

American Museum of Science and Energy – a preview of the coming move!

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of August 13, 2018)

Seventy-five years ago, Oak Ridge altered the course of history – in America, and for the world. And if you think I'm exaggerating, then you don't know or fully appreciate our Oak Ridge history. It is truly amazing!

The grand reopening of the American Museum of Science and Energy is set to help change your perspective on Oak Ridge. You will be astounded when you see it...and interact with the exhibits!

When AMSE reopens this October in its new location in the very heart of our city, Main Street Oak Ridge, it will mark the dawn of a new era for the Secret City. You will want to be there and bring friends. The opening will be grand, for sure!

I believe AMSE has done a remarkable job throughout its history in Oak Ridge. The museum opened first on March 19, 1949, as the American Museum of Atomic Energy. Then in 1974, the museum relocated to a new location where for 44 years the American Museum of Science and Energy has served as a primary location promoting Oak Ridge history. The Children's Museum of Oak Ridge has also been a key contributor to helping folks understand our history for years.

The Flat Top house will be moving to the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge where it will become part of a living history exhibit along with a Victory Garden planned by the Manhattan Project National Historical Park.

Within AMSE's continuing primary role as a national science museum, this renovation will shake off the dust and ready it to bring Oak Ridge's earth-shaking history alive like never before. AMSE will continue its role of promoting Oak Ridge history to visitors from across our nation and the world.

In a newly-designed exhibit gallery, fresh new exhibits will join improved showcases of the Manhattan Project, Earth's energy resources, and nuclear reactors, as well as interactive exhibits on Y-12, national defense and nuclear materials storage. In addition to exhibits, AMSE, in its new location, will feature state-of-the-art classroom facilities, an auditorium lecture hall with a seating capacity of 150, and a retail shop.

What's more, a new director is at the museum's helm: Julia Bussinger holds a degree in chemistry and a doctorate in conservation. She previously managed the Aerospace Museum of California, served as director for the City of El Paso Museum of History and Museum of Archaeology, and as executive director of the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum in Palm Springs, California.

I was privileged to be asked to introduce Julia to the history of Oak Ridge. I took her first to our International Friendship Bell, then to the Secret City Commemorative Walk and next to the Alexander Guest House main lobby, as I do many visitors to Oak Ridge.

She asked very probing questions and quickly gained a comprehension for the important role the people played in the history of Oak Ridge. She is obviously experienced in telling the stories of history through the people who lived it. I believe she will be a great asset to our efforts to take AMSE to the next level.

But wait, there's more! AMSE's new home in the center of town marks its role as the protector of Oak Ridge's science legacy.

A legacy, I contend, we've taken for granted for far too long. Oak Ridge's rich history at the crossroads of national defense and energy makes the town a prime destination for science and heritage tourism. We must seize this opportunity to put Oak Ridge on its rightful pedestal before the nation.

The museum will also contain exhibits and programs by the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in conjunction with their activities at the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. There will also be temporary

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exhibits, such as an exhibit featuring the history of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The always popular Department of Energy's Public Bus Tours will originate there.

Heritage tourism is on the rise across the United States. We can capitalize on that trend and by adding science tourism we can see even more benefit. Here in Oak Ridge, in my opinion, we're sitting on an untapped gold mine. Oak Ridge's contribution to the nation and the world is unmatched, a legacy made even richer by the fact that it continues to be a global leader in nuclear science, supercomputing, advanced materials, research and development, and more.

The American public is fascinated by World War II, nuclear technology, state secrets like the Manhattan Project, and national history. Books on the Secret City top bestseller lists. The public thirst for Oak Ridge is already there. We're ready-made for science and heritage tourism. All we have to do is hang out our "WELCOME" sign and invite the public in.

The potential benefits of becoming a Science and Heritage Tourism destination for Oak Ridge and the surrounding region are extraordinary. It would be an economic boon for the community, as tourists flood in to spend their money not only at local museums, but at local restaurants and hotels. This in turn attracts new business investments and engagement. Science and Heritage Tourism would raise Oak Ridge's national profile, drawing in new families and professionals to the area.

As we continue to assure that Oak Ridge's story secures its prominence in our national collective memory, AMSE's role becomes more important than ever. And when people learn about the groundbreaking contributions of Oak Ridge 75 years ago and still ongoing today, they value them and want to support the community's efforts in the future.

The new AMSE is a prime opportunity for our community to capitalize on Science and Heritage Tourism. It's the perfect anchor for experiencing Oak Ridge: After touring the museum, visitors are equipped to take in the Manhattan Project National Historical Park or hop on the DOE Public Bus Tour, which will leave from AMSE's new location when it opens to the public this fall. (Please note the DOE Public Bus Tours will depart from the New Hope Center until the new AMSE opens to the public this fall.) Visit <https://amse.org/2018/02/09/2018-doe-public-bus-tour/> for more information.

The way I see it is, investing in Science and Heritage Tourism is really an investment in ourselves; in our community, and history. Beginning in 1942, Oak Ridge was, at its core, a place where young people could come to change the world. And they did. A lot has changed since then, but that central fact remains.

Still today, Oak Ridge is a beacon of innovation and discovery for scientists and researchers, a place where they can change the world. We can showcase that innovation in new and different ways in the new location for AMSE.

It's high time we shared with the public what we've long known to be true: In large part, the legacy of science and energy in America is Oak Ridge. That's what AMSE in its new location celebrates. Let's all celebrate it together.

I hope you will join me in promoting Oak Ridge to your contacts. Tell them about the new location for the American Museum of Science and Energy. Invite them to join you and learn about the amazing scientific accomplishments of the past and get a glimpse of the future in our American Museum of Science and Energy in Main Street Oak Ridge!

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AMSE's new Executive Director, Julia Bussinger, at the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell
(Photo by Lynn Freeny)



We visited the Alexander Guest House's historical display on the Oak Ridge history orientation tour
(Photo by Lynn Freeny)

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AMSE's new location in Main Street Oak Ridge (Photo by Lynn Freeny)