

Fairmont in the 1990's

We all remember the 1990's, right? It seems like only yesterday. But, do you remember some of the events that shaped our community during that decade? Here are a few of interest as reported in *Sentinel* articles and other resources in the Pioneer Museum from that era.

In 1990, Fairmont's official census showed 11,506 residents.

What happened in 1990? The landscape at the intersection of Blue Earth Avenue and State Street was soon to change. Known as Weber's corner, the Standard station across from the Fair Mall was sold to make way for an Amoco Food Station scheduled to open during the summer of 1990.

Fairmont Federal Savings and Loan was taken over by the federal government in 1990 in order to "stabilize the ailing thrift." This was only the second Minnesota Savings & Loan to be seized by the federal government as of that date. In February of 1989, Fairmont Federal was listed as one of the four weakest Minnesota savings and loans.

In February of 1990, the Fairmont Medical Clinic broke ground for a \$2.5 million expansion and renovation. Tech Builders of Fairmont was selected as the general contractor.

The year 1990 also saw the Fairmont Boys' Basketball team, coached by Ron Hested, take third place in the Class A Division of the Minnesota State Tournament.

Emil and Vi Koenig, owners of Koenig's retail store and lunch counter in the 1940's and 1950's were back in Fairmont that year too. More than twenty-five years after closing, the Koenigs and approximately 200 of their former employees were planning a reunion at Grace Lutheran Church.

In July of 1991, the Martin County National Bank held a grand opening for their new 9,000 square foot facility.

In 1992, the former Fairmont Community Hospital on Albion Avenue across from Ward's Park was demolished to make room for a then planned apartment complex.

Construction also began in 1992 for the new First Farmers and Merchants National Bank at 114 South Park Street and the Bryan's Pharmacy building on the corner of Blue Earth Avenue and State Street. The new Bryan's Pharmacy building, which moved from the Pamida building, was constructed during the summer and opened on November 26th of that year.

The end of an era for Woolworth's in Fairmont came in 1993 with the closing of their Fair Mall store. According to a Woolworth's spokesperson of that time, the store didn't

produce the kind of return on investment needed by the company. The store had twelve full-time and six part-time employees.

In 1994, the Fairmont Medical Clinic was purchased by the owners of the Mayo Clinic, making it a part of the Mayo Health System. The clinic, previously owned by a group of local physicians, would now have full access to Mayo training programs and Mayo specialists will practice part-time in Fairmont.

Also in 1994, Taco John's made a comeback in Fairmont. About two years prior to their reopening, it had closed to make way for an enlarged gas station on Blue Earth Avenue.

The year 1994 also found some of the world's best known celebrities visiting Fairmont. Paul and Linda McCartney, Paul being the ex-member of the Beatles, visited Fairmont on March 25th. The purpose for their visit was to kick-off Linda McCartney's new line of frozen vegetarian dinner entrees which was to be produced locally by Fairmont Foods. Then Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson was on hand to greet the McCartneys and praise the fact that the creation of numerous new jobs would result from this venture.

In 1995, Howard Engquist sold Reco Motors to two long time employees, Garry Rosen and Jim Teubner. Reco Motors was founded in 1946 by Howard's father, Al Engquist, and Henry Rosenwinkel.

Also in 1995, Chris Candy Company announced that it had been purchased by Consolidated Biscuit of McComb, Ohio, and would relocate to Wilmar. The business had been in Fairmont for forty-seven years.

In that same year, Maple Pointe, on the corner of Albion Avenue and State Street, was being completed. The building would house Associate Optometry, Sweet Financial Services, and Reeve Family Dentistry.

The year 1995 also saw the loss of two long-time downtown landmarks, Braun's Shoes and Kiehl's Bakery. Braun's had been in Fairmont for ninety years and Kiehl's for nearly fifty-five years.

In 1995 Dial Corporation of Omaha, Nebraska, announced that it was going to purchase and redevelop the Fair Mall from Fairmont Management Company LLC. The new name for the mall would be Five Lakes Centre.

In October of 1995, Wallace's Department Store announced that it was closing after eighty years in Fairmont, and the Fairmont Armory was demolished in December.

In January of 1996, Fairmont boys basketball coach Ron Hested notched his 500th win in a double overtime victory over St. James.

In July of 1998, Fairmont was chosen for a new \$75 million soybean crushing facility called Cenex Harvest States. Although construction was not scheduled to begin immediately, many new jobs were predicted as a result of this endeavor.

As we are well aware, change is ongoing and to be expected, whether in our community, our state, our nation, or the world. The events mentioned above are but a few of the changes and happenings experienced by Fairmont and its citizens during the 1990's. As usually seems to be the case, some businesses closed their doors, while others opened with exciting new products and opportunities. The 1990's represents recent history, and is likely well remembered by the many individuals that lived in the area during that time period.

For more information about the decade of the 1990's, or other historical interests, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.