



New Oklahoma Heritage Center to tell state's story through its famed people

OKLAHOMA CITY What do the first person to fly solo around the world, the greatest vert-ramp rider in BMX history and country music's leading lady have in common? Their Oklahoma heritage.

The lives of influential Oklahomans like Wiley Post, Mat Hoffman and Reba McEntire are powerfully captured in the new Edward L. Gaylord-Boone Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Center, which will celebrate its grand opening the week of May 7.

But it's not just famous Oklahomans portrayed in this interactive, technology-driven Center everyday Oklahomans representing all walks of life are also honored.

"The goal of the Oklahoma Heritage Center is to bring Oklahoma's colorful history to life through the state's greatest asset its people," said Shannon Nance, Oklahoma Heritage Association president.

"We have taken great strides to include people from a diverse range of industries, backgrounds, socio-economic status and age so that everyone who comes to the Center will find someone with whom they can connect."

The Oklahoma Heritage Association contracted with Northern Light Productions out of Boston, Mass. to create the exhibitory for the Center. Northern Light's previous projects include the Spy Museum and the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

"This project has been a profound immersion into the breadth of talent and achievement of so many folks from Oklahoma," said Bestor Cram, Northern Light Productions principal. "The phrase 'The Great State of Oklahoma' rings loud and clear with integrity."

One of the Center's main exhibits, the Oklahoma Through Its People Gallery, celebrates the five characteristics of an Oklahoman perseverance, pioneer spirit, optimism, generosity and individualism. Custom-built exhibits were created for each of the characteristics, and each features six Oklahomans, past and present, who have displayed that attribute in their lives.

Perseverance is a metal tree of 15 various sized screens some showing video,

others showing still shots. Visitors have different experiences of ballerina Maria Tallchief or scientist Dr. Jordan Tang depending on where they stand to view the exhibit. Optimism features a touch screen video monitor on one side and "life tiles" on the other, which show a progression of photos morphing into each other, including images of Olympic gymnast Shannon Miller from childhood to the present.

Other exhibits include the Oklahoma Theater, which plays a 12-minute film about everyday Oklahomans from across the state; the Oklahoma Hall of Fame gallery, where visitors learn fun facts about all 611 inductees via touch screens; and the Tell Your Story exhibit, where visitors share and record stories about their own heritage through video prompters.

Visitors can then e-mail the recording to themselves as a memento of their experience.

The ultra-modern exhibitory contrasts sharply with the historic building in which the museum is housed the former Mid-Continent Life Insurance Building at 13th Street and Shartel Avenue. After sitting vacant for more than a decade, the 1927 facility will soon be filled with the faces, voices and spirit of Oklahoma's people.

The Oklahoma Heritage Center will open to the public May 12.

Regular hours will be Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors (age 62 and older) and \$5 for students (ages 6-17). Children 5 and younger are free, and group rates are available.

The Oklahoma Heritage Association preserves Oklahoma's history and inspires pride in the state by supporting education, celebrating the accomplishments of Oklahomans and leading the publishing industry in publishing books on Oklahoma history.

The non-profit organization is funded entirely by private donations and is dedicated to promoting Oklahoma's living history through its people.

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