

Apprentices Olympia Overlooks America

By MIKE PRICE
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The near-worldwide International Apprentices Olympia just bypassed the United States. The Britisher who pulled his country into the cultural competition of young handcrafters spent Thursday in Amarillo asking why.

Fred Hill of Canterbury, guest of Larry Oles of 810 Avondale, took the afternoon for a detailed discourse on the Olympia, recapping his own questions and answers with the same enthusiasm he showed in a noon talk before the Downtown Rotary Club.

He named off the 13 European nations that take yearly turns as hosts to competition among young carpenters, bricklayers and other artisan, and said, "Japan and Korea just joined the bunch. I had hoped we could keep the western countries together, but for some reason they overlooked the United States."

American membership poses some problems, Hill said, among them vastness and — real or imagined — "emphasis on mass production rather than individual craftsmanship."

One of Hill's companions suggested Amarillo might be the Olympia jumping-in place for the U. S.

The Englishman, recalling Texas stereotypes, said, "I've always heard the Lone Star State is where things start to happen. That might be a good idea."

History of the Olympia looks relatively simple beside Hill's own experience in the program. He laid them out side-by-side:

"Spain was the instigator. After their Civil War, they realized they couldn't depend on olives and oranges for economy. They had to industrialize. Eventually, they challenged Portugal to competition with their outstanding young apprentices."

In 1950, Hill's son got word of the Olympia while working as an apprentice at Hill's loom and spinning wheel factory in an old Canterbury monastery.

He applied to Madrid to enter. The problem came with his acceptance: there was no British team, no official connections at all. Hill went to Madrid as his son's sponsor.

Already familiar with youth work as a Boy Scout leader, Hill approached the British Embassy there. "I emphasized the importance of unifying Europe — exchanging knowledge and culture; told



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them languages didn't mean a thing to these boys. They didn't need them, what with meeting each other, exchanging addresses and all." That approach failed.

Back in England, he took his request to various large industries, "but a little name like Fred Hill didn't cut much ice."

His solution was taking himself out of the picture. Using a letterhead featuring his son's Olympia participation — no self-reference — he finally sold Britain on the program. That was 1956.

When the more than 300 youths meet Nov. 4, 1970 in Tokyo, they will face an international judging panel and problems devised by master craftsmen.

They have a week to study blueprints and designs and build whatever the tests call for — silver chalices, fireplaces and so on. Growing interest in technology has made a place for electronics students, who may be instructed to build or rewire a television set. The second week is leisure.

Hill says there are few things better for the various trades than the program. "It's more important than sports — far more."