

# Award for Outstanding Achievement Cleveland Ave. Time Machine

## *a streetcar named inspire*



by Chad D. Emerson

On March 7, 1965, more than 500 civil rights supporters left Selma, Alabama on a march to the State Capitol in Montgomery, with the goal of promoting equal rights for all. After traveling fewer than 10 blocks, the marchers were famously attacked by law enforcement officials on what has become known as “Bloody Sunday.” Not to be deterred, the marchers tried two more times—ultimately reaching Montgomery on March 25th. One of the iconic figures who inspired this brave struggle was Rosa Parks, whose resolve not to allow discrimination to move her to the back of a Montgomery city bus helped launch a movement.

Today, guests to Troy University’s Rosa Parks Museum Children’s Wing in Montgomery, Alabama, can board the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine and enjoy an educational and entertaining journey back to that important era.

Since opening in 2006, the Time Machine attraction has met with much success. Part of this appeal has centered on the attraction’s multi-sensory, entertaining approach to educational storytelling. For instance, Time Machine guests board a replica 1950s Montgomery city bus that has been retrofitted with futuristic dials, knobs, and details that flash, whiz, and whirl. Once aboard, riders experience unique lighting, audio, and fog effects while the “bus driver”—a futuristic robot named Mr. Rivets—welcomes them to take a seat as they begin a multi-stop journey through the civil rights era.

Soon, guests meet their time travel guide, an African-American woman who guides them

on their emotion-packed ride through these sometimes desperate, sometimes tragic, but always inspirational times. To accomplish this effect, a seven-projector system envelops riders with civil rights history imagery at the various “stops” on the route, covering Jim Crow, Dred Scott, Harriet Tubman, the hopefulness of African Americans during Civil War Reconstruction and the failed doctrine of “Separate But Equal.” Ultimately, guests return to the present day where they disembark and head into the Rosa Parks Museum to learn more.

To develop the attraction, Troy University—operator of the Rosa Parks Museum—selected Eisterhold Associates of Kansas City, Missouri. According to Ray White, Vice Chancellor for Troy University Montgomery Campus and Owner Representative for the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine Project, “[Eisterhold] was selected based on their past successful creative and design work with the Troy University’s Rosa Parks Museum project.”

The driving force for the project was to not only educate guests about important Civil Rights stories but to do so in an interesting and inspiring way that would appeal to guests of all different ages and backgrounds.

“We asked that they develop an experience that would help visitors understand the early Jim Crow laws concerning segregation so the visitors, especially children, would better understand why the Montgomery Bus Boycott took place,” explained White. “The Cleveland Avenue Time Machine experience provides that historical trip back in time to gain that understanding.”

As one part of a \$4.2 million dollar expansion to the Rosa Parks Museum, the Time Machine project accounted for about \$1 million of the

overall budget. After a series of meetings and negotiations, Eisterhold was given the green light in September 2003 to begin design work. Over the course of the next three years, several delays—with the most prominent being the death of Ms. Parks in October 2005—slowed progress on the project. However, in February 2006, the Time Machine was completed and opened for guests.

Significantly, White noted that none of the delays resulted from the contractors. Rather, an expansion of this size—both in terms of dollars and physical structure—accompanied with several legal issues (again, unrelated to the creative vendors) required additional fund-raising and logistical work beyond that which was originally anticipated.

Visitors range from school groups to the everyday tourist, all enjoying the amazingly creative and contemporary approach used to tell these historic stories. According to White, “the Cleveland Avenue Time Machine presentation has exceeded everyone’s expectations. It is an interesting and unique way of presenting historical learning.”

The Time Machine is a creative job well done in honor of such an important part of this country’s history.



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