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Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum events to revisit its creation

A series of five special events starting Thursday promises to take audiences on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum's journey from concept to concrete.

The museum, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, is bringing back some of its creators to share memories of the early days of the museum, its planning and its construction.

For those who remember those days — which really began more than 30 years ago, not just 10 — it will bring back memories. For newcomers, the series will provide an inside look at the museum's founding.

The series includes behind-the-scenes stories from the community leaders who took the idea, built support, and pressed state and federal legislators to back it. Audiences will meet Bob Rogers, the man who oversaw the museum's groundbreaking design, the creators of its signature life-size figures, and the artists who brought music and other inventive details to the museum experience.

Sam Cooper, now systems technician at the museum, worked for Egizii Electric when the museum was being built.

"Some of the stories they had about how it was designed and what went into it," he said, "I thought it was time to share those with the public."

"We're trying to touch on from how it started to when we opened the doors," Cooper added.

The first Evening with the Creators at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in the museum's Union Theater will explore "How It All Began" with moderator Mark DePue.

DePue, director of oral history at the presidential library and museum, said a roundtable of early advocates will include Julie Cellini, an Illinois Historic Preservation Agency board member for 27 years and chairwoman from 1985 to 2010; Susan Mogerman, former IHPA director and former chief operating officer of the library and museum; and Bob Coomer, director of the IHPA from 2004 to 2007.

All three played major roles in creation of the museum.

"I plan to ask them each a couple of questions to get things started," DePue said. "This will be about the very early stages of the museum and how they went about finding support and money to do this."

On April 2, Rogers, founder and chief creative officer of BRC Imagination Arts, will explain his "Scholarship Meets Showmanship" approach that guided the design of the museum. BRC Imagination Arts of Burbank, California, is the design and production company that created the museum and its innovative — and in some cases groundbreaking — exhibits.

On June 18, representatives of LifeFormations Art and Technology Studio, the team behind the museum's 46 lifelike statues, will discuss their work. The detailed figures put visitors face-to-face with young Abe Lincoln, a heartbroken Mary Lincoln, the scheming John Wilkes Booth and many others.

The artists and designers of BRC Imagination Arts will visit the museum Aug. 20 for the fourth event in the series. They are the people who brought a holographic ghost to the museum, guided visitors along Lincoln's journey from log cabin to the White House, and figured out a way to best showcase the library's artifacts.

David Kneupper, an award-winning composer and sound designer, produced more than three hours of music for the museum to capture both the triumphs and tragedies in Lincoln's life. Kneupper will wrap up the series Sept. 17.

All the programs begin at 6:30 p.m. in the museum.

A "Golden Ticket" to all five events is available to the general public for \$40 and to members of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation for \$36. Single-event tickets also will be sold.

Clare Thorpe, manager of guest services for presidential library and museum, said a sneak-peek video of the series, as well as more information on all museum events, is available at TenYearsLincoln.com.

"Sam (Cooper) produced it," she said of the video. "Go there, watch it, and they'll get a taste of what kinds of stories they're going to hear."

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