

## Heritage Tourism and Y-12, K-25 and X-10 history

Heritage Tourism is a current buzzword that seems to be catching on across the nation. Places like the World War II museum and even places as small as the Casey Jones Museum are making economic headway for their cities and communities promoting the idea of historical designations.

A Heritage Tourism study was recently completed for the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitor's Bureau by Akins Crisp Public Strategies where such approaches as designating Oak Ridge as a Heritage Area and full utilization of tourism destinations at Y-12's New Hope Center and Beta 3 Calutrons, K-25's North Tower and The Graphite Reactor at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory were included in the long range planning document. These sites are seen as unique facilities that are found nowhere else and thus could serve as strong draws for heritage tourism.

Y-12 has its first real opportunity to put on a public face that contributes to Oak Ridge's heritage tourism efforts with the New Hope Center. Yet, much of Y-12 remains, of necessity, restricted access. ORNL has the same situation to a lesser degree. K-25 is currently the only one of the three sites that has the potential for ready public access.

The demolition problems recently uncovered have increased the cost of demolition substantially and have called into question the decision to preserve a portion of the K-25 "U-shaped" building as a tourism attraction. Public input is being requested. Historic preservation efforts are being evaluated.

This series of articles are focused on telling the history of Y-12 and that is a contributing factor, but there is even more to it than that. K-25 (East Tennessee Technology Park) and X-10 (Oak Ridge National Laboratory) each play a role as does the city of Oak Ridge proper. The focus of this Y-12 history article this week will call attention to some of these uniquely Oak Ridge heritage tourism assets.

At the end of a recent article taken from the book, *The Manhattan Project - The Birth of the Atomic Bomb in the Words of Its Creators, Eyewitnesses, and Historians*, I said that Heritage Tourism can be an effective vehicle through which the world comes to Oak Ridge to learn of the introduction of the Atomic Age. The article concluded by stating, "Here they can see the genesis of the wonders that have resulted from the atomic bomb to nuclear medicine and scientific research that even today continues to do amazing things. Ours is a story, a heritage, an achievement that is ongoing and intriguing. It just needs to be 'well told' often and with creativity."

A recent historical event at Y-12 reminded me of the importance of encouraging the public to understand the history of these three unique and historical sites. The 2008 Leadership Knoxville class spent the day in Oak Ridge. They began their day at the New Hope Center's Y-12 History Exhibit Hall where they were given visitor badges and viewed the historic Y-12 exhibits we have there.

They were then bused to the Jack Case Center where breakfast was served and where Gerald Boyd representing the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Operations and Kevin Smith representing the National Nuclear Security Administration's Y-12 Site Office met them along with George Dials, B&W Y-12's President and Chief Executive Officer, and his staff. These business persons were quickly immersed in good food and a thorough overview of the inter-workings of the government facilities at Oak Ridge. They asked excellent questions and the exchange was most productive.

Gerald Boyd, DOE ORO Manager, asked a most insightful question of me as the group was passing into the Jack Case Center's spacious cafeteria. He wondered what was being done to present the history of Oak Ridge, the whole history, to these Knoxville business leaders. I told him we were taking them on tours of Y-12 and ORNL and that the history of Y-12 would feature in my portion of the tour. His inquiry was right on target, however, and I must admit that in thinking about it more since our brief discussion, I have come to wonder if we are using our Oak Ridge history to our best advantage.

The focus of the event was to give the class participants information to help them understand the tremendous impact Oak Ridge has on East Tennessee. Especially the positive economic impact was presented, and rightly so as that impact is huge. However, the historic contributions Oak Ridge has made

to East Tennessee, our nation and even the world, were not featured. Did we miss an opportunity to communicate with our Knoxville leaders? They saw visual presentations and the tours gave them visual information. But did they experience our history enough to understand the full impact or just hear a bit about it?

Just the mere presence of the government facilities in Oak Ridge has tremendous economic benefit for our region. The present and future missions provide excellent jobs and result in even more indirect jobs. However, I wonder if we in Oak Ridge and especially those of us who work on the government missions, miss the potential impact of the historic missions.

For example, the "Moon Box" at Y-12 was recently allowed to be taken to a conference in Nashville where environmental engineers marveled at its simplistic yet effective design. You see, they were discussing the design of just such a container for a future mission to Mars to bring back material to Earth without contaminating it. I understand the moon box was the hit of the conference. Now, that aluminum box physically being sent to that conference made all the difference. A picture would not have had the same result.

The K-25 dilemma, being the most recent and urgent look at Oak Ridge's unique historical heritage, brings the situation before the public. What to do about the history of K-25? Is it necessary to save a portion of the physical equipment and buildings? Is there a way to tell the story without having access to the real thing? What about the Beta 3 Calutrons at Y-12. Can that story be adequately told without the physical setting being experienced? What about the Graphite Reactor? See what I mean?

The small scale model of the K-25 gaseous diffusion compressor outside the American Museum of Science and Energy and the calutron panel along with an example sending and receiving unit combination are good attempts to show something of our history, but can they get the job done alone? Do we need to figure a way to provide access to the more specific and actual items at the various sites?

Thought must be given to what the unique history of the government facilities can do to help us represent ourselves and what we do at the facilities to the public, all the while remembering that the security of our missions must be assured. The presidential order on historic preservation specifically includes Heritage Tourism. A balance is required, and sometimes a delicate one.

The upcoming Integrated Facilities Disposition Program is where funding is being sought to demolish many more of the Manhattan Project era structures at Y-12 and ORNL. This effort will require study of the historic preservation situation and the need to maintain the balance of our history along side our mission.

K-25 is just the first one to be caught up in the process. Y-12's history and ORNL's history will also require planning and specific effort to assure that history is not lost to future generations.