the Environmental Protection Agency, praised the city's efforts: "You're making significant progress," he said.



The impulse to clean up the area came about three years ago and first thing anybody knew the project grew into a world's fair sanctioned by the 36-nation Bureau of International Expositions in Paris.

President Nixon sent invitations to BIE's 36 member nations.

While he was doing that, the three railroads that shared the yards merged and the combined company agreed to move outside of town.

Through purchases, lease and outright gift, the Expo '74 Corporation (a non-profit firm) obtained the island-and-riverfront site.

Construction got underway early this year.

Expo '74 has been designated as an official Bicentennial Celebration event and it is said to be the first such fair to have a theme: Celebrating Tomorrow's Fresh, New Environment.

"We want the exhibits to be environmental in thrust," said King F. Cole, president of the Expo '74 Corporation.

The site is bristling with new buildings--the temporary plywood and metal modules for concessions and foreign exhibits and the two permanent buildings, the Washington State pavilion and the U.S. pavilion, all more than 70 per cent completed.

In all, the city of Spokane, the State of Washington and the federal government are investing nearly \$35 million in the fair, and what they build will revert to the city.

Total expenditures are expected to amount to about \$76 million.

The showpiece will be the \$11,500,000 U. S. pavilion--a gigantic big-top of coated vinyl stretched up 145 feet on a center pole from two semi-circular base buildings. The Commerce Department will sponsor exhibits in it.

Expo '74, operating as it is under BIE rules, rates a U. S. Commissioner, and President Nixon gave the job to Philadelphia lawyer J. Welles Henderson. The post carries with it ambassadorial rank.

In July, Henderson and Expo president Cole went to Europe to follow up on President Nixon's invitations.

Henderson said that several European nations indicated "strong interest" in putting up exhibits, but he got no early commitments.

Henderson ran smack into one of Expo's problems: "Spokane? Where's that?" Moreover, there seems to be a universal proclivity to mispronounce the word (it's Spo-can, not Spo-cane), even among Americans.

And there's a tendency to confuse Spokane with Seattle, which ran one of the few financially successful world's fairs anywhere, in 1962.

Spokane lies nearly 300 miles east of Seattle, 100 miles south of the Canadian line and 15 miles west of the Idaho line in a fertile valley between the Cascades and the Rockies. The population is about 200,000.

Spokane prides itself on being the heart of the Inland Empire, which includes eastern Washington State, northern Idaho, western Montana, northwest Oregon and southern British Columbia.

Canada at first announced that it would set up a pavilion on the smaller island in the river at a cost of about \$1.8 million, but in July, much to the dismay of fair officials, Ottawa backed out.

The provincial government of British Columbia took exception, however, and ultimately succeeded in getting Ottawa to bring Canada back in.

Remote though it may be, Spokane was no mystery to the Russians--they were among the first to agree to take part and their pavilion will be the biggest foreign one at the exposition, 52,000 square feet.

This is said to be the first time the Soviet Union has participated in such a fair in the United States since the late 1930s.

Officials estimate that about five million people will come to the fair. That compares with about 50 million at Montreal in 1967 and with about 9.6 million at Seattle in 1962.

More than \$1 million in advance tickets had been sold by mid September.

Officials expect most visitors to come from the western U. S. (especially Oregon and California) and western Canada.

Normally, about 12 million people visit Washington State each year, and the advertising effort next year will be to suggest to them that they spend two or three days at Expo, since they are already close at hand.

Alan C. Edmunds, director of Expo's hospitality services, says interest in Expo is already running high.

In August alone, nine months before opening day, 655 requests for information about lodging came to his office, from 47 states and Canada and Mexico.

Peak demand will be in July and August, he said--probably for about 7,500 units per day. There are about 5,200 units available in Spokane, including commercial rooms, transient apartments and college dormitories.

Latecomers will be able to get accommodations, Edmunds said, but they will have to drive sometimes as far as 75 miles from Spokane to find them.

He also said there are spaces available for 5,500 recreational vehicles within an hour's drive of Spokane.

Hospitality Services is acting as central reservation agent and there is no charge for the services. Edmunds urged the public to order space early.

What will visitors see when they get here?

The latest in what the establishment is doing about cleaning up the environment. The U. S. pavilion will set the tone: exhibits will show the dimensions of the problems and describe solutions industry and government have come up with.

The foreign exhibitors will go along--while laying great stress on what their countries are all about, through exhibits that show their productive prowess and through entertainment that will show off their cultural backgrounds.

Of the total of 340,000 square feet of exhibit space available, two-thirds had been taken by mid-September.

Visitors will be able to frolic in what will be the world's most modern and spectacular amusement park. Rides and other equipment worth \$2 million are now being built in Europe, and when the Expo fair is over, it will all be sent to Israel, where it will be set up as a permanent amusement park.

Top-flight entertainers, from corny to classic, will also be appearing throughout the fair.

Jack Benny will be here. So will Bob Hope, Lawrence Welk, the Carpenters, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Gordon Lightfoot and many others. Van Cliburn has also signed.

Symphony orchestras from Utah, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Los Angeles have signed up. The Seattle opera company will present two operas--Pagliacci and Aida.

When it's all over next year, Spokane will have cleaned up the inner city and it will have gained a downtown park, an opera house and the two ultra-modern buildings of the U. S. pavilion.

Said King Cole: "It will be a really nice area--all green and clean."

And Spokane's place on the map will be more secure and maybe everybody will learn to pronounce it Spo-can.