

# OUR CENTURY

## 1974

### AT A GLANCE



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTO

Frank Robinson.

### OPEC has city over a barrel

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, the oil cartel, had raised prices twice in late 1973. In January, it raised them again — to \$11.56 a barrel, nearly four times the October price.

The “oil shock” hit America hard, but it hit Cleveland harder than most places. Not only did Clevelanders face long lines at gas pumps and lower speed limits, but the auto industry — the area’s backbone — led the nation into recession. Buyers discovered that not only were Japanese cars more economical than American “gas guzzlers,” but they had fewer quality problems.

Within a year, General Motors had laid off more than 7,000 workers in northern Ohio. The Lordstown Vega assembly plant was shutting down for a week or two at a time. The GM Fisher Body Division laid off employees in Cleveland, Euclid and Elyria. Ford announced shutdowns at its Lorain plant, which assembled Mercury Montegos and Ford Torinos.

Suppliers to the auto industry were affected, especially steel and rubber companies. So were machine tools and machinery industries, as plants canceled expansion plans. By year’s end, there were 8 million unemployed Americans — the most since 1940. The unemployment rate was 6.1 percent in Greater Cleveland, and twice that in the city.

John Glenn made good his vow to oppose Howard Metzenbaum for the Senate seat to which Metzenbaum had been appointed by Gov. John Gilligan. In the climactic City Club debate the weekend before the primary, Metzenbaum scoffed that Glenn had never held a job in private life.

Glenn replied: “Go with me and tell and a Gold Star mother her son didn’t hold a job. Go to Arlington Cemetery, watch those flags, stand there and tell those people they didn’t have a job.” Glenn won the primary and went on to a landslide victory over Ralph Perk in November.

Councilman Dennis Kucinich was running for Congress again, this time against State Rep. Ron Mottl for the open 23rd District seat. His aggressive campaign prompted the Press to observe editorially that “Dennis the menace has become Dennis the demagogue.” Mottl won a close race.

James Rhodes, meanwhile, tried to regain the governorship he had held from 1963 through 1970. In 1970, when he was ineligible to seek a third term, he was defeated in the Republican Senate primary by Robert Taft, while Gilligan was governor. Pundits said the times had passed the 65-year-old Rhodes by.

Gilligan, buoyed by polls showing him with a big lead, adopted an above-the-fray attitude. But in the last 10 days, Rhodes unleashed a \$100,000 media blitz that hit Gilligan as aloof and uncaring.

On Election Night, both ABC and NBC projections showed Gilligan re-elected. Shortly after midnight, Rhodes conceded. He told his supporters, “We lost the election and that’s it,” and went to bed. At 3 a.m., he was awakened with news: The complete count showed he had been elected governor again.

However, Rhodes had a Democratic lieutenant governor. State Rep. Richard Celeste of Lakewood had defeated John W. Brown.

After two years of improvement, the Cavs fell to 29-53 in their last season at the Arena. Coach Bill Fitch’s one-liners no longer were enough to stop fans from muttering. The Crusaders finished third in the Eastern Division of the WHA, with a 37-32-3 record, but lost to the Chicago Cougars in the playoffs.

Mileti’s Indians struggled to a fourth-place finish in the American League East. Phil Seghi replaced General Manager Gabe Paul, who had left to join George Steinbrenner’s New York Yankees. The Perry brothers, Gaylord and Jim, won 38 games — 21 and 17 respectively — though opposing teams repeatedly demanded that the umpires search Gaylord for illegal baseball-doctoring substances. Oscar Gamble and George Hendrick each hit 19 homers. In July, Dick Bosman threw only 79 pitches in a no-hitter against the Oakland Athletics.

It speaks volumes about the 1970s Indians that the most memorable event of the year — probably of the decade — was the infamous 10-Cent Beer Night on June 4. Juiced-up fans swarmed on to the field, forcing the umpires to declare a forfeit for the Texas Rangers. In September, Seghi picked up future Hall of Famer Frank Robinson on waivers from the California Angels. When the season ended, he named Robinson as the majors’ first black manager, replacing Ken Aspromonte.

Once fans could count on the Browns to make them forget the woes of the Indians. The 1974 Browns finished 4-10, the worst record in their 29-season history. Nick Skorich retired as coach.

By Fred McGunagle

Green and blue spotlights crisscrossed the floor, sparkling off the specially created gold commemorative medallions around the necks of guests. Resplendent in his brown mohair tuxedo, Nick Mileti happily acknowledged the applause of thousands.

It was Oct. 26, 1974, and Mileti, 43-year-old “sports magnate,” was opening the gleaming \$25 million Coliseum in Richfield. It was the acme of an almost unbelievable career that had started with part-time jobs in the fourth grade at Corlett Elementary School. “Superstar Mileti Makes American Dream Come True,” a Plain Dealer profile had said in 1972.

That was the year Mileti added the Cleveland Indians to his National Basketball Association Cavaliers and American Hockey League Barons. Now, in 1974, he also owned the World Hockey Association Crusaders, with stars for whom he had outbid the National Hockey League. He also owned radio station WWWE.

From his two-story loge high up in the Coliseum, Mileti cheered Frank Sinatra, whom Mileti had paid \$250,000 as the Coliseum’s opening act. So did those inside the building, many in tuxes and evening gowns for the champagne party to follow.

Outside, the scene was different. Interstate 271 was a parking lot. Cars trapped in the jam were overheating and running out of gas. Drivers who managed to reach the Ohio 303 exit were forced by police to keep going into the countryside because the Coliseum parking lot was full.

Many abandoned their cars. Clutching their \$25 tickets, they slogged through the mud toward the lights of the Coliseum a half-mile away. One woman in an evening gown clambered up an embankment and fell in the weeds. She struggled to her feet, only to fall in a ditch.

The problems continued into the first athletic event, a Crusaders hockey game the next week. It had to be called off because the ice-making equipment didn’t work. The same thing happened for the second game.

But gradually, the Coliseum overcame the bugs. It presented a steady run of circuses, ice shows and rock concerts. All who saw it agreed it was a fine facility, even though there were problems with the location — especially when snow turned hilly Ohio 303 into a toboggan run.

Mileti was a born promoter. He started with events for his alma mater, Bowling Green State University, and the Miss Lakewood beauty pageant in Lakewood Park for the Lakewood Jaycees.

In the early 1960s, he told Lakewood Mayor Frank Celeste the Jaycees wanted to do something more significant. Celeste told him Congress had just created a senior citizen apartment program in which sponsors need put up only a small amount of “seed money.” The result, in 1963, was the Westerly, the first senior citizen apartments in the country.

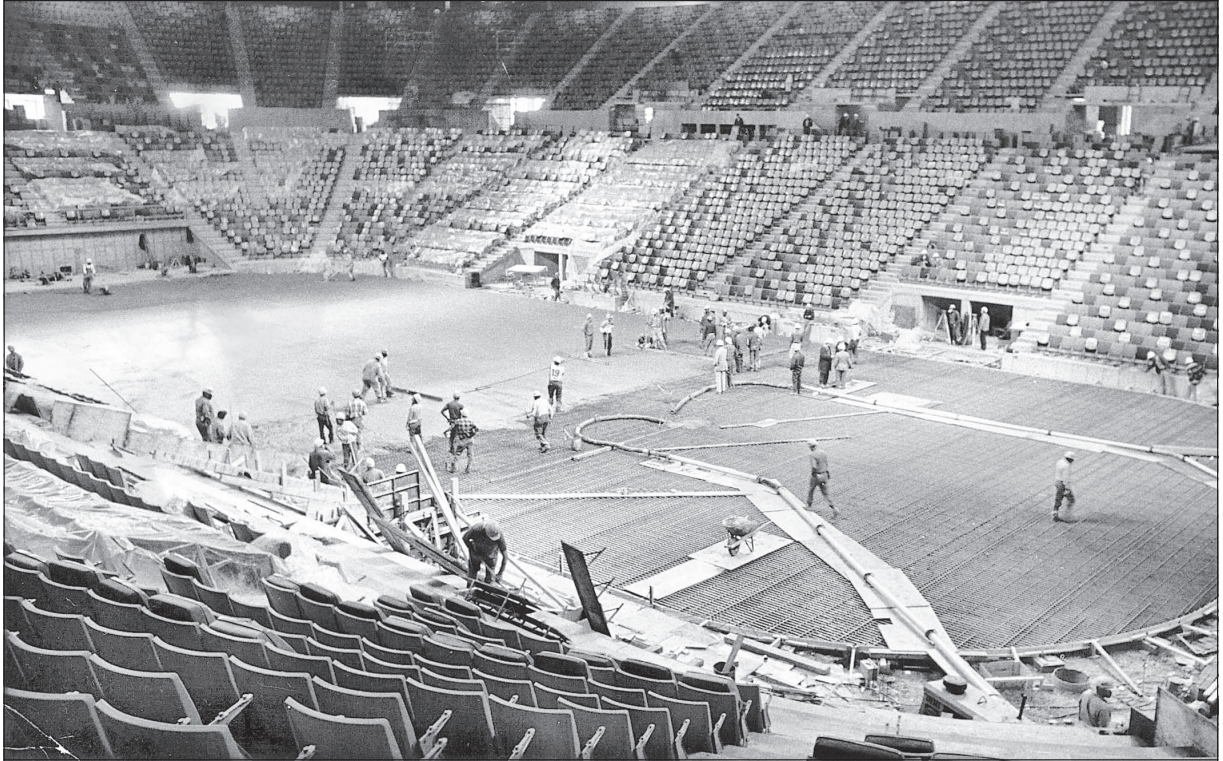
Another result was that Mileti and Celeste found themselves the most knowledgeable lawyers in the country about senior citizen housing. When Celeste left office in 1964, they formed National Housing Consultants Inc., advising sponsors around the country on how to wade through the red tape.

Mileti burst on the sports scene in 1968 when he bought the Arena and the Barons — or rather, headed an investor group in which others put up most of the money. Needing another tenant for the Arena, he won an expansion NBA franchise in 1970. When he couldn’t get an NHL franchise, he joined the new WHA in 1972.

Mayor Ralph Perk had staved off financial ruin in 1972 by selling the sewer system to a regional board for \$35 million. Now that money was running out. Worse, the city-owned Cleveland Transit System had exhausted its reserves and was facing bankruptcy. The legislature authorized creation of a regional transit authority — one eligible for federal aid — but set a Dec. 31 deadline.

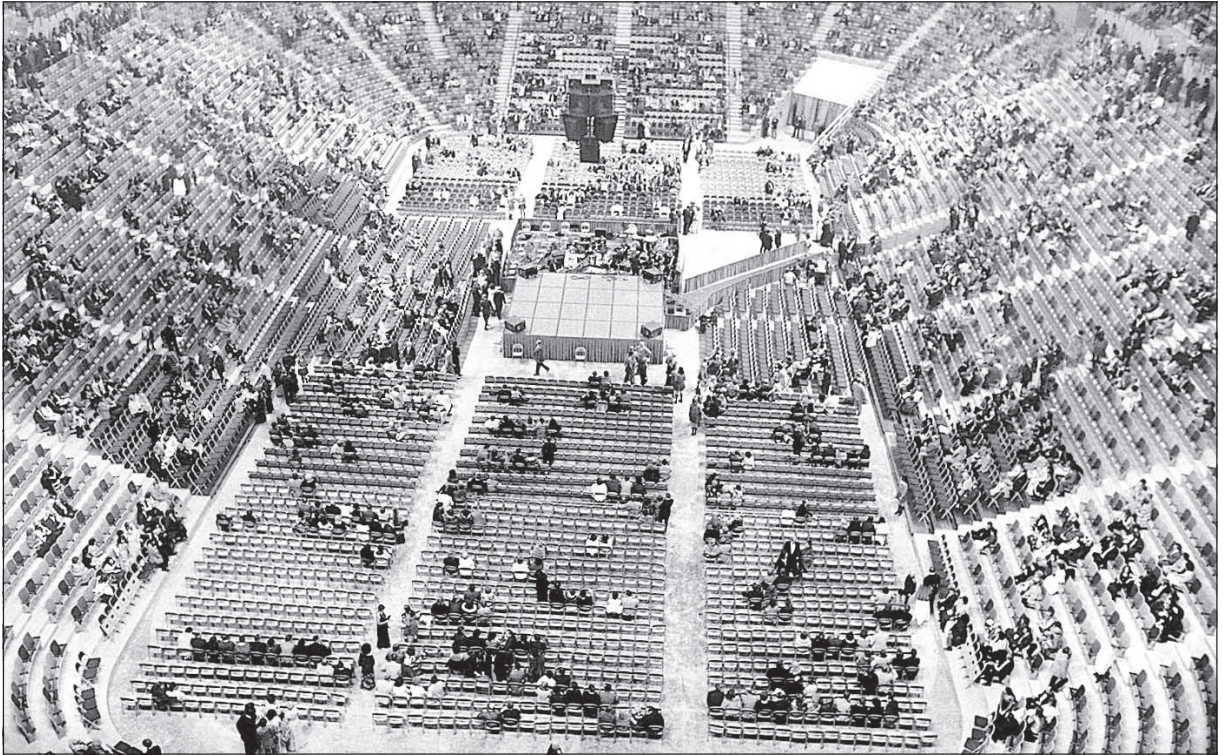
**Feb. 4:** Newspaper heiress Patty Hearst is kidnapped from her Berkeley apartment by members of a group calling themselves the Symbionese Liberation Army. Two months later, Hearst joins her abductors in a bank robbery.

**Mar. 15:** A federal grand jury names President Nixon an unindicted



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTO

The Coliseum’s cement floor is poured just days ahead of its opening.



The crowd — at least those who weren’t stuck on the interstate — gathers for Frank Sinatra’s opening show at the Coliseum.

That same year, he suddenly emerged as owner of the Indians, buying the team from financially strapped Vernon Stouffer. Again, others put up most of the money. “Why are you assuming I put in any money?” he asked an interviewer. “I put in work and talent. There are different things that make a partnership. Sometimes you put in money and sometimes you don’t.”

By 1974, Mileti’s teams were struggling financially. The Indians were losing games before nearly empty stands. One of Mileti’s partners, Alva “Ted” Bonda of Apcoa Inc. took over business operations. The “lovable loser” Cavaliers were losing their lovability as well as games. The Crusaders were having trouble meeting their high payroll. The minor-league Barons had been sold in 1973 and moved to Jacksonville, Fla.

The new Coliseum gave a boost to hockey and basketball attendance, and Mileti added as a tenant the Cleveland Nets, a team formed by Joe Zingale in the new World Team Ten-

nis League. Akronites adopted the Cavs as “their” team. Clevelanders braved the icy roads, though there was no public transportation and the traditional blue-collar fans began to drift away.

Population was in decline. The megalopolis that demographers called “Cuyahoga Valley City” in their predictions failed to materialize; instead, the Census Bureau dropped Cleveland from the list of the nation’s 15 largest metropolitan areas. A recession put a crimp in recreation spending. The real estate development around the Coliseum, on which the investors had hoped to make their real money, was nowhere to be seen.

The Coliseum lights still gleamed, visible for miles around. Nothing arose to block the view.

“The Big House on the Prairie” stood alone.

*McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.*



Host Nick Mileti on opening night,

## Merger puts regional transit on the road

For the first time, Perk agreed to submit a tax issue — an increase in the income tax from 1 percent to 1.5 percent, with part of the money earmarked for CTS. In the fall, however, Perk was busy running for U.S. Senate. The tax was defeated.

Officials redoubled transit negotiations under intense media pressure. On Dec. 31, City Council approved a plan to gather the Cleveland, Shaker

Heights, North Olmsted, Euclid and Maple Heights systems under a regional umbrella. Cleveland would get four seats on the board, with three each for the county commissioners and suburban mayors. Cleveland would also get \$11 million for past investments.

County voters, however, would have to pass a 0.5-percent “piggy-back” sales tax in 1975.

The city still faced red ink. On Dec.

30, Judge Daniel O. Corrigan blocked Perk’s plan to lay off 289 police and firefighters because council had not approved it. Instead, he ordered Perk to lay off 300 “temporary” workers who had been on the payroll longer than allowed by the city charter.

The city faced financial chaos, Perk said. It was the same prospect the city had faced at the end of 1972 and 1973.

— Fred McGunagle

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

co-conspirator in the Watergate cover-up.

**April 8:** Atlanta Braves slugger Hank Aaron hits his 715th home run, surpassing Babe Ruth’s record.

**June 30:** Soviet ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov defects to Canada.

**July 30:** The Supreme Court rules unanimously that Nixon must turn

over tape recordings sought by the Watergate prosecutor.

**Aug. 8:** Nixon resigns. Gerald Ford becomes president.

**Sept. 8:** Daredevil Evel Knievel fails in his bid to rocket across the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle.

**Sept. 16:** Ford pardons Nixon.

**Oct. 13:** Muhammad Ali regains

the world heavyweight boxing title with a knockout of George Foreman in Zaire, Africa.

**Deaths:** Earl Warren, Charles Lindbergh, French political leader Georges Pompidou, former United Nations Secretary-General U Thant, Duke Ellington, Jack Benny, Samuel Goldwyn, Chet Huntley, Walter Lippmann.