

# MINNESOTA STATE FAIR



Nov. 21, 2022

Jerry Hammer, long-time CEO of the Minnesota State Fair, will retire from his position in the spring of 2023. Hammer's State Fair career spans 53 years including the last 26 as CEO. He is the longest-serving chief executive in the 169-year-old institution's history. The Great Minnesota Get-Together is one of the world's largest and best-attended events, with this year's fair attracting visitors from all 50 U.S. states plus 38 nations around the world.

"I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to serve this amazing place for so long," Hammer said. "What a great gift it is when your life's work is bringing people together to celebrate the very best of each other. This is way more than an agricultural fair. It's a uniquely Minnesota-style celebration of our humanity."

During Hammer's tenure as CEO, the State Fair has seen significant growth in attendance, programming and revenue with a Super Bowl-sized annual economic impact in the Twin Cities of \$300 million, plus more unmeasured impact across the state.

Also during his tenure, the 322-acre State Fairgrounds have undergone nearly \$180 million in major improvements and upgrades including renovation of historic facilities, significant new construction and large expansion of fairgrounds landscape, amenities and infrastructure - all with no public funding. Much of the work was accomplished through the State Fair's bonding authority along with the Minnesota State Fair Foundation - both launched during Hammer's first years as CEO.

Hammer said that he is most proud of the fair's professional staff, and their high level of expertise. "They make everything go," said Hammer. "Think about the magnitude of this event, and the many disciplines and multiple layers of coordination required to make it all happen. They do it brilliantly. The fair is in exceptionally strong hands."

The State Fair's board of managers is initiating a search process to name Hammer's successor. Hammer will stay on as CEO into the spring to help with the leadership transition.

Hammer has spent all his working life at the State Fair, starting in 1970 at the fair's greenhouse as a 15-year-old high school student. He joined the full-time staff in 1977 and served in a variety of positions in events, media, marketing, public relations and senior management before being appointed CEO in 1997.

Hammer is past chairman of the International Association of Fairs & Expositions, and Mid-West Fairs Association, and is the recipient of a variety of professional and community awards including the IAFE's Hall of Fame.

Hammer and Debby, his wife, have both lived their entire lives in St. Paul's Como Park neighborhood, in the shadow of the State Fairgrounds. Their two grown children, daughter-in-law, son-in-law and five grandchildren are all confirmed fair junkies.