

Convention fighting B-movie stigma:

Stage set for Reagan
to play film star again

By TOM PANZENHAGEN

There is as much garbage in downtown Detroit as there is Republican support for the Equal Rights Amendment.

mind, then the stage is set for this week's Republican National Convention. The GOP platform is full of compromise, hardly representative of the views of either wing of the party. Similarly, any resemblance between

downtown Detroit and the rest of the recession-ridden and trash-riddled city is purely coincidental.

Downtown, the stage is set. Republicans will be greeted with open arms — the open arms of a film director welcoming his million-dollar star to the set.

The star, of course, is Ronald Reagan. And the set is downtown Detroit in general, the Joe Louis Arena in particular.

It's all systems go. Lights, camera action.

FOUR YEARS AGO, at the Republican convention in Kansas City, the script was not nearly so neat.

Then-President Gerald Ford and candidate Reagan were battling it out for the nomination. The aura of smoke-filled, backroom politics was alive.

What's more, Kansas City is more reminiscent of a Hollywood back lot — where anything can happen — than of an A-grade sound stage.

It's harder to mail a letter in Kansas City than it is to sweat.

Altogether, the scene four years ago was a sticky one. It seemed appropriate that the convention arena was adjacent to what once were slaughter house stockyards.

You knew that one candidate, either Ford or Reagan, would not emerge from the heat, dust and smoke alive.

THIS YEAR it's a different story. It's a hollywood, B-movie story.

SMALL-TOWN BOY MAKES GOOD
NOMINATED FOR PRESIDENT
STARRING RONALD REAGAN

Detroit is primed to play host.

From the exquisite shops of the Renaissance Center to the darkened bars of downtown, Detroiters are proclaiming that they love a good party.

An optometrist shop in the RenCen greets you with a sign, "Welcome GOP."

And a middle-aged Anchor Bar regular, barely capable of holding down his bar stool, maintains: "Detroit is a great city — did you know Abraham Lincoln's blood-stained chair 'is out at Greenfield Village."

"Or at least it was when I was a kid."

The fact is, all of Detroit and its suburbs are proud to host this convention.

Finally, a chance to escape the billing of "Murder City, USA."

It's not often you can clear the slate as Detroit can this week. A good performance means money, prestige and respect.

CHANCES ARE a good performance is just what the Republicans and a national TV audience will get.

At Joe Louis Aren last week, all the final nuts and bolts were being applied to the massive podium from which Ronald Reagan will charm his followers.

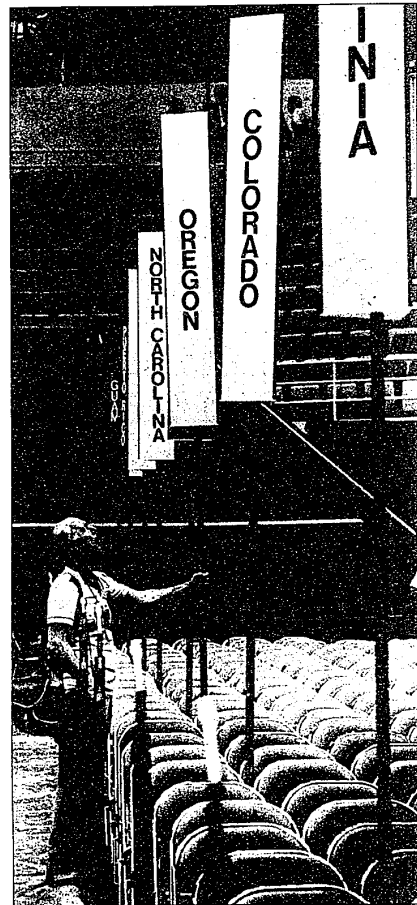
The last rolls of the cheap blue felt were being applied to all the bare concrete portions of the arena that weren't already covered with cheap red and white felt.

Thirty television cameras surround the podium; this promises to be the most photographed convention ever. And perhaps the best planned, because Republicans are as concerned about their image as we Detroiters are about ours.



Michigan Bell worker Don Duzniowski connects phones in the delegate seating area in Joe Louis Arena in preparation for the convention. (Staff photos by Randy Borst)

The Republicans can clear their slate too. They'll have a chance of capturing the White House this year, and they're not going to reduce those chances by producing an un-tidy convention.



George Tames, a photographer for the Washington bureau of the New York Times, sets up a picture in Joe Louis Arena, scene of this week's Republican Convention.

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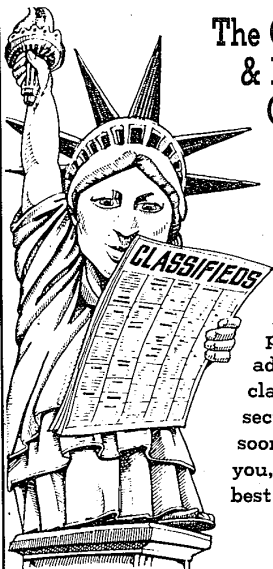
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