



Roosevelt AI avatar ready for your questions - but stick to the past

AI among many interactive exhibits at new library

By Michael Standaert
North Dakota News Cooperative

It comes straight from the man himself - or at least an artificial intelligence, avatar version - so it must be true.

Former president Theodore Roosevelt never did like being called "Teddy."

"Teddy was never a name I called myself, not in private, not among my family," said a terse AI Theodore Roosevelt, one of the most interactive features at the just-opened Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library on the bluffs above Medora.

"At my own table among friends or kin I went by Theodore or Colonel," the AI continued. "A man has a right to the name he chooses. Still in the world beyond these walls, Teddy clings to me like burrs after a ride through the brush."

Roosevelt's ranking of the top three U.S. presidents? Easy as the

mountain they're all carved into alongside him in South Dakota.

"Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln," said AI Roosevelt. "Each changed the shape of America."

The avatar is no oracle, however. Ask him to comment on living presidents or future predictions, the AI avatar demurs.

"I'll leave today's politics to the living," he said. "I know what it is like to feel the weight of that office."

While remarkably eloquent, AI Roosevelt is still a baby, so sometimes mumbles or fails to respond to questions until asked a second or third time.

He's still learning, according to Michael Bakalars, a technical director at Microsoft ISE working on building out the AI system.

That process will improve as he answers more questions, Bakalars said, leading to less stumbling and repeating of questions.

The learning curve so far has included using AI to read all of Roosevelt's writing, his handwritten and typed correspondence, and then vetting it with historians knowledgeable about his thoughts and opinions.

"We've had around 50 different historians that can access this and they look at his responses and try to confirm it," Bakalars said.

"Every time someone comes up and asks him something, we check back with them to see if it's true because we want the most accurate version we can get," he said.

That includes current U.S. president Donald Trump, who asked AI Roosevelt several questions during his visit on July 1st as part of the rolling opening of the TRPL, including about the Panama Canal, about when you should and shouldn't go to war, and about coming to North Dakota.

If no one in the room asks questions, the loquacious Roosevelt avatar pipes up with a string of stories, or, if you're standing in the right spot, it/he may call on you to step up to field a query.

Outside of the Medora area, where Roosevelt lived and ranged on and off over the course of several years in the 1880s, the avatar said he had a particular affinity for the Missouri River valley.

"The Missouri River cuts through North Dakota like a



A view of the AI avatar of Theodore Roosevelt from inside the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library ready to answer questions from visitors or relay stories regaling his exploits. Just don't call him Teddy. Photo provided by TRPL.

blade," the AI Roosevelt said, waxing poetic. "I spent days riding along its bluffs, watching the sun burn off the mist. That land always felt alive. Cottonwoods whispering, the grass moving in waves. I found a kind of peace out there that was different from the Badlands wildness."

Asked about why people should come to the library dedicated to his life and work, AI Roosevelt said he doesn't want people to come to a museum thinking of a president as just a figure in bronze or stone.

"I want people to leave with fire in their belly," the AI avatar said. "For the notion that citizenship requires you to do something, to

stand up, to get your hands dirty, make things better. You ought to see how one person can wrestle big problems, sometimes win, sometimes not, and still keep at it. That's what matters most."

Doris Kearns Goodwin, a historian and presidential biographer, got a firsthand look at the interactive features on her way through the library, including a representation of herself in period dress in the badlands.

She said the wait for creating a library like this honoring Roosevelt's life may actually make it more impactful.

"The great thing, in a way, waiting 107 years for this makes sense when you look at the interactive

technology they have here that you don't have in a normal presidential museum," Goodwin said. "What he wanted more than anything was to be an example for young people, so if they can feel Teddy Roosevelt here, which I think they will be able to go, then it's really splendid," she said.

The North Dakota News Cooperative is a non-profit news organization providing reliable and independent reporting on issues and events that impact the lives of North Dakotans. The organization increases the public's access to quality journalism and advances news literacy across the state. For more information about



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.

Interactive Presidential Library highlights Roosevelt's life, conservation efforts

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

By Michael Standaert
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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 be-

come 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.

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 Duey 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," Duey 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.

"Yes, it's going to change, there's going to be more people here, but hopefully it doesn't change what the town is a lot," Char Marthaller said. "It's such a great place to come with your family and with your kids, and you don't want that to change."

Trolley driver Mark Billings, who had a day off and was able to see President Donald Trump come through on July 1, said the library and the visit by the president were a coup for the area.

"I think it's been very well received by the locals," Billings said. "There's been so much planning for this. It's been seamless so far, and I haven't sensed any frustrations or any hiccup they haven't thought of. For a small town, it's been a great achievement."

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REQUEST FOR BIDS

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Department of Natural Resources is requesting sealed bids for the purchase of one (1) new forestry crawler dozer. The machine will be used for wildfire suppression, firebreak construction, hazardous fuel reduction, heavy brush clearing, trail construction, habitat restoration, park development, and general land management activities.

The machine offered shall be new, unused, current production, and meet or exceed the following minimum specifications.

One (1) New Forestry Crawler Dozer:

Minimum Machine Specifications

Engine

- Diesel engine
- Minimum 110 net horsepower
- EPA Final Tier 4 compliant
- Automatic engine idle and shutdown features
- Heavy-duty cooling system suitable for high dust and debris environments
- Reversible cooling fan

Operating Weight

- Approximately 22,000–25,000 pounds

Transmission

- Hydrostatic drive
- Infinitely variable speed control
- Counter-rotation capability

Blade

- Six-way Power Angle Tilt (PAT) blade
- Heavy-duty cutting edge
- Heavy-duty push arms

Undercarriage

- XL or equivalent wide-track configuration
- Sealed and lubricated track (SALT) undercarriage
- Heavy-duty track rollers
- Full-length track guards
- Segmented drive sprockets

Forestry Protection Package (Required)

Machine shall be factory-installed or dealer-installed and designed specifically for forestry and heavy brush applications.

Package shall include:

- Heavy-duty front brush guard
- Heavy-duty cab cage
- ROPS/FOPS certified forestry cab protection
- Front windshield guard
- Rear window guard
- Side window guards
- Front and rear forestry sweeps
- Heavy-duty limb risers
- Heavy-duty belly pans
- Engine compartment guarding
- Hydraulic hose protection
- Cylinder rod guards
- Fuel tank protection
- Cooling package protection
- Radiator debris screen
- Protection for work lights and mirrors
- Heavy-duty rear screening
- Debris sealing around engine compartment
- Heavy-duty guarding designed to protect machine while clearing brush and constructing firebreaks.

ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE WINCH, CAB, HYDRAULICS, TECHNOLOGY, LIGHTING, SAFETY EQUIPMENT, WARRANTY REQUIREMENTS, TRAINING REQUIREMENTS AND BID SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS CAN BE OBTAINED FROM THE TM NATURAL RESOURCES DIRECTOR, JEFF DESJARLAIS AT 701 477-2640.

Bidder is required to include 3% TERO Fee to bid of \$10,000.00 or more. Must specify 3% TERO Fee.

All sealed bids must be addressed and mailed to:

Allan Malaterre, TM Property Director
PO Box 900
4180 Highway 281
Belcourt, ND 58316-0900
Contact No: 701 477-2635

Faxed bids will not be accepted.

All Tribal and TERO Regulations will be applicable, and must be concurred with.

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids.

Closing Date: All bids must be received on or before the close of business at 4:30 p.m., July 17, 2026.