

Handling a 'fair' set of problems

By WILL KOTEFF

Quartering a couple of pigs who weren't on the original guest list is something you learn to deal with as general manager of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

"Stabling problems are the types of things we have to deal with most often," comments John Wiley, GM of the 51st Fair and a resident of Mississauga.

Cows, horses, poultry, pigs and even people by the thousands — and it's Wiley's job to see it all works. This year there were 14,000 competitive entries in the fair, most announcing their intention to enter at the last minute.

Wiley remembers, "For two or three days in early October the mail bags had to be dragged in here."

Those pregnant canvas sacks contained application letters post-marked from as far away as China and Australia. This year there were also participants from nine Canadian provinces, many places in the United States, Britain and Europe.

"You deal with a tremendous cross-section of people and it's meeting these people that I enjoy most," explains Wiley. "Most of them are professionals," and that makes the general manager's job a lot easier.

Wiley was appointed head of the Royal, one of the world's largest and best indoor agri-

cultural and livestock fairs, in March. He was executive secretary in his eighth year with the fair at the time.

Before that, his background includes graduating from the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, work with the Western Fair, the Ontario Beef Importers Association and the Canadian National Exhibition.

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But the logistics of the Royal is something unique and Wiley's years there have certainly helped him cope well this time around as head of the operation. The demands for his time seem never-ending and some of the problems unusual, but the Mississaugan appears unflappable.

"Our worst period is the last two months before we open," Wiley maintains after that, the momentum of the fair carries things through, although you can bet it's getting a helping hand every inch of the way.

Even before the fair ends Saturday, the tack rooms are emptied and the food exhibitors pack up their wholesome goodies, plans for year 52 are in the works.

Wiley is thinking about feature information exhibits.

"I think we absolutely must do this," says Wiley. "That's one of the real changes in the fair."

Potatoes are the big feature next year. And as the idea is developed through the years exhibitors will be showing consumers much more about what they can do with different food products.

Also, other exhibits are being developed to show us city slickers the various aspects of agriculture in detail, according to the general manager.

About 320,000 showed up to take in the flower, food, livestock and horse shows, craft displays and nibble on rich Canadian fudge last year. And Wiley is hoping for at least the same attendance this time.

One person who came back as he has every year for the past decade is Alex Blackhall, of Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

And for the ninth time in those 10 years as an exhibitor at the fair, this 72-year-old Scottish gentleman won the world barley competition with his special, pedigree grain.

During his annual visits to the Royal, Blackhall, a spritely, talkative man, stays with a cousin on Agnes St. in Mississauga.

Blackhall's accomplishments during his life-long farming and grain-growing career in-

clude a world championship at the Washington Fair in 1957. And he was so good at the local level that after four straight victories, the fair organizers stopped him from entering by asking him to be a judge.

For each of his nine victories in the world class competition at the Canadian fair Blackhall collected a silver tray and \$200.

He gave one tray to his Mississauga cousin. The rest are at home — all shined up and ready for the biggest tea party ever seen in Scotland.