

How We Have Imagined the Future Explored in Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition

Ray guns, robots and plans for a nuclear-powered car are all part of [“Yesterday’s Tomorrows: Past Visions of the American Future.”](#) a new traveling exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES). Multiple copies of the exhibition will simultaneously tour rural cultural institutions in Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri and Utah through December 2001.

The exhibition is part of the [Museum on Main Street](#) project, a partnership of the Smithsonian Institution and State Humanities Councils with rural America. The partnership, established in 1991, was formed as a creative response to the challenge faced by rural museums to enhance their own cultural legacies.

“Yesterday’s Tomorrows” will open at the Thomasville Cultural Center in Thomasville, Ga., on March 13 and continue on view through April 17. Mid-March marks the opening of the exhibition in the other four states.

“Yesterday’s Tomorrows” focuses on popular culture and technology as seen in toys, books, movie stills, world’s fair memorabilia, car designs, advertisements and models of architectural designs to examine ways in which Americans of the late 19th and 20th centuries have envisioned the future.

From the buoyant and optimistic tomorrows of General Motors’ “Futurama” at the 1939 World’s Fair to the bleak future presented in the films like “Planet of the Apes” (1968) and “War of the Worlds” (1953), this exhibit explores a range of visions from the past. Five free-standing kiosks show futuristic predictions about homes, transportation and communities.

In connection with the exhibition’s national tour, the new website, www.yesterdaystomorrow.org, debuts to the public on Feb. 1, featuring fun facts and activities relating to past predictions and future visions. It includes teacher activities, national tour information, interactive games and links to other future-oriented web sites.

“Yesterday’s Tomorrows: Past Visions of the American Future” has been generously supported by a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Hearst Foundation. The exhibition was developed by SITES, and is an adaptation of an exhibition originally produced in cooperation with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History.

SITES—a major outreach arm of the Smithsonian Institution—extends the Smithsonian collections, research and exhibitions across the nation and abroad. Since 1952, SITES has organized and circulated exhibitions on the arts, sciences

and humanities. Descriptions for exhibitions from the Museum on Main Street program can be found at www.sites.si.edu.

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“Yesterdays Tomorrows” Openings and Program Highlights

Museum on Main Street brings together the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), the Federation of State Humanities Councils, individual state humanities councils, and small rural museums in a collaborative effort to serve rural audiences. The partnership, established in 1991, was formed as a creative response to the challenge faced by rural museums to enhance their own cultural legacies. Invariably, Museum on Main Street exhibitions spark an astonishing array of public programs that, in turn, broaden public investigation of the humanities, inspire community pride and cooperation, and develop a heightened awareness of local heritage.

March 13 - April 17 Thomasville Cultural Center in Thomasville, Ga.
Thomasville will focus on the influence technology will have on the future of the visual and performing arts.

March 15 - April 21 Panhandle Pioneer Settlement in Blountsville, Fla.
The Panhandle Pioneer Settlement’s companion exhibit partners with local businesses to examine the effect technological advances of the 20th century have had on everyday life.

March 16 - April 29 Flat River Historical Society in Greenville, Mich.
Greenville, Mich. plans programs that include a laser light show, sci-fi flick nights, and children’s story hours at the local library.

March 17 - April 29 Foundation for the Restoration of Ste. Genevieve in Ste. Genevieve, Mo.
A design competition for middle-schoolers in Ste. Genevieve challenges the students to imagine their town in the year 3000.

March 20 - April 28 Brigham City Museum in Brigham City, Utah
Accompanying exhibits in Brigham City will highlight a local builder of space rockets and will also test visitors’ knowledge of “cutting edge” appliances of the past.

For additional information about programs planned in the five state tour to augment “Yesterdays Tomorrows,” please contact representatives at the State Humanities Councils listed below:

- David Reddy, Florida Humanities Council, (727) 553-3800 or dreddy@helios.acomp.usf.edu
- Laura McCarty, Georgia Humanities Council, (404) 523-6220 or ltmc@georgiahumanities.org
- Robin Le Van, Missouri Humanities Council, robin@mohumanities.org
- LuAnn Kern, Michigan Humanities Council, (517) 372-7770 or lkernmihum@voyager.net
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