

Commission formed to promote bicentennial in state

By Marella Synovec

When the sparks of the United State's bicentennial celebration fade away, Don Searcy, executive director of Nebraska's American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, said he hopes the spirit of the Bicentennial will stay.

"The Bicentennial has helped get 215 million people working together in some way," Searcy said, "and hopefully the projects and cooperation will continue into the future."

The 15 member Nebraska Bicentennial Commission was appointed by Gov. J. James Exon to coordinate and aid the scheduling of events and projects to commemorate the nation's 200th birthday, Searcy said. The members were appointed in June, 1972 and are serving 6-year terms.

"The function of any commission is to reflect the thinking of the people as well as it can," Searcy said. Determining ways citizens can best participate in the bicentennial, suggesting ways to continue bicentennial projects after July 4, and making people aware of the Bicentennial are concerns of the commission, he said.

A "bicentennial community" is one which has filled out an application approved by Washington D.C. for having programs commemorating the bicentennial, he said.

Nebraska projects

Some Nebraska projects so far have been the restoration of a baled hay church in Arthur, all-ethnic festivals in Omaha and Hastings, the development of Norfolk's Liberty Bell Park, and the Interstate 80 Sculpture Project.

"A time capsule containing an automobile was buried in Seward, Nebraska's official fourth of July city, last year," Searcy said. "It takes a lot of cooperation to get somebody to donate a car for burial in a time capsule," he said. The time capsule also has a section for 1976 artifacts, he said, and will be opened in 2025.

Youth have played important roles in bicentennial projects, he said. In several communities, grade school children wrote a letter to Washington D.C. asking if their small town could be a bicentennial community.

"Because of the bicentennial, organizations like the Nebraska Humanities Council and the Council for the Arts may be strengthened," Searcy said. The organizations can help carry out community potentials in the future, he said.

Searcy said, the commissions funds are in two categories:

-administrative funds of approximately \$25,000 for fiscal 1976 from the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) and \$33,860 from the state.

-non-administrative funds which can

be used for publications, programs and momentos. These funds are obtained from the sale of bicentennial medallions and souvenirs.

Corporation sells souvenirs

Searcy said the commission does not handle the buying and selling of Bicentennial souvenirs. The Bicentennial Corporation, 619 Sharp Building at 13th and N Streets, sells the souvenirs.

The corporation consists of two corporate holders, four part-time sales people and herself, according to Linda Coonrod. Coonrod does bookkeeping,

ordering, shipping and other office duties for the corporation. A percentage of the profits from sales goes back to the commission, she said.

Spoons, bells, sold

Charms, collectors' spoons, bells and decals are the best selling items, Coonrod said. Communities take items on consignment, set their own prices and return those which are not sold, she said.

The corporation's future will be determined at a meeting this month, she said. Either an auction will be held July 3 to sell what is on hand, or it will remain open until September 8.

Although there are some complaints about commercialization, people seem to get very interested in bicentennial, according to Barb Henderson, Lincoln's bicentennial chairpersons. "People are glad to see that special things are being done," she said.

The Lincoln Bicentennial Committee has planned a downtown parade for June 26, and has prepared a State Bicentennial Commission slide show and published a history of Lincoln which will soon be available, she said. The committee has raised about \$1000 and received a \$10,000 grant for the restoration of Lincoln's City Hall, for the preservation of the Lincoln Federal Building and for the construction of a performing arts center, she said.

Different goals

The goals for America's 200th anniversary celebration differ from the goals of the centennial celebration, Searcy said.

"In 1876, the country was attempting to show the world that the documents it was based on held true in spite of the Civil War," he said. "We were also trying to show that we were more than an emerging nation and that we had the technology and the curiosity to make us a world leader."

"But in 1976, we don't need these goals. We've gone through our internal problems without a real revolution and shown the world that the system works," Searcy said.

"What we are concerned with now is how to keep Americans from abusing the freedom to choose between apathy and awareness."



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