

Wiping tarnish off old amusement park

United Press International
OKLAHOMA CITY — Instead of starting from scratch, Jack Linn this time is starting with a lot of scratches.

Linn's last task was transforming an Iowa cornfield into an amusement park. Within a half-dozen years, the Adventureland park in Des Moines was annually attracting nearly 600,000 children of all ages.

His current job presents a different problem. The park is already there, but it requires an image change and a major revitalization.

Frontier City has been an Oklahoma City tradition since 1958. Its gunfights and western attractions have always been popular, especially in a community often regarded by outsiders as a grown-up cowtown.

But it has slipped to a run-down condition over the years and now receives stiff competition from White Water, a water theme park that drew 300,000 guests during its first year of operation in 1981.

Frontier City's wood buildings are worn and tired-looking. Weeds poke out from the mock Old West storefronts. A section in the middle of the park that burned in 1976 is an eyesore, as is a trash dump within eye distance of the attractions.

"I can't say the property was deteriorating to the point it wasn't functional," Linn said. "It's just the age started to tell on a lot of the structures."

Cynthia Griffey, who has worked at the park since 1973, said its previous owner never had the financial resources to make adequate improvements.

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Roads and parking areas were patched instead of resurfaced and other repairs were delayed.

"It was never done right," she said. "It needs new sewer lines — there is only one set of bathrooms," she said. "It's easier to build than it is to rebuild."

The man who operated the park until this winter bought it at a bankruptcy auction in 1969, but never invested enough to maintain the facility, she said.

"You've got to have money to do anything," Griffey said. "And this new company is putting the bucks into it. There was one man running it before. Now there's a company."

The new owner is Tierco Group Inc., which purchased the facility for about \$1.2 mil-

lion and is pumping hundreds of thousands of additional dollars into its renovation.

A map in Linn's office details some of the myriad of improvements expected before the season begins in late April. Notations remind Linn of landscaping required or bricks falling or visual problem areas.

Lumber is scattered throughout the park, while carpenters repair the weathered saloons, novelty shops and crafts stores located in the shadow of a hangman's noose. Bulldozers and work vehicles crisscross the 40-acre site.

"Cinema 180," a dome-shaped structure featuring action and scenic films on a screen extending across half the building, will be added. New rides will complement a roller coaster and other existing attractions.

Linn also plans to build a one-acre lake on the site of the 1976 fire, to make the center of the park aesthetically and physically refreshing. A fountain will recirculate the water, and visitors will be able to operate remote control boats on the lake.

The park's traditional gunfights and saloon shows will not be lost amidst the changes, Linn said.

"We definitely don't want to lose site of the fact Frontier City has been here since 1958 and that it's part of the history of Oklahoma City," Linn said.

"The identity of Frontier City is here. The image was a little tarnished."

Politicians pledge support

United Press International
OKLAHOMA CITY — A Sequoyah County delegation seeking construction of a long-promised Sallisaw port on the Arkansas River navigation system has received pledges of support from several congressmen, a Sallisaw legislator said Wednesday.

House Majority Leader Jim Wright, Rep. John Paul Hammerschmidt, R-Ark., and members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation endorsed the project in meetings in Washington last week, Rep. Don Mentzer, D-Sallisaw, said.

"The hangup is in the White House," he said. "If we can get any funding at all (for water projects), we feel ours will be in the bunch."

About 53,000 acres of farmland were taken for the navigation system with the government's assurance that a port would be built at Sallisaw, he said.

Congress approved the port in 1976, but it was never funded.

The loss of the farmland represents a substantial cut in the area's tax base, Mentzer said.

A port would bring the tax base back up and attract industry to provide jobs in the area, Mentzer said.

Unemployment in Sequoyah County is about 10 percent and in nearby Fort Smith, Ark., it is closer to 13 percent, he said.

The Reagan administration wants promises that the local government would match federal funds for any such project, but he feels the area has made a large sacrifice already, Mentzer said.

An industrial park already has been built at the site, complete with city utilities and a sewer system to handle industrial waste, he said.

The port originally would

have cost less than \$1 million, but the estimate now is \$6 million, he said.

"We just feel like we've done our part. We were told we would have a port," Mentzer said.

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Pilot says 'drowning' was faked to collect life insurance money

United Press International
SEATTLE — A Navy mechanic and his wife have pleaded guilty in federal court to faking his drowning in a plot to collect \$113,000 worth of life insurance.

U.S. District Court Judge John Coughenour accepted the pleas Tuesday of Danny Bishop and his wife, Linda, and ordered both to appear for sentencing May 14.

Under federal law, the couple, now in jail in lieu of \$20,000 bail, face a maximum of five years in prison and a \$1,000 fine for their convictions on mail fraud.

Bishop, 26, reportedly disappeared on Nov. 1, 1979, while on a fishing trip near stormy Deception Pass in Puget Sound. But in court, the mechanic admitted he told his mother prior to his departure that he was going on a "secret mission in Germany."

According to prosecutors, he instead moved to Minnesota and later Texas, using the name of his deceased cousin.

Bishop was arrested in Austin when a county sheriff's deputy stopped him for an expired license plate tag and conducted a routine identification check. The check revealed Bishop was wanted on a federal warrant.

Linda Bishop, 37, admitted she tried to claim about \$113,000 in life insurance while knowing her husband was still alive. In her efforts, she managed to collect several of her husband's Navy paychecks, worth \$3,282, and billed the government for her subsequent move to Bellevue, Iowa.

Tom Hillier, a federal public defender representing the wife, said the couple apparently concocted the scheme after falling behind on their household payments while living on his Navy paycheck.



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