

FP-046

R.L. THORNTON, JR. STATUE

Dydamic!

Well, OK, that's not a real word. But don't tell that to those who remember R.L. Thornton Senior a Dallas civic leader who accidentally coined the term during an interview with Fortune magazine back in 1949.

Thornton was a successful businessman, the organizer of the Dallas Citizens Council and mayor of Dallas through most of the 1950s. But above all, he was Mr. State Fair of Texas, serving as the event's president from 1945 until 1960.

Thornton's love for the annual fair began at the age of 9, when his father promised to take him there if he'd make his summer productive by picking cotton. Thornton returned from the extravaganza enthralled with an ice-cream-on-a-stick treat called a Hokey Pokey, as well as a pail of grapes he bought for 15 cents.

By the 1930s, Thornton was a prominent banker, and Dallas was competing with other Texas cities to host the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition. It was thanks to Thornton's business acumen and marketing skills that Dallas captured the prize, resulting in much of the architecture you see around you.

A few years after he became president of the fair in 1945, Thornton traveled to the town of Kerens, Texas, near Corsicana. There, he purchased the remnants of a massive Santa Claus that had once been a popular Christmas promotion but had lost its allure with visitors. Thornton hired a Dallas artist to rework Saint Nick. One year later, the remnants of that Santa Claus reappeared at the State Fair of Texas as Big Tex, the state fair's most legendary icon.

Always the visionary, Thornton had constructed at Fair Park in 1956 the nation's first commercial monorail line. It only transported people across a narrow part of the Fair Park lagoon and was dismantled eight years later. Still, that monorail was typical of Thornton's quest to always make the fair bigger and, well, more dydamic!

This bronze statue, honoring R.L. Thornton Junior's contributions to the fair and to Dallas, was dedicated on New Year's Day, 1968, just four years after Thornton's death.

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