

# BUILDING THE SUN BOWL

You cannot fly over St. George or drive across Skyline Drive on the Red Hill without being struck by the symetric beauty of the Dixie Sun Bowl. The giant green oval surrounded by tiers of gray concrete, glares out of the heart of the city like a jewel, and to the new generation it might seem that it has always been there. But it hasn't.

The block where the Sun Bowl sits was always an area of activity. The Indians used to come in, camp the winter there, and trade their goods. Later it became the infield of a horse race track. But it wasn't until 1947 that some creative Lions Club members and a bunch of hard working people got the entire community behind them and turned the place into the grand old bowl we know today.

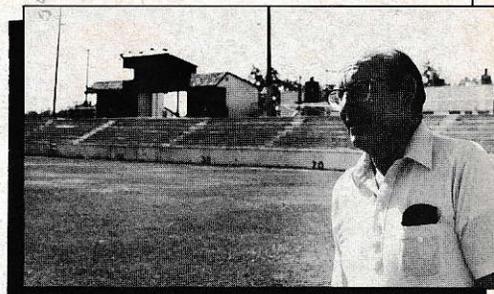
The Lions had been putting on the Dixie Roundup since 1935. (The first few years it was a joint effort between the American Legion post and the Lions.) Those early rodeos were held on Armistice Day, November 11, at the old race track and grandstand which were just northwest of where the Sun Bowl is now situated. The

## It stands as a monument to the dedication and wisdom of a unique community.

*The Lions Club has recently undertaken an important project—that of erecting a large stadium as an entertainment center in St. George. This stadium will have a seating capacity of 5,500. The arena proper will be a sodded field for sports: Rodeos, livestock shows, softball, football, volleyball, track meets, and various other athletic games. It will also serve as a setting for musical entertainments such as band concerts, oratories, pageants, etc.*

*The Washington County schools and all civic organizations of St. George are backing this project 100 percent. To date the Lions Club has \$15,000 on hand which has accumulated over a period of years along with a generous membership contribution, to carry forward the work on this stadium. They are asking the civic-minded citizens of St. George to match this amount.*

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spectator seating along the side of the Red Hill.

"We made a report to the club in the meeting the next Thursday," Neal said. "They thought the idea was sound, so we formed a committee and were instructed to talk to the city council about it." That committee originally consisted of Neal Lundberg, Reid Leigh, Rulon Snow, and Ez McArthur. Later, a finance committee was formed with Dr. L.W. McGregor as chairman and Clark Blake and George Pace as members.

"We ended up with a 49-year lease, and an option of 50 more, on the property," Neal recalls, "and we had a couple of clean-up days there before World War II hit."

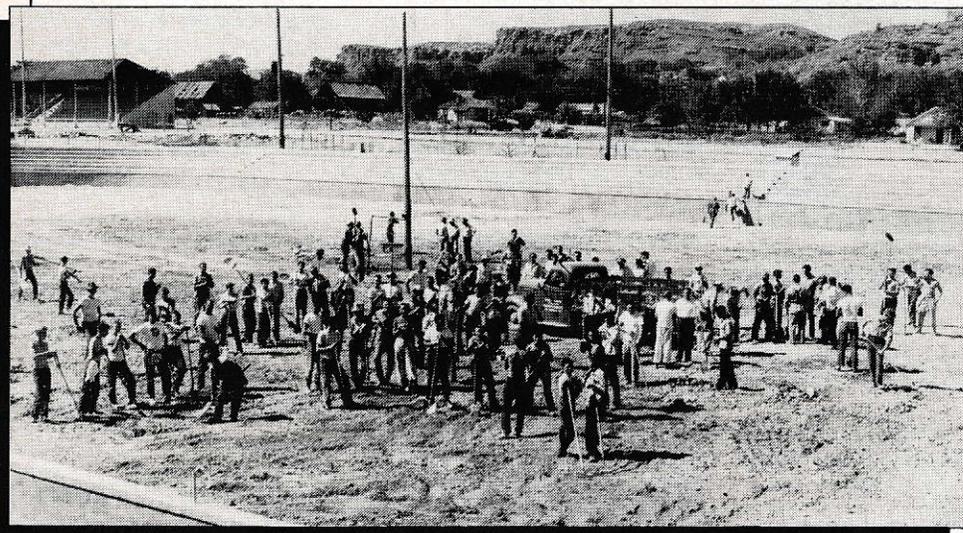
The war put the project on hold for several years, but the Roundup continued to flourish each year. (It was now being held in September.) The committees remained active, and funds from the rodeo were set aside each year toward the building of a new facility.

It was along about the spring of 1946 that Neal Lundberg and Ez McArthur were out riding their horses on a Sunday afternoon. They were riding up from the south end of town and happened onto Eric Snow, then mayor of St. George. The three rode together for a while and as they rode by the old race track and rodeo grounds the mayor pointed to an indented area inside the track and mentioned that maybe that was where the Lions ought to build their new arena. Lundberg recalls, "He said it was city property, and it would be years before the city would be able to develop it. He said if we were interested, we should bring it up at the city council meeting, and maybe something could be worked out."

So, again Neal took the idea to the Lions, and it was accepted by the club. The lease was changed from the property where the Four Seasons now stands to where the Sun Bowl now exists.

The boys were all home from the war now, and there was nothing stopping the project once it started rolling. Immediately, fund drives were begun, and the Lions were each asked to contribute \$100 each. "The response was phenomenal," says Lundberg, who was elected chairman of the project committee. "A total of 42 Lions reached in their pockets and pulled out \$100 during that time—and that was in the days when the

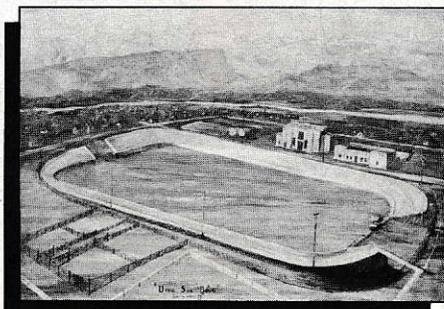
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grandstand faced south and stood about where the third-baseline of the Elks baseball field now runs.

Neal Lundberg and Reid Leigh were in charge of the grounds in those days, and one year, probably 1940, they had finished putting in the temporary bleachers and were up at the old Lions meeting hall where Jolley's Ranchwear sits. They were refreshing themselves and talking about the rodeo grounds, and as Neal remembers it, they talked about how nice it would be to have a permanent place to hold the rodeo each year.

"We went for a ride," Neal remembers, "and ended up over where the Four Seasons now stands." That land had been given to the city for a park, and as Neal and Reid looked it over, they envisioned how a nice rodeo arena could be situated there, utilizing the natural amphitheater effect of the land and placing



Above, Neal Lundberg, who was chairman of the committee that built the Sun Bowl, looks at it today. Middle, high school and college students help level the Sun bowl for the first rodeo in 1947. Bottom, Tom Watson's rendition of the Sun Bowl which sparked public interest in the project and helped the fund raising drive.

best man in the county could be hired for \$100 a month."

Tom Watson painted an artist's concept of the still unnamed bowl, and when it was printed in the *County News* the contributions from the rest of the city and county began rolling in. "People from every walk of life were donating," Neal remembers. "There was a total of 113 people who were not Lions who gave at least \$100," he says.



Cars were raffled off—one being a 1947 Plymouth. Neal recalls that one car was won by Sheriff Antone Prince.

Barney Seegmiller supplied pipe for the project at a nominal price. J & J Mill and Lumber supplied an earth mover. Lindau Foremaster hauled load after load of cement from Victorville, California, and charged nothing for freight. Les Holcomb and A.J. Webber of the Soil Conservation Service donated their time and expertise in

engineering the mammoth project. And it was the Soil Conservation Service's gunite machine that was used to lay all the rows of cement seats around the bowl.

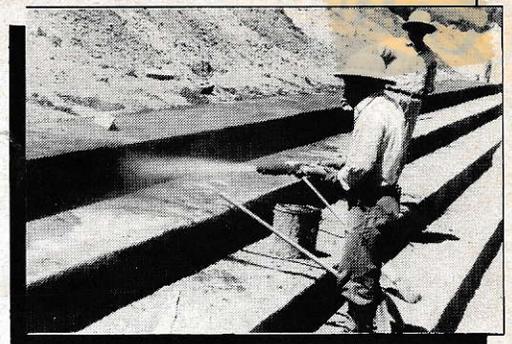
"It could have never been built without the help and know-how of men like these," says Neal. "They and many other individuals worked their hearts out and, in many cases, neglected their own jobs and businesses to build the Sun Bowl."

Originally the idea had been to build just a rodeo arena, but Neal began thinking that the facility should be more, that it should be built at least large enough for football games. "We talked to Les Holcomb about the possibility of making it larger, and he said it wouldn't cost that much more to enlarge it—so we did."

The project was begun in January of 1947, and by rodeo time in September it was ready for use. "There was a crew there most everyday," says Neal. "We hired Ed Frei to be foreman of the project, and LeGrand Frei ran the gunite machine. The rest of the labor was donated by a bunch of devoted Lions and townspeople who sacrificed an awful lot for the project."

When the bowl was nearing completion, armies of Dixie High School and college students came in to help level off the arena and do the final cleanup.

Everybody did what they knew how to do and some learned things they never thought they'd do. When they were blasting out some of the ground in the excavation process they couldn't find a crimper to crimp the caps on



Left, Lions Ray Whipple, Spencer Snow, Loren Lundberg, and LaVon McQuaid, finish carpentry work on the bucking chutes. Above, LeGrand Frei sprays cement for bleachers with gunite machine.

the dynamite. So Neal figured out the next best thing. He used his teeth to do it. "When I started," he recalls, "there were about 15 or 20 guys standing around watching. But a little while later I looked up and there was nobody around, except Reid Leigh." Neal wondered where all the boys had gone and Reid said, "I don't know. I guess they didn't want you scattered all over them."

Early in the building phase the paper had announced a contest to name the new facility. "Anyone who can write is eligible," the article said. It was Bobbie Laub, son of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Laub of Santa Clara, who entered the name "Dixie Sun Bowl,"

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and won the \$15 prize.

The rodeo was held on a dirt floor the first year, but by the next September, a bright green carpet of grass covered it from one end to the other, and the sod has been there ever since.

In the end, the Lions figured the initial phase of the Sun Bowl cost about \$35,000. (The same project would cost \$2 to \$3 million now.) That cost was covered completely by the funds raised, and the Lions boast that there has never been a dime owed on the facility. During the years since, several additional phases have been completed, including concession stands, corral work and extensive cement work.

There is no other facility quite like it anywhere, and it became a symbol of the ingenuity and industriousness of the people of Washington County. From Pocatello, Idaho, to Las Vegas, Nevada, civic groups and cities have come to the St. George Lions for advice and direction in building their own rodeo and sports facilities.

"We were very proud of the accomplishment," says Neal. "And we were never stingy with what we had learned. Our blueprints and ideas have been shared liberally with many cities through the years."

And through the years the Sun Bowl has stood as a monument to the Lions and to the many people who gave so much to see it evolve from a simple idea to a practical

reality. It is a symbol of a community that has never been afraid to progress, a community that, in hindsight, was farsighted and wise.

As Neal Lundberg says, "It's a good example of what can happen when you get a bunch of damned fools headed in the same direction." ■