

# The American Museum of Science and Energy's new home is taking shape!

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of May 14, 2018)

As most of us are aware by now, the American Museum of Science and Energy will soon be moving to a renovated location in Main Street Oak Ridge. It will be located in the northeast most portion of the site in a building that was most recently the location of a Sears store. All of the museum facility will be on the upper floor with the main entrance facing west at street level.

The construction work in this location is moving along quite well. According to Ken Tarcza, manager at the U.S. Department of Energy's Integrated Support Center – Oak Ridge, the project is on schedule to be completed in early Fall. Ken also indicated that an information session is planned for mid-June to give the general public a preview of what is to come this Fall.

Ken and I were able to tour the site recently with Ray Evans, the City of Oak Ridge's consultant for developing commercial retail facilities. During the walk through, it became obvious to me that the facility will be one in which we can all take a lot of pride. You will be amazed when it opens in August!

The AMSE we have come to love has not had exhibits upgraded nor improvements made to the building for several years. This Main Street Oak Ridge location will be all new inside with modern materials and equipment. It is going to be really nice, for sure!

The site is taking shape with walls going up and the two classrooms are far enough along to be quite impressive. The retail store just off the main entrance and the welcome/orientation portion of the space is becoming apparent as well. The main room is much larger than it might seem as the entire space, including offices, classrooms and exhibit space is approximately 18,000 square feet. Yet the main display area is actually quite spacious.

I have been pleased to be a part of the design team working on the exhibits along with the museum professional teams hired by the DOE to build out the displays. The new highly interactive state of the art museum layout, maps, videos and photograph panels as well as the artifacts to be included are all exceptional. Again, you will be amazed when AMSE reopens in this modern new space in August!

This is an exciting time for the community as well as the Department of Energy. This new facility is an important part of the Heritage and Science Tourism "hub and spoke" concept that, in addition to AMSE, includes the Manhattan Project National Historical Park at their main office in the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge and the DOE Public Bus Tour which will originate from the new location of AMSE.

Other aspects of this "hub" concept include several facilities located near the center of the city. These are the Oak Ridge Room in the Oak Ridge Public Library, the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell, the Secret City Commemorative Walk, the Birth of the City Monuments, the Explore Oak Ridge Visitor Center, and even the lobby of the Alexander Guest House, Chapel on the Hill and Jackson Square. I even have hopes to see an expanded exhibit of Oak Ridge history in the Midtown Community Center.

The excitement surrounding the transition of AMSE to a modernized facility with new exhibits to capture the scientific and engineering feats accomplished in Oak Ridge, just happens to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the City of Oak Ridge. This is a great time for the city, local Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association, the AMSE Foundation, the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge and other citizens' groups to consider how best to tell our story. Oak Ridge history is too important to not play a role in the city's Heritage and Science Tourism efforts.

"Spokes" of the "hub and spoke" concept include the Y-12 History Center, the Graphite Reactor, the soon to be completed K-25 History Center (for now the K-25 Overlook) and the K-25 replica building, viewing tower and historic K-25 Building footprint in the coming years. This huge "U shaped" footprint to be marked and much of the slab preserved with wayside exhibits, is designated a part of the Manhattan

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Project National Historical Park, as is the Graphite Reactor at ORNL, Building 9731 and Building 9204-3 (Beta 3) at Y-12 and the Alexander Guest House lobby.

Ken Tarcza also said, "The new AMSE will be a centerpiece in the City and a great fit with what is already being done as well as what is being planned to bring more tourists and visitors to Oak Ridge." Sounds like the "hub and spoke" concept is well understood by Ken.

He went on to say, "Our partnerships with the City, the National Park Service, and the AMSE Foundation are remarkable, and truly the reason why we're just a matter of months away from being able to unveil the new AMSE to the world. Yes, I said world because this venue will be an even better resource to help people understand Oak Ridge and its ongoing legacy in global science, national security, and environmental restoration."

The new AMSE will continue the tradition of celebrating our history and highlighting the future through education, not only in the new and exciting interactive exhibits showcasing the past and highlighting the future, but also in the state of the art classrooms. The new AMSE will leverage technology to help DOE execute their important mission of outreach and education.

Ken concluded our exchange by saying, "This has been a tremendous undertaking, involving some very complex issues against a very short timeline. I believe the partnerships we have developed brought a wide range of the "right people" to the table. And I believe people are going to be very pleased with this collective effort."

As the AMSE exhibits are joint efforts of the three main DOE programs, quotes from the leaders of each program follow:

Jay Mullis, Manager, DOE Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management: "The new location offers visitors a more comprehensive understanding about the environmental cleanup and restoration happening in Oak Ridge, and how this topic is connected to the site's past and future. The new exhibits and displays showcase how far we've come, and how we are continuing to transform Oak Ridge."

Geoff Beausoleil, Manager, National Nuclear Security Administration Production Office, US DOE/NNSA: "The New American Museum of Science and Energy will provide visitors a better understanding of the unique history of the Oak Ridge DOE facilities from their beginnings during World War II to the missions that are performed today. The focus on our national security missions performed at Y-12 will highlight and explain the role that this facility has had for 75 years in providing the materials and manufacturing necessary to protect our national security."

Johnny Moore, DOE Oak Ridge National Laboratory Site Office Manager: "Serving as the hub for communicating Oak Ridge's significance historically and today, the new American Museum of Science and Energy will allow visitors to learn about the reservation's past and present contributions both nationally and globally. The Oak Ridge National Laboratory will showcase its past scientific impacts that have led to today's emerging technologies and research which address the most pressing global issues."

Remember, the information session will be announced shortly and will be held in mid-June. And, of course, there will be a grand celebration when the new AMSE opens in the Fall! Stay tuned for more information and exciting developments as the time draws near.

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Exterior construction is creating a new and impressive main entry (Photo by Lynn Freeny)

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Ken Tarcza, Mildred Socorro Lopez-Ferre and Ray Adams join me on a tour of the new AMSE facility  
(Photo by Lynn Freeny)



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A view of the auditorium (Photo by Lynn Freeny)