

## Official: Fairgrounds upgrades drawing attention

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Horse stables at the state fairgrounds. PHOTO BY MAIKE SABOLICH

OKLAHOMA CITY – Oklahoma City's recent investments to improve the equine facilities at the state fairgrounds have been noticed by other major metro areas in competition for major horse shows, officials said Thursday.

The All-American Quarter Horse Congress needs more room for its big annual event in Columbus, Ohio, a newspaper in the area reported recently. Cam Foreman, manager of the organization, said that the congress might move after its contract expires in 2015 unless Ohio's state fairgrounds facilities are upgraded.

Oklahoma State Fair Inc. Vice President Bill Allen said Foreman was probably

posturing, although his concerns are valid.

"We've seen this before," Allen said. "Once we started upgrading our facilities, there were other cities that started building and upgrading their own in hopes of getting some of the lucrative shows that we have.

"We feel this is a posturing statement position by Cam to try to get the Ohio fairgrounds to build him the kind of facility they would love to have," he said. "It's a major source of revenue. We really do not see that show packing up and leaving."

The congress is the largest single-breed equine show in the world with about 8,000 horses arriving from around the world, bringing an estimated \$180 million economic impact with them.

In late 2009, Oklahoma City voters passed a temporary sales tax initiative called MAPS 3 to raise about \$777 million for several infrastructure projects across the city. Those projects include a convention center at about \$250 million, a central downtown park at \$130 million and upgrades at the state fairgrounds at \$60 million.

The portion focused on the fairgrounds was intended to replace aging public event buildings, particularly those used throughout the year by the public for events such as antique shows, craft fairs and the annual Oklahoma State Fair. That complements projects that have been ongoing since 2004, when voters approved an increase to the hotel and motel tax that produced \$75 million in upgrades to the park's horse barns and State Fair Arena.

Officials said renovations are now under way on Barn 4 and Barn 5 near the arena. Once that project is complete, all nine barns will have been upgraded for a total of 3,200 stalls. The Ohio fairgrounds has 1,200 permanent stalls.

Even if Oklahoma could steal the congress away from Ohio, the fair park has a full calendar already, officials said. Between the end of the state fair in September and the end of the year, the fairgrounds has about 2,000 horses coming and going every weekend.