

THE 1973 CARNIVAL RULERS



William Buchanan Dunavant, Jr.

King Cotton has reached out across international boundaries, and William Buchanan Dunavant Jr., the 1973 Cotton Carnival King, looks upon the fiber as a passport.

Mr. Dunavant, president of Dunavant Enterprises, Inc., a cotton firm with holdings throughout the United States, and is a cotton farmer with land throughout the South and in Montana.

The importance of cotton transcends the bounds of language, international boundaries and even ideology, according to Mr. Dunavant.

Last year his firm was involved in cotton sales to the Peoples' Republic of China.

"It was a real opportunity to promote the product more than anything else," Mr. Dunavant said. "And being the King of the Cotton Carnival has a special meaning to me because I'm a cottonman. This year's theme will be 'Memphis On The Move,' and that's exactly what you are talking about when you trade cotton to other countries." The new King said his personal theme for the Carnival will be putting cotton back into the event. It is his feeling that in the week-long gaiety of the occasion, the people involved in past Carnivals seemed to lose track of the main purpose: Providing a center ring for one of the most important products of the region.

Mr. Dunavant's knowledge of the cotton market came as a matter of tradition. His grandfather, William P. Dunavant, along with Nathan Bedford Forrest, was instrumental in the building of one of Mississippi's first railroads. The road, which eventually became the Frisco Railway, was used extensively in the transportation of cotton from farmer to market.

The King's maternal grandfather, Woodson Thomas Knight, owned and farmed acreage near Tunica, Miss. Part of the original land at Dubbs, Miss., is still owned by his grandmother, Mrs. Knight.

Mr. Dunavant's beginning in the cotton business was as a junior partner in the firm he now heads. The company began as T. J. White & Co., and Mr. Dunavant's father was a partner. The firm has grown to become the largest handler of United States cotton and handles 1.25 million bales annually.

His past experience with the Cotton Carnival includes the position of director of the event.

The 40-year-old King has shared his experiences in the cotton business with his wife, Lillian Dobson Dunavant. The couple has five children: Elizabeth, 20; Dorothy, 18; William III, 14; John 9, and Buchanan, 2.

Mr. Dunavant was graduated from the McCallie School in Chattanooga. He attended Vanderbilt University, where he was a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, and was graduated from Memphis State University with a bachelor of business administration degree.

His sporting interests include tennis, and last year he competed in and won several tournaments. He is also an avid sportsman. He owns a fishing and hunting lodge in Mississippi, and his enjoyment of the outdoor retreat is shared by his entire family. No slouch when it comes to golf, he has twice won the Memphis Cotton Exchange Tournament.

Mr. Dunavant is in favor of improved cotton-raising techniques which enhance the environment and work consistently with it.

"Cotton is as much a part of our environment as it is a part of our economy. When you get right down to it, there is nothing like cotton. It's not anything close to being man-made."

Mary White Leatherman

Mary White Leatherman, the 1973 Cotton Carnival Queen, will be the first granddaughter of a King of the pageant to reign.

Her grandfather, Samuel Richard Leatherman, was King of the Carnival in 1937, but her family's background in the fiber goes back another hundred years.

"My great-great-grandfather, Richard Abbay, bought cotton from the Indians in 1837. I, personally, think cotton is a great fabric."

Miss Leatherman, who is 19, is steeped in the tradition of cotton growing. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Richard Leatherman Jr., and until she was 17, she lived on the cotton plantation, Commerce Landing, in Tunica County, Miss. It is the same plantation that was farmed by Mr. Abbay.

"Cotton means a lot to me, and I would agree with King William. Cotton has become a luxury fabric, but you see it enough in denim and blue jeans. I'm going to do what I can to promote cotton while I'm the Queen."

But there are other aspects to her role in the Carnival events.

"I think Cotton Carnival serves a civic purpose. We are going to be visiting crippled children and nursing homes. It gives people much pleasure to see us. We represent the city of Memphis. I think the Carnival is something Memphis can use to get together as a city."

Miss Leatherman is a freshman at Mount Vernon College in Washington. Her interest lies in interior design.



She has found time to develop expertise in several areas. When she was 14 she won the Memphis tennis doubles championship. She has represented the city twice in the Tennessee state closed tournament.

"Tennis is still my favorite sport, but I don't play in tournaments anymore. I haven't put in the time that is needed. I also like to hunt."

Among her other aesthetic interests is painting. She also has been a follower of the Memphis Civic Ballet and takes dancing lessons herself.

The grace, which is perhaps the product of her dance training, is exhibited when she has to support the 50 pounds of flowing train that follows behind her official costuming.

During a session in full garb for photographers, her mother, Mrs. Leatherman, expressed a bit of concern over the weight of the train. She was afraid that it would pull Miss Leatherman's copious collar out of view. But the queen, with a minimum of effort, managed to straighten the collar to her mother's satisfaction.

The events of Cotton Carnival promise, as always, to be hectic and demanding for the royalty, but even after the long session with photographers, Miss Leatherman managed to keep her cool. She even came through it with a mischievous twinkle in her eye that gave the impression she was planning to enjoy every last minute of the events ahead.

But then, she has had practice being in the public eye. While in high school, she held several class offices. At Foxcroft, she was awarded the best posture award upon graduation. Last year she was presented at the White Tie Ball of the Memphis Hunt and Polo Club.

She has a long list of family members who have been involved in the Cotton Carnival, but Miss Leatherman is the first Queen.