

# Interactive Presidential Library Highlights Roosevelt's Life, Conservation Efforts

Medora expecting crowds, and changes, as word of experience gets out



Visitors to the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library on July 2 activate wristbands before entering the exhibition which provides a multitude of interactive experiences. Photo, Michael Standaert NDNC.

By Michael Standaert

**North Dakota News Cooperative**  
Rumbling virtual train car rides. Avatar butterflies fleeing a mounting case to fly around the room. Shadows of flies buzzing around a harbor seal skull.

A panoramic charge up San Juan Hill. Toy rifles for virtual shooting of bottles from a fence. An AI Theodore Roosevelt telling stories and answering questions. Building a campaign poster and setting out for a presidential run.

These are just a few of the many interactive features visitors experience as they meander through the newly opened Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, adding a vibrancy to the journey through the life of this remarkable man that few presidential libraries attain.

Upon entering, visitors are given a wristband with a wooden compass attached that they scan into a system, allowing them to see themselves in period dress at different stages in the journey through Roosevelt's life - cowboy, sailor, soldier, politico.

"People are just overwhelmed with all the interactive experiences that they weren't expecting," said Matt Briney, chief communications officer for the TRPL.

"The whole idea is that it puts you into the arena, and I think the reaction of guests is going to be the thing that is most special for me," Briney said.

While guided tours are available, self-guiding allows visitors to trace Roosevelt's early interests in animals and the outdoors and how that built his desire to craft a bold and courageous life for himself, as well as how his ideas about conservation emerged throughout his life.

Dark and light play prominently as visitors pass from room to room, reflecting on Roosevelt's sometimes tumultuous life.

The journey through includes Roosevelt's time in the North Dakota badlands following the deaths of his mother and first wife Alice, early political rise and later presidential campaigns, his times in Cuba, Africa and Panama, and his conservation efforts including the establishing of what would become the first national wildlife refuge, Pelican Island in Florida.

For Simon Roosevelt, the details about his great-great grandfather's conservation efforts displayed throughout the library brought home how important of a figure he has been in protecting and preserving America's lands.

"I don't want to say any one thing was the most important to him, but the land, the outdoors, the wildlife, if there were things he cared so deeply about from the time he was small until his very last days, those were it," Roosevelt said.

Roosevelt said he hopes the library becomes something beyond just a place to visit once, but a continuing draw for people, particularly as the programming is built out.

"I hope it will become a gathering space for people to come share ideas, to advance ideas forward, and for solutions to come out of those meetings to advance the interests of the whole country," Roosevelt said.

"I guess I overwhelmingly feel proud that the values and the things that were most important to him are finding expression here in the way that they are," he said.

Rex Schulz, president of Ducks Unlimited, said he was very impressed with the library and how it fit into the setting of the North Dakota badlands as well as the context of Theodore Roosevelt's life.

"That Roosevelt had conservation prior to anyone else recognizing that, he was so impactful being that first generation of conservation, and being a conservationist myself and in my volunteerism, that really resonates with me," Schulz said.

The TRPL has gone from concept stage over a decade ago, to several years of concepts, then finally construction and exhibit development during the past three or so years, with leadership appearing to hit all the right notes on how the experience is for visitors.



Displays like this at the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library showcase Roosevelt's appreciation for nature as a young boy and how that initiated a lifelong commitment to what became the conservation movement. Photo, Michael Standaert NDNC.

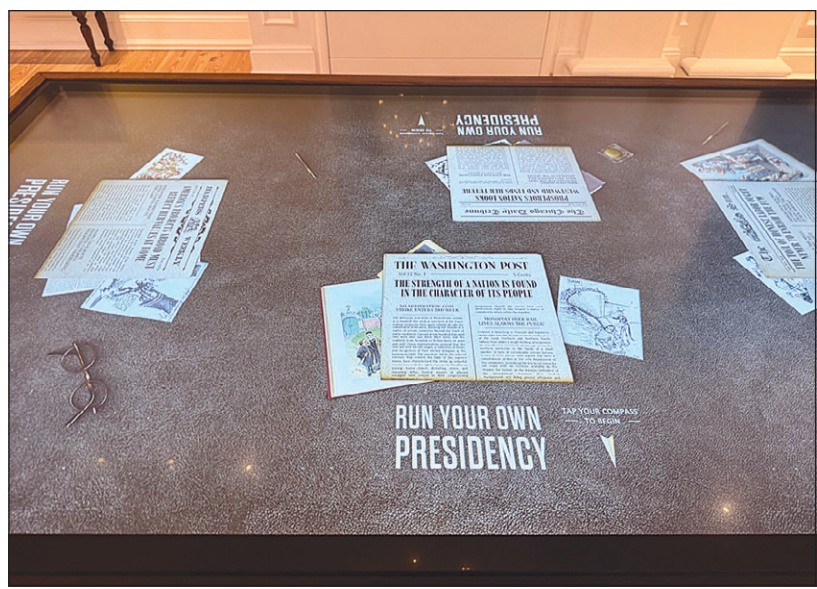
Briney said there was a lot of time spent on figuring these issues out - whether it would be a library with a lot of books and research, or something like a museum full of relics and artefacts - and veered down a road not often taken with presidential libraries.

"I think people are going to be blown away by the fact that it is neither of those things," Briney said.

Supporters of the library, Char and Ducey Marthaller, who've been involved since 2020 and volunteered with helping plant the grasses on the roof, said Medora will possibly experience some change - more crowds at times, maybe a bit more congestion at others - but that the addition of the library to the community is an exciting development.

"We think that over time it's going to even out and mesh with all the other things going on in Medora," Ducey Marthaller said. "It's not going to be a crowded place every day."

While some local residents privately express concern about potential impacts, including costs, more crowds and higher prices at stores and restaurants, others are going with the flow and businesses expect it will help them in the long run.



Interactive exhibits like this "Run Your Own Presidency" area and another to "Run Your Own Campaign" allow visitors an immersive experience into various aspects of Roosevelt's life. Photo, Michael Standaert NDNC.



The final room of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library overlooking North Dakota badlands offers visitors a chance to reflect on the all the information they've taken in on Roosevelt's life over the course of the self-guided tour. Photo, Michael Standaert NDNC.

# Classic Cars On Parade

Stanley's parade always includes a section of classic cars on display.



This 1965 Ford Mustang is owned by Ron Herfindahl and driven by Kelly Evenson.



A 1988 Pontiac Sunbird owned and driven by Ron Herfindahl.



Neil Olson of Tioga has been a part of Stanley's parade since 1982. This is his 1959 Chevrolet Impala convertible.



This 1961 Impala Bubble Top was a car of the year pick by the North Dakota Street Rod Association.



Rod and Mary Anderson of Ray own this 2018 Camaro SS.



A 1956 Ford Crown Victoria owned by Ken and Cleo Bykonen.



This vehicle was unidentified as to owner, but the owner wished a Happy 4th to all.



A 1971 Dodge Dart owned by Lyndon and Shelley Hoiby of McGregor.



Jack and Aneda Fladeland's 1956 Ford Fairlane Crown Victoria.



Brian Hollinger's 2023 Silverado Bison Truck.



This 1966 Cadillac Sedan DeVille is owned by Mike Machart of Culbertson, MT. Restoration is a work in progress.



Greg Johnson's 1938 Chevrolet Master Deluxe Coupe.



Patrick Johnson drives this 1929 Model A Ford Phaeton owned by Greg Johnson.



Dianne Clark's 2001 Camaro SS.



A 1969 Ford Galaxie owned by Waylon Bruhn.



Brian Hollinger's 1971 Chevelle 454 SS.



A 1995 Camaro driven by Laramie Smith and Jeannie Keller.



A 1971 Mach 1 Mustang, all original and driven by Kayden Uran.



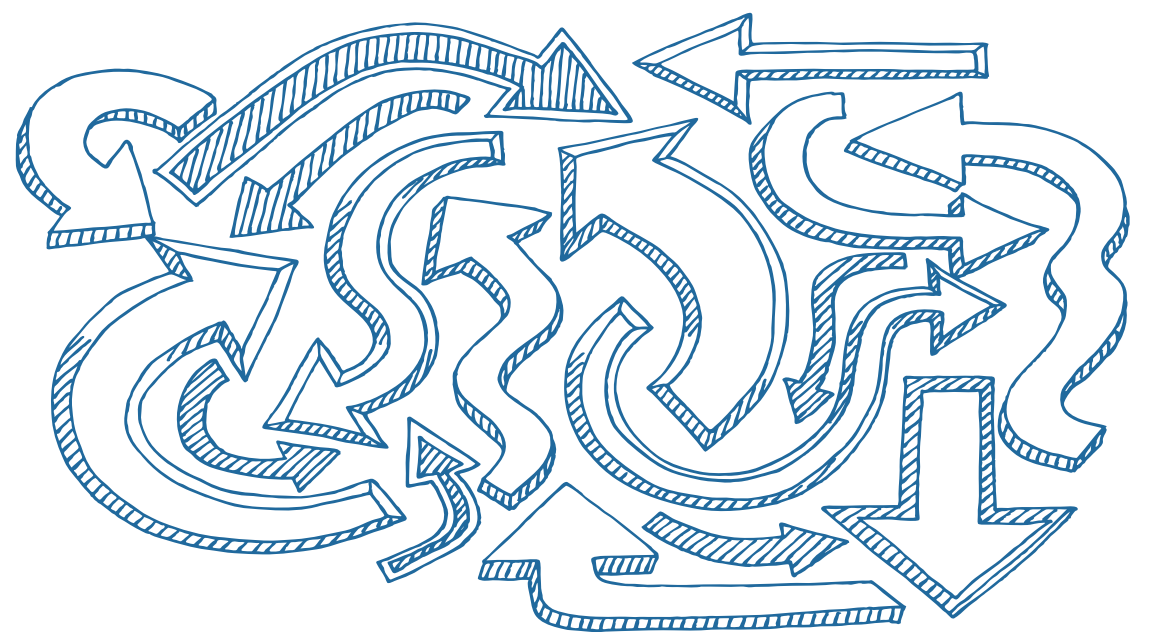
Steven Pennington's 1969 Chevrolet Camaro SS.



The owner was unidentified on this 1986 El Camino.

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