



Minnesota World's Fair Committee CEO

Mark Ritchie:

World's Fair would showcase, strengthen state's health-and-wellness sector

A Minnesota Competitiveness Interview

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Present

John Adams, John Cairns, Pat Davies, Paul Gilje, Randy Johnson, Ted Kolderie, Paul Ostrow (chair), Mark Ritchie, Bill Rudelius, Dana Schroeder (associate director), Clarence Shallbetter.

Summary

Minnesota is attempting to showcase and strengthen the strong health-and-wellness sector of its economy by submitting a bid to host the 2027 World's Fair, according to Mark Ritchie, president and CEO of the Minnesota World's Fair Bid Committee and former Minnesota Secretary of State. The bid committee made a first attempt last year to be selected to host the 2023 World's Fair, under the theme of "Wellness and Wellbeing for All: Healthy People, Healthy Planet." Minnesota was among the three finalists, but lost out to Buenos Aires. Ritchie says it's rare for a city to win the bid on its first try. It usually takes two or three attempts. Minnesota's was the first U.S. bid for a World's Fair in nearly 30 years.

The Minnesota bid committee has refocused its efforts toward hosting the next available date, the 2027 World's Fair, for which there is not yet any announced competition from other cities. Ritchie points out that the 2027 World's Fair would be one of the shorter Expos, lasting only three months. Longer, six-month Expos are held on the years ending in zeros and fives, such as 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2025, etc.

The wellbeing and long-term economic viability of Minnesota's health and wellness ecosystem are critical to the state and cannot be taken for granted, Ritchie says. We must ask, he believes, now that we've been gifted with an incredible health/medical/wellness sector, what the elements are that keep it from going away and what the elements are that should trigger a warning. He notes that Minnesota was once a leader in computers and software, which disappeared almost overnight. We should better

analyze what happened to that industry so we can try to prevent that from happening to our health and wellness sector, he says.

Ritchie believes working with leaders throughout the Upper Midwest in planning for an event like the Minnesota World's Fair could bring greater collaboration, sparking of new ideas and more creative thinking to the whole region.

Biography

Mark Ritchie is president and CEO of the Minnesota World's Fair Bid Committee. As a full-time volunteer, he leads the effort to bring the 2027 World's Fair to Minnesota, with a focus on health and medicine.

Ritchie was Minnesota's elected Secretary of State from 2007 until his retirement in 2015. In this role, he was a champion for making Minnesota the number one place for employment growth by encouraging the creation and growth of start-up companies, public benefit corporations and nonprofits. Minnesota's high ranking for business climate is one of the many outcomes of supporting public- and private-sector entrepreneurs in the state.

As Secretary of State, Ritchie led Minnesota through a modernization of its election system to ensure that everyone could vote-no matter how busy, far away or limited in their mobility. He was elected president of the National Association of Secretaries of State in 2009 and currently serves as an appointed advisory board member of the U.S. Federal Election Assistance Commission. In addition, he has served on the Minnesota National Guard Strategic Advisory Task Force, the Emeritus Council of the Minnesota Historical Society, and on the boards of directors of Expo USA, Communicating for Agriculture, MADD Minnesota, LifeSource and the Jefferson Center.

In the 1980s, Ritchie served as the trade policy analyst for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and then as president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy in Minneapolis. In 1994, he was a cofounder of the Global Environment & Trade Study at Yale University, which conducted research on the linkages and potential synergies between international trade and the environment.

Ritchie is a graduate of Iowa State University and of the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

Background

Continuing its focus on Minnesota's competitiveness, the Civic Caucus interviewed Mark Ritchie to learn about Minnesota's bid to host the 2027 World's Fair and how the fair could celebrate and strengthen the health-and- wellness sector of the state's economy.

Discussion

We must focus on the gift we've inherited of Minnesota's strong economy. Mark Ritchie, president and CEO of the Minnesota World's Fair Bid Committee and former Minnesota Secretary of State, said we should look at how that strong health/medical economy evolved. Then we must look at what our responsibility is for keeping it strong now and investing in it going forward into the future. He

said he has frequent opportunities to talk about Minnesota's economy with people all around the world.

Ritchie had the opportunity to understand trade and trade policy from the agricultural sector.

During the 1980s, he worked as the trade policy analyst in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. At that time, the Minnesota Trade Office was part of the Department of Agriculture, with a primary, but not exclusive, focus on trade in farm products.

In the mid-1980s, a new round of international trade talks was launched within the global framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), now called the World Trade Organization (WTO). He said the Minnesota Agriculture Department became aware that many things that were important to Minnesota's family farmers were being traded away as part of these trade negotiations, which did not seem good for the state.

Ritchie took a leave of absence from his position as trade policy analyst to more closely study these newly launched trade negotiations and their potential effects on Minnesota's family-farm interests. When he returned, he focused on what we could do to be sure that trade in agriculture and related industries could best serve us.

In 1949, Minnesota was on the cover of *National Geographic* as the state that "Makes Ideas Pay." Ritchie said [the article](#) reported that Minnesota had companies with great ideas that also knew how to market them.

In 2014, when Minnesota was beginning to ramp up its campaign to host the 2023 World's Fair, the bid committee, at the request of the U.S. State Department, held a U.S.-Russian Innovation Conference featuring high-tech companies from both the U.S. and Russia. Ritchie said many of the business leaders from Russia who attended the conference said, "We have many scientists, engineers and mathematicians and all kinds of inventors, but in Minnesota you know how to turn good ideas into marketable products that make money."

"The *National Geographic* article points out how fundamental this is to who we are as a people here in Minnesota," Ritchie said.

When Ritchie ran for Minnesota Secretary of State in 2006, he already knew that office had an important role with businesses at their startup and capital-formation stage. "But I didn't know that business services accounted for two-thirds of the work of the Office of Secretary of State," Ritchie said. "Within two days of being sworn in, I knew I needed to focus on the business side-especially converting our business services from being only paper-based to also being available on an online /digital basis, providing statewide access. What I did not know was that we were about to head into a big economic downturn." He said filings with his office for new businesses increased during the economic downturn, when people were laid off and were looking for other opportunities.

Ritchie said the office made it a priority to digitize operations to make business filings easier. "I knew this was important to keeping Minnesota competitive, since entrepreneurs can choose almost anywhere in the world to incorporate their businesses in this new, digital era," he said. "We need to honor the past by being good stewards of the strong economy we have inherited. And we must invest in the future so that those who come behind us will inherit the same opportunities."

When Ritchie was nearing the end of his two terms as Secretary of State, some people approached him to ask for his help in bringing a World's Fair to Minnesota. Ritchie said he attended the 1964 World's Fair in New York with his family and was amazed to see things like videophones and driverless cars. The visit to the fair drove his interest in science. He realized that having the World's Fair in Minnesota would be a very good opportunity to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) for our young people.

After contacting the international body that makes the decisions on where World's Fairs are held, Ritchie said the Minnesota group realized, "we could pull this off. We learned that Minnesota has so many connections, relationships and citizen ambassadors all over the world who could support our effort."

The World's Fair Bid Committee chose the theme of health and wellness . Ritchie said committee co-chair Marilyn Carlson Nelson made a very compelling proposal that the focus should be on health. The theme developed was "Wellness and Wellbeing for All: Healthy People, Healthy Planet."

"We are ground zero for so many different aspects of health and wellness, healing and medicine," Ritchie said. "Minnesota is a leader in everything from open-heart surgery and organ transplants to addiction treatment, mental health, and physical fitness. We have world-leading organizations like United Health, Medtronic and Mayo and we are number one in keeping ourselves healthy through hiking, biking, parks and other outdoors recreation. We have a balance of things. We invent, inspire, invest in and build infrastructure for health and wellbeing like no other place on the planet."

The wellbeing and long-term economic viability of Minnesota's health and wellness ecosystem are critical to the state and cannot be taken for granted. " We were once leaders in computers and software and that disappeared practically overnight,"itchie said. " Now that we've been gifted with this incredible health/medical/wellness sector, what are the elements that keep it from going away or what are the elements that trigger activities that we should take as a warning?" He noted that we would benefit from a more thorough detailing and analysis of how Minnesota lost its computer/IT sector-what happened to Control Data, Honeywell, Sperry, etc.

Ritchie said Massachusetts has created a billion-dollar fund to recruit biotech and medical-related companies. And Austin, Texas, has systematically raided other regions, like Silicon Valley and Minnesota, by helping hundreds of companies move to Texas.

The Minnesota World's Fair Bid Committee made a first attempt last year to bid for hosting the 2023 World's Fair. It was the first U.S. bid for a World's Fair in almost 30 years. Minnesota was among the three finalists, along with Buenos Aires and Lodz, Poland. In November 2017, the official decision-making body, called the BIE (Bureau of International Expositions) voted to select Buenos Aires. Ritchie said the BIE is a treaty-based organization with 170 member countries. The voting countries each send representatives to the twice-a-year general assembly meetings of the organization. Only paid-up countries can vote, he said, so usually about 120 countries can vote.

Ritchie said it is very rare for a city to be selected as the host on its first attempt-normally it takes at least two or three bids. The Minnesota committee was strongly encouraged by many of the member countries of the BIE to make another bid as soon as possible. The next opening is for 2027. He said there was unanimous opinion that our theme-Health and Wellness-is the most important topic the

World's Fair movement needs to address and that Minnesota is a very appropriate location for an Expo on this topic.

As the Minnesota World's Fair Bid Committee begins its second bid, we must think about what Minnesota's health and wellness sector will look like in 2027, when the whole world would come to visit. "Will we continue to have the strength, the diversity and the most leading-edge technology?" Ritchie asked. "Will we have reduced or eliminated some of the disparities in health that we are tackling in earnest today? Will we have reversed some of the negative trend lines? Will our leading companies still be headquartered here or snatched?"

"Hosting a World's Fair is a particular way of calling attention to this special place we call home," he said.

Ritchie said there is currently no announced competition with Minnesota for hosting the 2027 World's Fair. Korea is interested in the 2030 fair. He said some U.S. cities want to host the longer World's Fairs, which last six months. The 2027 fair is one of the shorter Expos, lasting only three months. The six-month, unlimited-sized Expos occur on the years ending in zeros and fives (2010, 2015, 2020, 2025) and there is one three-month Expo in-between these longer versions.

"My personal commitment is winning the bid," Ritchie said. "Once we have secured the right to host, then the work of shaping and organizing the 2027 Expo will be for a new generation of leaders. It will take an army of young people to pull it off."

What's the evidence it makes a long-term difference when you bring a world-class event like the World's Fair to your city or state? An interviewer asked that question and Ritchie responded that he was asked to speak at the 40th anniversary gala that celebrated the 1974 Spokane Expo. He said people at the anniversary event commented that, in their view, Spokane was "dying" and the 1974 World's Fair completely reversed that. "They did it consciously," Ritchie said. There is **a very insightful public television program** that describes how this came to be in Spokane, he said.

There is also **a short video of Bill Gates** describing how important the 1962 Seattle World's Fair was to exciting him about technology and innovation.

The City of Bloomington and the Mall of America are very involved in the World's Fair work. Ritchie said we all know that most people do not know what a special place Minnesota is until they visit. We have to get people to come here to visit for them to understand who we are. "Bloomington is very self-conscious about carefully building up its community over the long term," he said. "The Mall of America (MOA) is very self-conscious about what it takes to make it in the Amazon world."

Ritchie said the City of Bloomington, its Convention and Visitors Bureaus, and the Mall are looking into the future and asking, "What can we do to ensure that Minnesota is able to keep attracting new talent, new students, new entrepreneurs-and what will keep our children and future generations coming back?"

Bloomington and the MOA have a vision for what want they want the [South Loop District](#) of the city to be in the long term, Ritchie said. "The MOA has a vision of how to beat Amazon. And Bloomington has thought a great deal about how to protect green space, the Minnesota River and the wildlife refuge, while keeping its businesses strong," he said.

He noted that Bloomington has signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which has had a positive impact in discussions with foreign leaders-especially those from island nations in the Pacific and the Caribbean.

As the World's Fair effort moves forward, how can it be connected in some way to the creation of good public policy in Minnesota? An interviewer asked that question and Ritchie responded that people have come to the bid committee with ideas. For example, he said, a group of young leaders in health care proposed taking on the very big medical challenge of eliminating type 2 diabetes in our state as an aspirational goal that could be achieved between now and the summer of the Expo.

There are institutions in Minnesota with 10- or 20-year plans, Ritchie said. "We've learned there could be more coordination among people who have these visions. Planning for a large event like this Expo-with up to 20 million visitors-can help accelerate collaboration among the major players in transportation, education, tourism, etc.," he said.

"If we take an economic perspective and recognize that health care is our single biggest sector in terms of employment, revenue, etc., we all need to be thinking about the wellbeing of this sector over the long term," Ritchie said. "How do we keep our health sector strong and not lose it like we did our leadership position in computers?"

The World's Fair committee must figure out how it can effectively plug into groups like the Civic Caucus, the Itasca Project and the Citizens League, Ritchie said.

The World's Fair can help create regional connections at home. Ritchie said the city of Chicago wants to work with the Twin Cities on this Expo and has given its support through the Deputy Mayor's Office and the Convention Bureau. Chicago also is very much in favor of the idea of a bullet train to the Mayo Clinic and Minneapolis. Leaders in other states and cities in our region, such as Madison, Sioux Falls, Duluth, Fargo/Moorhead, Des Moines and Iowa City, have also expressed interest.

Minnesota is blessed to have an investment community/ecosystem that understands and is leading on some of the major new financial tools being used to develop health care and wellness, including Impact Investment, Blended Capital and Social Investment. Our leading financial institutions are crucial to the long-term success of our health-and-wellness sector, Ritchie said. He gave the example of [Sunrise Banks](#), which has a special focus on underserved communities

An interviewer mentioned that his stepson is a venture capitalist in California. His company is looking for diversity as a key factor in the companies in which it invests. The company has invested in Minnesota as a prototypical community where diversity is going to be important. "He sees diversity as a critical element in the future of the economy in any part of the country," the interviewer said. "He's on the front edge of that. He sees Minnesota as a really great place to invest based on that premise."

Ritchie said the Twin Cities area can sometimes mask some of its diversity. He said we need to mentor young entrepreneurs of color, women, our returning soldiers and other veterans who will be our next generation of civic, commercial and political leadership.

Higher education is one of our main industries in Minnesota. Ritchie responded to a question about the role the former Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) used to play by saying we need better planning in higher education. "There isn't a single higher education system in the state, so coordination is both more difficult and more important," Ritchie said.

"In my work lobbying for Minnesota's World's Fair bid, I have met with over 100 ambassadors, foreign ministers and a number of heads of state," Ritchie said. "It was amazing how many had sent their children to school in the United States-a number to Minnesota, in fact-and they had some serious questions. They want to know if it's still safe here. They saw the shooting in Las Vegas. These questions are now front and center." And they wanted to know about the new difficulties in getting visas.

He noted that Minnesota's private colleges, the University of Minnesota and Mayo Medical School all have alumni around the world. "They've been very helpful in making connections," he said "and we will be mobilizing them even more for our next bid."

The federal and state governments are involved in making a bid for the World's Fair.

Ritchie said that by June of 2018, Minnesota must re-submit an updated bid application to the U.S. Department of Commerce. "The Commerce Department is the sole decision-maker on what moves forward as an official U.S. bid," he said.

The U.S. State Department is the official member of the BIE, since the department is the official member of all treaty-based bodies. The Department plays a crucial role throughout the process, Ritchie said. "We have been blessed with unanimous support from both houses of Congress, endorsement by both President Obama and President Trump, and incredible investments of time and money by the State and Commerce Departments."

Ritchie said that for its 2023 bid, the committee successfully convinced both houses of Congress to rejoin the BIE and got the State Department to pay back dues to the group. Ritchie said there has been "unbelievable" bipartisan support in both the Legislature and Congress for the Minnesota bid.

Ritchie said the proposed site for the World's Fair will be somewhere in the South Loop near Fort Snelling, which will soon be celebrating its 200th anniversary. There is a proposed bonding project to do repairs on Fort Snelling and build a new visitor center in time for the anniversary. "This is an example of investments in our state's future that can be spurred along by special events," he said. "In this case, Fort Snelling, it will take some state action to get things done in time for the 200th anniversary," he said.

How do we get all the major Minnesota players on the same team, speaking with one voice? An interviewer asked that question and gave the example of the Upper Midwest Study, which was done 45 or 50 years ago, where there was never one voice on doing what the study recommended. "Nobody really wanted to get involved," the interviewer said.

Ritchie said Chicago thinks the World's Fair in Minnesota would help their city, because all the big planes from around the world tend to land there. The CEO of Choose Chicago, the visitors bureau, suggested that the Minnesota World's Fair could partner with Chicago to sell tourism packages in Europe that include other arts and music attractions around our region.

"More interaction with leaders in other cities will spark new ideas and creative thinking," Ritchie said. He regularly talks to Sanford Health leadership in Sioux Falls, because Sanford is helping provide entire health care systems in other countries. He also communicates with Land O Lakes, which has a major presence in East Africa and therefore is in touch with senior government officials every month.

What personal characteristics of a governor would help Minnesota win the World's Fair bid?

An interviewer asked that question and Ritchie responded that some of the current gubernatorial candidates have played very important roles in getting the bid to where it is. He believes a governor would have to be strong enough to take flak from people who "tend to oppose anything and everything."

"In addition, when heads of state, ambassadors or other senior government officials come to Minnesota, they need to meet our governor. In those meetings, the governor needs to thank them for supporting our first bid last year and ask for their vote again," Ritchie said.

"And our new governor can play a key role in making sure that our Minnesota World's Fair is strongly supported by the whole Upper Midwest," he continued. "Normally, 80 percent of the attendance at an Expo is by people who live within a day's drive, so the entire region will be the most important market. We need, of course, to have a governor who welcomes the whole country and the entire world to visit and who makes sure we continue to be a welcoming place for all."