

TRAVEL

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Branson folks spend \$40 million more

WHAT next for Branson, Mo.? It seems there's an announcement a week coming out of this little town that has become one of the country's major tourist destinations.

Now Silver Dollar City is pumping \$40 million into a new multi-layered theme park "that will highlight some of the most colorful and entertaining eras of 20th Century America," a press kit boasts. The folks at Silver Dollar City are all excited about their



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new project which will be called "Celebration City."

Among the features will be a 10-story-high wooden roller coaster and a spectacular evening laser production show. It's scheduled to open in late spring of 2003.

The location for this new operation is on a 112-acre piece of land, formerly the site of Branson USA.

Mel Bilbo, CEO and president of the Silver Dollar City Corporation, says, "Our lives were forever changed by the new frontiers of 20th Century civilization and technology — the onset of electricity, the development of the automobile and the creation of spectacular high technology."

"We'll celebrate America by presenting themed entertainment to include more than two dozen rides, games, restaurants and shows, plus the nightly laser production."

Of the wooden roller coaster, Bilbo adds, "Coaster aficionados will tell you there is nothing that compares to the clickety-clack of the wooden track and the thrill of the ride."

More on Branson

Didn't we say there was always something new going on in Branson? The \$1.5 million American Presidential Museum, for instance, opened recently.

Visitors will see a replica of the Oval Office, a section of Air Force One, dresses of several first ladies and much more.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"Celebration City" is scheduled to open next spring in Branson, Mo. It's an extension of Silver Dollar City.

The new museum is located just behind the Starlite Theater and is open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily.

From October-December at the Will Rogers Theatre in Branson you can catch the "John Davidson Show."

Mike and Shari Rradford are moving their "Remember When" show to a larger venue next year. The show will complete this season at the IMAX location and will begin 2003 at the Music City Centre Theatre, a beautiful, new 700-seat venue in the middle of the famed Highway 76 Strip.

Perhaps we mentioned it before, but the Roy Rogers-Dale Evans Museum is moving from Victorville, Calif., to Branson and will be located behind the Smirnoff Theater on Green Mountain Drive and Highway 376.

Construction will begin this fall and the museum should be finished in May. There'll be daily live music shows by members of Roy and Dale's family, video presentations and showings of old Roy Rogers TV show episodes.

New in Amana

Something called a "Holzfest"

will be held Friday through Sunday in the Amana Colonies, with displays of wood creations, wood tools and wood supplies.

There'll be demonstrations of chain saw sculpting, lumber sawing and wood carving, plus live music and dancing by swing, polka and country music bands. Of course, being Amana, there'll be food and beverages served throughout this three-day event. Hours: noon-7 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday.

Driving Tour

I'm trying out the new Amana Colonies audio driving tape on the CD player in my car. I just wanted to test the information, even though it's designed to be played as you drive through the colonies.

Available for \$10 at the Amana Colonies Welcome Centers, the Museum of Amana History and various other area businesses, the CD (with cassette converters, available for those who don't have CD players in their cars) gives a nice introduction to the area with a variety of voices, music and information on what to see. Ask for "Amana Colonies by Car."

The CD highlights 21 histori-

cal sites in a two-hour tour that takes visitors through seven Amana Colonies villages. Some of the narration is by Thomas P. Johnson, producing director of the Old Creamery Theater Company that now headquarters in Amana.

Local historian Peter Hoehnle says, "Our major concern was to have at least one site in each village and to pick sites that were representative of the Amana communal experience."

Listeners can select the track number to correspond with their location; maps and instructions are included with the CD, along with site markers at each stop.

Backyard travel tip

Here's another backyard travel tip from Joe Taylor, president and CEO of the Quad-Cities Visitors Bureau. He wonders how many of us have been to Black Hawk State Historic Site in Rock Island recently.

"It celebrates its 75th anniversary this year," Taylor points out. "Since 1927 the woods and lands of Black Hawk have been preserved for not only history, but for enjoyment. If you haven't been to Black

Hawk in the last several years, you are in for a pleasant surprise, as the site has been restored. There are lots of great picnic spots. The Hauberg Indian Museum shows the lives of the Sauk and Fox Indians in seasonal, life-size dioramas, and a new exhibit on the Civilian Conservation Corps is in place.

"Parking lots have been expanded and improved, and a pedestrian bridge now safely connects the park divided by Black Hawk Road.

"The former Girl Scout building is now Singing Bird Nature Center, with one wing named the 'Pete Petersen Bird Nest' in honor of the Quad-City ornithologist.

"There are more than four miles of trails, ideal for traveling when the fall colors reach their height. The forest is also one of the largest urban forests in the Midwest and one of the least disturbed in Illinois."

The museum is open 9 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m., closing at 4 p.m. from November-February. A donation is requested.

Special events include a prairie outing in September and a geology or archeology event in October.

Right here in River City

The above-mentioned Joe Taylor also reminds us that there are other "backyard travel" suggestions at the Mississippi Valley Welcome Center, 900 Eagle Ridge Road, LeClaire. It's open 361 days a year.

"We've hosted 1.5 million visitors since we opened in 1989," Taylor says proudly, mentioning the Iowa Peddler Gift Shop, Buffalo Bill's Antique Attic, the Midcoast Fine Arts Gallery, an ATM machine, plenty of parking, a friendly staff, exhibits and more than 400 brochures of things to see and do in Iowa and Illinois."

He's certainly proud of the place. Those driving by on Interstate 80 or US Highway 67 can tune in the visitor information program at 1610 AM on the radio dial.

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