

Community Invited to 3rd Annual K-25 Workers Reunion/Hootenanny and History Celebration

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of March 23, 2026)

Here is an annual event you do not want to miss! It is a growing annual reunion, and the community is invited for the first time this year.

Former workers of the historic K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant and community members alike are invited to attend the 3rd Annual K-25 Workers Reunion/Hootenanny, a celebration honoring the people and history behind one of the most important facilities of the Manhattan Project, the Cold War, and nuclear power.

The event will take place Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and is open to the public.

Pre-register at: <http://weblink.donorperfect.com/k25reunion2026>

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Hosted by the American Museum of Science and Energy, the reunion is presented in partnership with Quality Family, Clinch River Home Healthcare, Cold War Patriots, Centrus, and Enrichment Federal Credit Union. The event is designed to bring together former employees, their families, and the wider community to celebrate the legacy of K-25 and the role it played in shaping world history.

The K-25 facility was a critical part of the Manhattan Project during World War II, contributing to the uranium enrichment process that helped bring the war to an end. Today, the site serves as a place of remembrance and education, and the annual reunion helps keep the stories of those who worked there alive for future generations.

This year's Reunion/Hootenanny promises a full afternoon of entertainment and activities for visitors of all ages. Attendees can enjoy live music, face painting, bingo, and a car show hosted by the Fast and Classy Car Club. The local fire department will also provide a popular "Touch-A-Truck" experience, allowing children and families to explore emergency vehicles up close. A variety of vendors will also be on site throughout the day.

Guests can also explore the site's history with **free admission** to the museum and the newly opened William J. Wilcox, Jr. K-25 Interpretative Center during the event. The Atomic History Campus at K-25 is becoming a tourist destination, and as the final touches go onto the K-25 Building footprint of flagpoles to mark the height and location of the building corners, even more detail can be easily understood.

The view from the Wilcox K-25 Interpretive Center platform also includes a view of Kairos Power's new buildings for the Hermes Small Modular Reactor. Kairos Power is constructing its Hermes low-power demonstration reactor with operations targeted for 2026. The project, supported by the U.S. Department of Energy and partnering with TVA and Google, aims to advance fluoride salt-cooled, high-temperature technology, creating 55+ jobs.

Also visible from the viewing platform is the location of Radiant Energy on the former K-27 building location. It is good to see the transition taking place at this historic Heritage Center of the East Tennessee Technology Park, or the former K-25 site, as most of us still refer to it.

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park will place wayside historical markers that will describe the history of gaseous diffusion at the K-25 site. Access to the footprint will eventually be available to the public. The footprint is part of the MAPR (this is the Park Services' acronym for our park) and is the most readily accessible physical portion. The Graphite Reactor, Building 9731, and Building 9204-3 (Beta 3) are not readily accessible yet.

Portal 4 is being prepared for public access to serve as the entry point for the Atomic History Campus at K-25. The Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee has refurbished Portal 4 and the surrounding area, including the parking lot. A sculpture garden has been created to recognize many of the individuals who supported CROET over the years.

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The building has been named for Robert Brown, who was a primary figure in the Department of Energy responsible for enabling the reuse of the land at K-25. The concept has caught on and is now a part of the reason Oak Ridge is becoming the Nuclear Renaissance center for the nation.

Alan Lowe, Executive Director and CEO of the AMSE Foundation, had this to say about the Atomic History Campus at K-25: "The K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant played a historic role in the story not just of Oak Ridge but of the entire world. Constructed during the Manhattan Project, when it stood as the largest facility in the world, the plant processed uranium for use in national defense and nuclear power plants until 1985 when the enrichment process was stopped, and in 1987, the process was placed in cold standby and plans for shutdown/deactivation and eventual demolition began. You can say the atomic age started in that mammoth facility, and those that grew up around it in Oak Ridge.

"Today, K-25 and those other facilities are gone, and the entire site has been expertly remediated by the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management and their contractors, including United Cleanup Oak Ridge. What stands on that property now is a wonderful combination of the past, present, and future. Looking at today and tomorrow, it serves as the center of the nuclear renaissance as a host of nuclear-energy related companies have made the renamed "Heritage Center" their home. But the history of place remains and is honored in both the K-25 Atomic History Center and the William J. Wilcox K-25 Interpretive Center, both managed by the American Museum of Science and Energy Foundation (AMSEF) as part of their "Atomic History Campus."

"Now those facilities are being joined by a third also managed by AMSEF. The Portal #4 gatehouse facility, remembered by so many who worked on the site, has been renovated and donated to AMSEF by the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee (CROET).

"Designed to serve as a welcome center to the entire site, the renovated Portal #4 includes an exhibit, a museum store, a coffee shop offering drinks and treats, and space for food trucks. In addition, again thanks to CROET, the Portal includes a display featuring a 1943 Willys Jeep. Just across Enrichment Street from the Portal on land also donated by CROET, AMSEF is establishing a partnership with the Southern Appalachia Railway Museum (SARM) to create a display of train cars and engines, given the very important role the rails played at the site over the years.

"Originally, many entry portals controlled access to the very secret site. Starting in 1954, those were consolidated into this new portal. From then until 2008, Portal #4 controlled access to the area, serving as an entry point for employees and visitors alike.

"When the plant was fully operational, several other buildings, six in total, made up portal #4, but now only the gatehouse remains. The turnstiles in that gatehouse have witnessed over the years a cross-section of Americans going to work, advancing our nuclear future, and serving our nation. The AMSE Foundation is very grateful that CROET saved the portal, renovated it so wonderfully, and gave it to us so we can share it with you."

Jennifer Lee, Director of Development for the AMSE Foundation had this to say, "The spirit of K-25 is alive and well in Oak Ridge and nowhere is that more evident than in the overwhelming excitement surrounding this year's K-25 Reunion & Hootenanny. From the local sponsors who didn't hesitate to raise their hands in support, to the members of the public eager to step onto this historic campus, to the passionate people behind our event committee who believe this story deserves to be told for generations to come, the energy around this event says everything about what K-25 means to this community, and it's easy to understand why.

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"The K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant wasn't just a facility. It was a community. Generations of families gave their careers, their ingenuity, and their dedication to work that shaped the course of history — work that many of them couldn't even speak about for years. The legacy they built together is woven into the very fabric of this city, and it deserves to be honored, preserved, and shared with the world.

"What excites us most about this year's reunion is how much it has grown, not just in size, but in purpose. We're welcoming more of the public than ever before, bringing new and familiar faces in the nuclear and energy industries into the conversation, and creating space for those living memories to reach a whole new generation. The reunion remains at the soul of this event, but the story of K-25 is too important to keep to ourselves.

"That spirit is not a relic. It lives in every person who worked those halls and in everyone who refuses to let this legacy fade. We cannot wait to welcome them all back on April 25th — and to share this incredible story with those who are discovering it for the very first time."

Several special giveaways and refreshments are planned for attendees. **Free food vouchers** will be provided to the first 250 former K-25 employees and one guest each, with registration, as well as the first 250 non-employees, with registration, who attend.

In addition, free desserts while supplies last. Visitors can also look forward to free event T-shirts, prize giveaways, and complimentary goodie bags while supplies last.

The reunion is about more than just fun activities—it's also about honoring the workers whose efforts helped change the course of history,

"This reunion is a chance for the community to come together, remember the incredible work that took place at K-25, and recognize the men and women who were part of that effort," Pam Toon said. "We invite everyone to come out, enjoy the day, and learn more about the vital role the plant played in ending World War II, the Cold War, and nuclear power around the world."

For those interested in local history, community fellowship, and a day of entertainment, April 25, 2026, promises to be both educational and enjoyable.

Come join the celebration and experience the story of K-25 while enjoying a fun-filled day with the community.

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Crowd under the big tent (Courtesy of Jennifer Lee)

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Car show (Courtesy of Jennifer Lee)

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Wheat Community historical display by Steve Goodpasture (Courtesy of Jennifer Lee)