

rivers of change

the national mississippi river museum & aquarium
prepares for expansion and growth

by Martin Palicki

Situated along the banks of the mighty Mississippi River in Dubuque, Iowa, the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium is expanding. Since 2005, the museum has been focused on the \$13 million expansion project, widening its focus from not only the Mississippi River, but throughout the rivers of America.

The project includes four new areas for the museum, a research center, traveling exhibit, and a new ticketing and admissions system.

- Rivers to the Sea traces the story of water and rivers as they flow from streams to rivers to the ocean. Guests will explore artifacts, inter-active exhibits, images, live ocean animals, touch screens, models, and mini theaters. This gallery will include the Ocean Today kiosk, presented in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution, NOAA and the Coastal America Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center network.

- Children will be engaged through a delightful presentation of rivers as Water, Life and Energy in the RiverWORKS Gallery, learning that rivers are functional as well as fun. Through hands-on water-based activities, they learn about rivers and what rivers mean to all of us. This children's "museum within a museum" keeps its river focus, which distinguishes it from many other wet or splash exhibits in museums and discovery centers across the country. The core message for visitors becomes: Rivers are fun and functional! A collage of visually exciting elements—a bicycle pedal-powered water cycle; larger-than-life, crawl-thru beaver lodge; a flowing river model with waterwheel—greet visitors and draws them inside.

- The RiverWAYS Gallery will show how rivers provide beacons for exploration as well as opportunities for living, explore how rivers are a part of our national identity, and explore the intersection between natural and cultural history. The

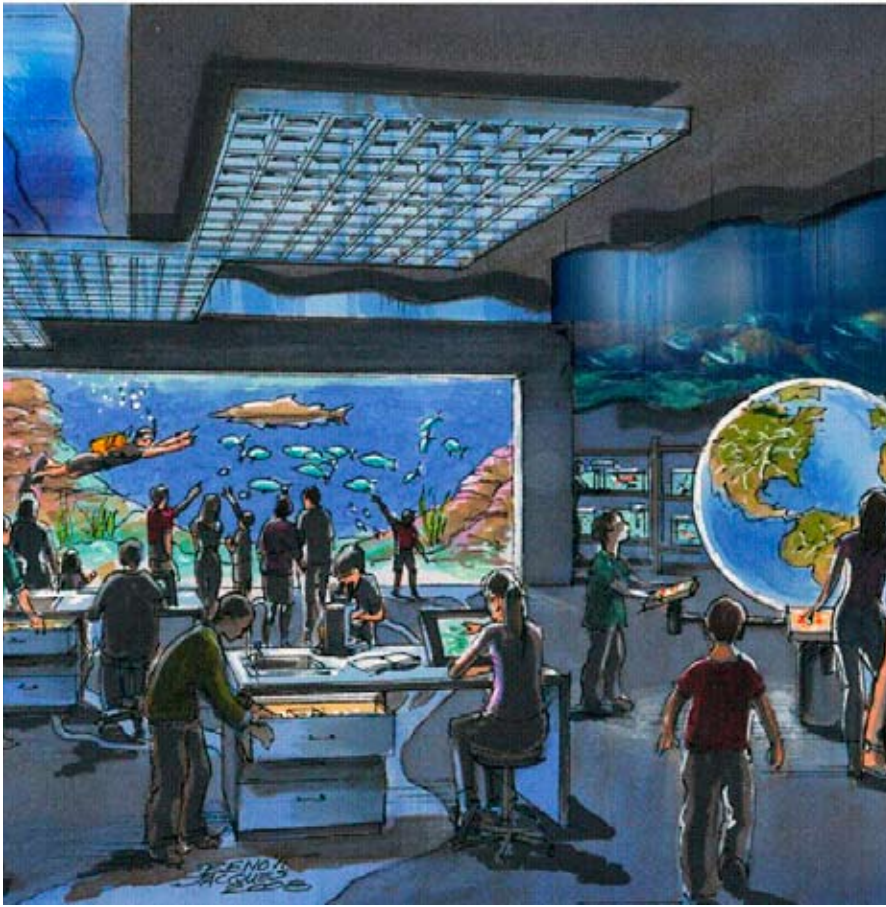
sounds of moving water, the mist from a waterfall and smoke from a nearby camp fire will hang in the air. The images from audiovisual elements will flicker in the softly lit space. Set within this immersive gallery, an informal theater experience provides a history of canals across the diverse and watery interior of the United States.

- The River Research Center will be a place for important research about the science and history of rivers. This space will have exhibits that showcase the dynamic research that is will be conducted not only in this center, but at other research institutions within Iowa and throughout the Mississippi River valley.

- The Large Format 3D/4D Theater will be the first large format digital theater in the region. For the digital theater and other digital technology, the River Museum is engaging Edwards Technology of El Segundo, California.



The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium traces the history of the Mississippi River and calls for its continued preservation.



The new Rivers to the Sea gallery will include interactive exhibits and artifacts.
All images courtesy of the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium

With partial funding from the McKnight foundation, the Museum & Aquarium will create a traveling version of these exhibits which will be available for travel throughout the Mississippi River valley from 2010 to 2012. Two formats will be available – an 800 square foot exhibit and also for venues with smaller footprint availability, an interactive touch screen computer exhibit which will have many of the learning components loaded into the kiosk.

The museum is also switching its Ticketing Point of Sale system to the CENTAMAN Enterprise Solution. The Museum is looking to improve how it tracks visitors and manages revenue.

“We were originally a local history museum,” explains Marketing Director for the museum, John Sutter. “But we have become a regional attraction, drawing visitors from Chicago as well as from all 50 states. Last year we had 225,000 visitors. With the expansion this year, we are hoping to top 300,000.”

Sutter is anxious to turn on CENTAMAN’s tracking features, identifying how much revenue comes from which geographic regions and also allows for targeted coupon promotions. The system will also provide a new online ticketing portal, and pull in data from admissions, retail and food and beverage.

The system also manages group sales and VIP programs (Memberships). “When a group or VIP checks in with their bar-coded ticket or ID card, the system can send an email or a text message to the group sales director or development coordinator so they know their group or VIP has arrived,” says Sutter.

The admissions system, along with the rest of the museum’s new exhibits is in the final stages of installation. Opening is scheduled for summer 2010. For more information on the museum, visit www.rivermuseum.com **ipm**



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