

Explore Oak Ridge: A new web site and an app for tourist in Oak Ridge

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 24, 2015)

Exciting times are all around us in Oak Ridge. Main Street Oak Ridge, the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, CVMR (Chemical Vapor Metal Refining) locating in Horizon Center and the potential for a barge terminal at the historic S-50 Thermal Diffusion Plant location, new construction on South Illinois Avenue, a pending airport at the East Tennessee Technology Park moves closer to reality, the Uranium Processing Facility at the Y-12 National Security Complex is doing preliminary site preparation, and even more potential projects are in the pipeline!

Amid all the construction activity, the signing of Memorandum of Agreements, the visits by the Department of Interior's National Park Service and other activities has caused many organizations to step up their planning for how to best handle the changes coming our way. On many fronts, new initiatives are being undertaken.

Evidence of such actions can readily be seen online. I am going to describe two such initiatives that bear the moniker "Explore Oak Ridge!"

First the Oak Ridge Breakfast Club has chosen a community project for 2015 to develop uniform signage and a mobile application (commonly called an "App") that will assist visitors to our city find points of interest. The App is still in the formative stage but is moving toward full implementation.

It can be seen now in its beta test stage at: <http://exploreoakridge.toursphere.com>

The App will easily be accessed on a mobile device such as an iPhone by the use of QR Codes on signage that will be placed at the various locations and will be described on the web site.

The second "Explore Oak Ridge" initiative uses the same logo as the above described initiative by the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club. It is a new Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau web site now ready for use. www.exploreoakridge.com Check it out!

It was formally launched last Thursday, 8/20/15, with a reception at Riverside Grille.

The new website is built around the central theme of **Explore Oak Ridge**. The ORCVB's announcement said, "This site promotes so much of what we love about Oak Ridge and presents a high-quality open invitation for guests to come experience the city."

The **Explore Oak Ridge** celebration at Riverside Grille showcased some of the website's highlights. The website developer is **Girl on the Roof** <http://girlontheroof.com>

Here is a summary of what has taken place to bring the web site to the point of official launching: In February 2015, Girl on the Roof, Inc. (GotR) partnered with ORCVB to help expand business and tourism through comprehensive branding and marketing strategies.

In March 2015, GotR completed the discovery phase, revealing great assets (history, science hub, outdoor/recreational assets) but also critical need to have all of Oak Ridge's leaders/residents singing the same tune about the city's strengths. (WOW! What a great insight!!! Some of us would sure agree with this, huh!)

In April 2015 ORCVB and Oak Ridge Chamber hosted (and GotR facilitated) a group of community leaders who met to discuss Oak Ridge's strengths, audiences, goals, and the importance of getting everyone "singing the same song" about Oak Ridge. (Again, WOW! This is a move in the right direction!)

In May 2015, GotR presented a marketing strategy to ORCVB that encompassed the **Explore Oak Ridge** brand and **ExpLORe** sub-brands (Waterfront, Parks, Culture, History, and Innovation).

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In July, 2015, GotR developed Stage 1 of **ExploreOakRidge.com** website. Additional features and functionality, and deeper content dives, are planned for future stages of the site beginning in 2016. So, there is MORE TO COME!

Here is what Carol Reeve had to say about this project, "We branded Waterfront, Parks, Culture, History, and Innovation as '**EXPLORE**' sub-brands under the **Explore Oak Ridge** umbrella in order to showcase the diversity of the community's offerings. There are so many stories to tell about Oak Ridge, and there's no reason for the city to be a secret anymore."—Carol Reeve, Chief Marketing Strategist at Girl on the Roof, Inc., a strategic marketing firm located in west Knoxville.

Marc DeRose has this to say about the new web site, "Oak Ridge has so much to offer visitors and residents alike. We partnered with Girl on the Roof to help us tell the story, and they have done an exceptional job. The ExploreOakRidge.com website is a launching point for the way we want to market Oak Ridge going forward."—Marc DeRose, Executive Director of Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau

Marc and Carol were kind enough to allow me to provide feedback on the web site design while it was being tested and well before it was released. I saw immediately that it was a cut above anything we had in any of the Oak Ridge web sites with which I was familiar.

One of the areas of the web site of most interest to me was the "7 Innovations from Oak Ridge that Transformed the World!" It intrigued me because Gordon Fee has been asking people to describe as many of the scientific discoveries that trace to Oak Ridge as the place where they were first identified or created. Not many people can list more than one or two.

So, I posted the link to that section of the web site on Facebook. Almost immediately the site began to get substantial traffic for that one section. It was shared over 2,000 times and recorded over 9,000 hits!

The launch held Thursday, 8/20/15, was a well-attended event and the web site was seen as a move in the right direction for the ORCVB and our city. **Girl on the Roof** staff had a video set up where audience members could make short video clips stating what they liked about Oak Ridge. I am sure we will see these comments posted on social media and placed on the web. It is good to see such enthusiasm.



Marc DeRose and Carol Reeve make a good team and have produced a high quality web site!

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7 Innovations section of the new web site that went viral on Facebook