

2009 ACE Awards Synopsis – Heritage Trails

Campaign & Programs: Tourism & Community Pride Campaigns

Needs Identification

The Texas Historical Commission asserts that “Heritage Tourism” is the fastest-growing segment of the \$40.4 billion tourism industry in Texas. Sophisticated historical and directional signage -- along with monuments, memorials, buildings and open spaces -- contribute to memorable destination cities.

Research from the Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) shows that most visitors to Fort Worth are drawn by its western heritage, such as the Chisholm Trail, Hell’s Half Acre, and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Yet no thematic historical or informational markers existed in the revitalized downtown area known as Sundance Square. Major themes of our city heritage were missing and there were gaps in the areas where heritage information was presented.

In 1991, a task force of the Fort Worth Chamber’s West Area Council that included representatives from the historic preservation community began to research the possibilities. Eventually the partners included the Fort Worth CVB, the City of Fort Worth, and Downtown Fort Worth, Inc. The group wanted to “put history on the street, not just in textbooks or visitor guides.”

The overarching goals were to link an attractive downtown urban environment to a sense of history, and to make Fort Worth the most memorable city in the U.S. by educating and entertaining Fort Worth residents, visitors and the 36,000 employees who work downtown.

The Chamber took the lead as the project served its mission of “making Fort Worth an excellent place in which to live, work and do business.”

Objectives

1. Establish a permanent exhibit of historical signage in the downtown area. Install at least 15 markers and three informational kiosks along Main Street and other high-traffic pedestrian areas.
2. Generate \$300,000 to fund the project from private and public sources.
3. Link the north and south areas of the central business district to encourage walking traffic to some of the lesser-visited areas of downtown.
4. Generate ongoing local publicity with at least two columns or op-eds, front-page major daily newspaper articles with color photos, and coverage on the four network TV news outlets.

Communication Pieces (Project Elements)

Sleeping Panther Sculpture

The eight-foot bronze sculpture is the cornerstone of the Heritage Trails project, installed and dedicated in December 2002 on the lawn of the Tarrant County Administration building in the far north end of downtown. Created by local artist Deran Wright and fired at the Hoka Hey Fine Arts Foundry in Dublin, Tex., it is placed on a slab of “Texas Pink” granite. The legend of the sleeping panther recalls the story of an 1873 businessman who said Fort Worth was such a quiet town, he saw a panther asleep on Main Street. The intended insult instead became an enduring symbol of the city’s strength. Panther carvings and images appear throughout the city.

Bronze Markers

The **primary communication vehicles** for Heritage Trails are the bronze markers themselves, installed November 2006 – April 2008. Each marker in the series bears a **signature cubistic longhorn design** by Fort Worth artist Evaline Sellors, who originally created the design for a 1937 Works Progress Administration relief sculpture on a Fort Worth north side high school. Heritage Trails committee members chose the progressive design because it **links past to present** and embodies the “cowboys and culture” slogan used by the city for years. It also complements the art deco design elements of many downtown Fort Worth buildings.

This cubistic longhorn serves as the thematic “icon” for the project, and is carried on the printed map distributed by the joint project partners, as well as on the Heritage Trails website, information kiosk and other promotional materials.

Fired at the Southwell Co. in San Antonio, the markers’ sepia-toned illustrations accompany a brief historical narrative of Fort Worth history, people, places and events. Historians wrote the copy and markers are placed in geographically accurate places, installed in sidewalk planter boxes over a distance of 16 city blocks, mostly winding down Main St. Examples of some titles are: Gamblers and Gunfights, Flying Machines, JFK and Hispanic Heritage. *{See enclosed map and photos.}*

Trail Map

Colorful and informative Heritage Trails fold-out maps are distributed by the four partnering organizations, the Renaissance Worthington Hotel, and the Intermodal Transportation Center (rail and bus station). The maps include the cubistic longhorn, a narrative from each marker, the purpose and history of the project, and a list of funders. Map is also included in Chamber newcomer packets and distributed at select Chamber events.

Information Kiosk

The first of three planned information kiosks was dedicated in April 2008 and celebrated the installation of the bronze marker series throughout downtown. The seven-foot-tall, four-sided, powder-coated steel kiosks will serve as downtown directories and provide the Heritage Trails map, transportation schedules and event information. The first kiosk at the corner of Main and Second Streets is near the Sleeping Panther sculpture and the first marker in the series, “The Stage Leaves from Here.” The kiosk is also located by the Renaissance Worthington Hotel, one of the largest hotels in downtown Fort Worth.

Website

The Heritage Trails website www.fortworthheritagetrails.com was launched in April 2008. It includes an interactive PDF of the trail map, along with photos, bibliography of sources, biographies of the artists and related links. The cubistic longhorn logo is hyperlinked from the Chamber’s home webpage. The Chamber website has received almost 8,500 visitors in 10 months *{web stats enclosed}*. The project is also featured on the CVB and Downtown Fort Worth, Inc. websites.

Methodology

From conception to installation, Heritage Trails was an 18-year journey. Fundraising challenges, design review boards, underground electrical issues, and pedestrian right of way issues all had to be resolved for a project of this magnitude and permanence.

In 2003, the original plan to have 15 six-foot tall sidewalk markers met with resistance from the Downtown Design Review Board due to pedestrian right-of-way concerns. After getting other sample approaches from the vendor and deciding to put the markers in the sidewalk planters, the design was revised to be a freestanding pole with plaque at a 45 degree angle so trail walkers could easily read it. This approach also reduced the unit cost so that more markers had potential to be sponsored.

After that decision, topics were finalized by the four historians on the task force, copy was rewritten to fit 900 characters per plaque, and the Chamber set about getting corporate sponsorships and other underwriting in 2005. Each marker is individually underwritten, in most cases by a business related to the subject. For example, Wells Fargo sponsored “The Stage Leaves from Here.” Lockheed Martin sponsored “Flying Machines.”

Meanwhile, engineers reviewed the marker locations to obtain required city permits. The markers were fast-tracked to be placed immediately prior to the Main St. Fort Worth Arts Festival in April 2008 to leverage exposure to the tens of thousands of visitors attending the annual downtown event.

Abbreviated chronology of major project steps

04/23/90	CVB President Doug Harman sends “Vision” letter to collaborators
06/27/91	Task Force formed
11/03/91	Grant application filed with the National Trust For Historic Preservation (\$1,880)
06/93	Harrison Jenkins, historic consultants, report funded and completed
10/14/93	Meeting held with Fort Worth Mayor Kay Granger to review project
02/94	Project put on hold due to fundraising conflicts
1998	Task Force formally names project “Heritage Trails”
03/01	Deran Wright commissioned to design bronze sculpture of sleeping panther
12/02	Sleeping Panther bronze sculpture dedication
2003	Design review board concerned re: initial sign design, location in pedestrian right of way
12/04	Downtown Design Review Board approves new approach to marker system
2005	Sidewalk marker copy re-written, graphic images collected
2006	Corporate fundraising begins with Chamber Board presentation
Jan.-Aug. 2006	Sidewalk marker vendor chosen, design begins, marker locations finalized
11/06	First sidewalk marker, “The Stage Leaves from Here,” is dedicated
2007	Marker copy finalized, plaques fired and delivered, print map designed
April 7, 2008	Information kiosk at corner of Main and Second Sts. unveiled by Mayor Mike Moncrief after a Fort Worth Chamber luncheon; 18 more markers installed

Fort Worth Heritage Trails Budget

Revenues

Sidewalk marker sponsorships	\$130,500
Foundation grants	\$144,000
Other sources	<u>\$ 35,500</u>
Total	\$310,000

Expenses

Bronze panther sculpture	\$ 85,000
Sculpture base	\$ 9,500
Sidewalk marker production	\$ 54,000
Installation	\$ 5,200
Engineer’s permit plans	\$ 2,000
Kiosk design/production/installation	\$ 45,000
Special Events	\$ 15,000
Legal fees	\$ 10,000
Marketing	\$ 15,000
Map design/ production for kiosk	\$ 8,000
Walking trail map printing	<u>\$ 10,000</u>
Total	\$258,700

Net proceeds applied toward long-term maintenance of project elements.

Evaluation

Objective 1: Establish permanent historical signage of at least 15 markers and three kiosks

The task force exceeded the goal with the **installation of 19 markers**, with three more planned. Several topics were added from the original list to be inclusive of key historic events, ethnic groups and industries. Of the remaining three markers, one is close to production; two are produced, but not installed due to downtown improvements currently underway. Two more information kiosks will be funded by a grant from Texas Dept. of Transportation Wayfinding funds.

Objective 2: Generate \$300,000 funding from private and public resources

Funding goals for the project were **exceeded by \$10,000** received from 22 private and public sector contributors, including family benefactors, foundations, corporations and public entities. **Cost was contained and project improved** by changing the concept from a series of \$15,000 sidewalk markers to \$2000 bronze plaque markers, which were more feasible for underwriting and passed city design and right-of-way requirements. Adequate reserves exist to fund maintenance for the project, and **criteria have been developed for adding future markers**.

Objective 3: Link north and south ends of downtown

Spanning 16 city blocks, the markers lead trail followers **north to south beyond the boundaries** of the more established area known as Sundance Square to the southern end of downtown, toward the convention center, water gardens, the new Omni Convention Center hotel and Lancaster Boulevard, also now being revitalized. A convergence of downtown revitalization has made the timing serendipitous for completion of this long-awaited project. In the nine months since the series dedication, almost 10,000 maps have been distributed.

Objective 4: Generate local publicity

With each of the three dedications (panther, first marker and kiosk), the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* ran **metro section front page stories** with photos. Each of the network affiliate TV news stations covered the panther sculpture dedication; six radio and TV network news outlets carried each of the subsequent dedication stories.

In 2007, Heritage Trails received a Citation of Merit from **Historic Fort Worth, Inc.** In the fall of 2008, Heritage Trails was a featured component in the **Distinctive Destination Award** bestowed upon Fort Worth by the **National Trust for Historic Preservation**.