

# The Diederich Family Carousel

The story of the acquisition, restoration, and enjoyment of the carousel donated by Warren and Irene Diederich.



*A Gift to the Community*

# Acquisition of the Carousel

This rare Allan Herschell carousel was built in 1928. The carousel was used in traveling carnivals. Although much of its history is unknown, it has been tracked from Texas, to Ohio, Iowa, and finally to Fargo. Orville Nelson was a carousel “nut” who tracked down this carousel for the Diederichs. It is unknown how the two men met, but it is known that Orville took it upon himself to find a carousel for Warren Diederich.



Diederich’s interest in finding a carousel came from his childhood memories of his neighbor fixing carousels, as well as his friends and his memories riding that carousel. Diederich strived to give the children of the Fargo-Moorhead area the same joy he had in his youth.

In July of 1995, Warren and Irene Diederich purchased the carousel in tattered and run down condition for about \$60,000. The Diederich family and employees at Industrial Builders restored the carousel to give to the children of the Fargo-Moorhead community.

The Diederichs purchased the carousel, not knowing exactly what they were going to do with it. After many discussions, Warren Diederich decided that the zoo was the place for the carousel. He believed the zoo would be a family recreational and educational facility and an ideal location for the carousel’s permanent home. The carousel would then serve as a “cornerstone” for the zoo to be built upon in the coming years.



# Restoration



Reed Nudell, head of painting the carousel, remembers the day they unloaded the carousel off the trailer; he said it looked like an absolute mess. People at Industrial Builders looked at the carousel and wondered why would Diederich buy such a “messed up” carousel. While building the shop to contain it, later named the “pony barn,” they researched extensively and worked with Nelson to “make [the carousel] as historically correct as possible.”



Before starting the restoration in August of 1995, the restoration team ran the carousel. To their surprise, it actually worked! They then made notes of what needed fixing, how things worked, and so on. Then they took apart the carousel, labeling every part and where on the carousel it



went. They had teams and artists that worked on the horses, as well as teams that worked on the carousel itself. Two horses were restored at a time. The horses were referred to as “stir fry” because of their wood bodies and aluminum legs and tails. Nudell can recall all the different steps they took to restore the horses: sandblasting, putting pieces together, carving heads, painting, airbrushing, decorating, and painting again. Nudell said that Diederich would stop into the shop, check out the progress, and if they hit a bump he would say, “Make it happen, Reed.”

# Restoration Continued

The Diederichs found two of the artists, Heidi Paulson and her sister, through Industrial Builders as Heidi drove truck for them. Andy Skogen put in numerous hours carving heads with one of the artists whose name isn't recalled. Nudell did most of the painting on the carousel and the initial painting on the horses. Laura Carley, daughter of Warren and Irene



Diederich, remembers, "Everyone adopted the carousel as a machine, not the rugged mess it was." The teams worked on the carousel 24/7 for just over a year to make it happen.



While the teams worked on the carousel, Diederich's secretary at the time, Joy Carlson, did extensive research to find the complete history of the carousel. She contacted the National Carousel Association and previous owners. She pieced together the information we have

today on the carousel. Though much of the carousel's history is unknown, Carlson tracked the carousel from Texas, to Ohio, to Iowa, and finally to Fargo. It is believed that in its earlier history it was a traveling carousel in carnivals until about 1980.

One of the last pieces to be restored was the horse railing around the carousel. This railing came with the carousel and was in its original condition. It was a piece that needed to be sandblasted, painted, and a few extra parts replaced; it was the simplest part of the project.



# Enjoyment



The carousel's restoration was completed in December of 1996. The carousel was opened to the public on December 19, 1996 at the Industrial Builders shop in West Fargo. Busses full of children from area schools came to the shop to ride the carousel. Diederich marveled at the beauty of the carousel horses and

livened with joy from the elation of the children on the carousel. Carley said that it was her father's dream to give this gift. It made him so proud and excited to give this to the children of the community for generations to come. It also made them proud to really help the zoo get off the ground. Diederich asked only one thing of the Red River Zoological Society's President Bill Renny - that the carousel's cost would stay low enough "so the average kid can afford to ride."



Shortly after restoration, the carousel's worth was estimated at \$400,000. Today, reflecting the consumer price index, it is valued at approximately \$594,000.



The groundbreaking ceremony for the carousel pavilion at the site of the future Red River Zoo took place on December 17, 1997.

# Today and the Future

The carousel is used for many more things than just riding it. The carousel and surrounding pavilion are used for birthday parties, weddings, receptions of all sorts, picnics, and many other special events. Throughout the years, the Diederich Family Carousel has become an icon for the Fargo-Moorhead area; bringing happiness



to the children who ride it and fond memories to the adults who see it. When asked how the idea of the carousel as an icon affects her, Carley said with teary eyes, “It makes me think of my parents. How they gave this gift to the community, it was their dream. It was what they wanted, and our people made it beautiful again.” Nudell said, “Just knowing that I did that makes me very proud of my work

and effort.”

The Diederich family is always excited about the carousel. Carley stated, “It is a living piece of history that is ours... To just know that you did it makes you really proud, no matter what it is. You want your kids to remember.” Nudell commented, “It ties families closer together.”



# Conclusion



This gift may not have changed their perspectives on giving though, Carley commented, "... knowing that this is yours is much greater than any amount of money can give. This carousel started movements for more family orientated things, like the downtown [Fargo] aspect for example. It got people involved and interested, and the idea just kept growing. We gave back and the idea of giving kept growing."

Today, Nudell would like to thank the Diederichs for thinking of this gift and making it happen. On behalf of the Diederich family, Carley would like to thank Reed Nudell, Andy Skogen, the master carpenter, and all the craftsmen that worked on the carousel. Without the help of all these people, the carousel wouldn't be in the condition it is in today.

In conclusion, the plan for the carousel is to keep improving and updating it as necessary, but most importantly keeping it as original as possible. Nudell said in closing, "This project was very enjoyable. The people put in hours upon hours of hard work and were unbelievably dedicated." The Diederich Family Carousel will remain at the Red River Zoo; where it will be ensured that Diederich's vision for children enjoying the carousel happens.



