



When Theodore Roosevelt came to the Dakota Territory in 1883 to hunt bison, he likely never imagined the impact this rugged land would have on his personal life and future career as president of the United States. Just a year later, following the death of his wife and mother in 1884, Roosevelt returned to what today is western North Dakota and found spiritual healing and perspective. His time at his Elkhorn Ranch near present-day Medora helped shape the man and leader he would become later in life.

North Dakota, in fact, played such a pivotal role in Roosevelt's life that he at one time said, "I never would have been president if it had not been for my experience in North Dakota." But he also influenced the land. A few years after Roosevelt left the territory, North Dakota became the 39th state in the Union in 1889. Now, with a new library soon to be dedicated in Roosevelt's honor near his old stomping grounds, his legacy is ensured in the Peace Garden State.

The Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library is set to open to the public on July 4 on a 93-acre site in Medora. Representatives of the library have waited years for the moment to arrive, and it's well timed to coincide with the 250th birthday of the U.S. Many things are planned for the grand opening of the 103,000-square-foot facility and all are welcome—even all living presidents have been invited to the celebration.

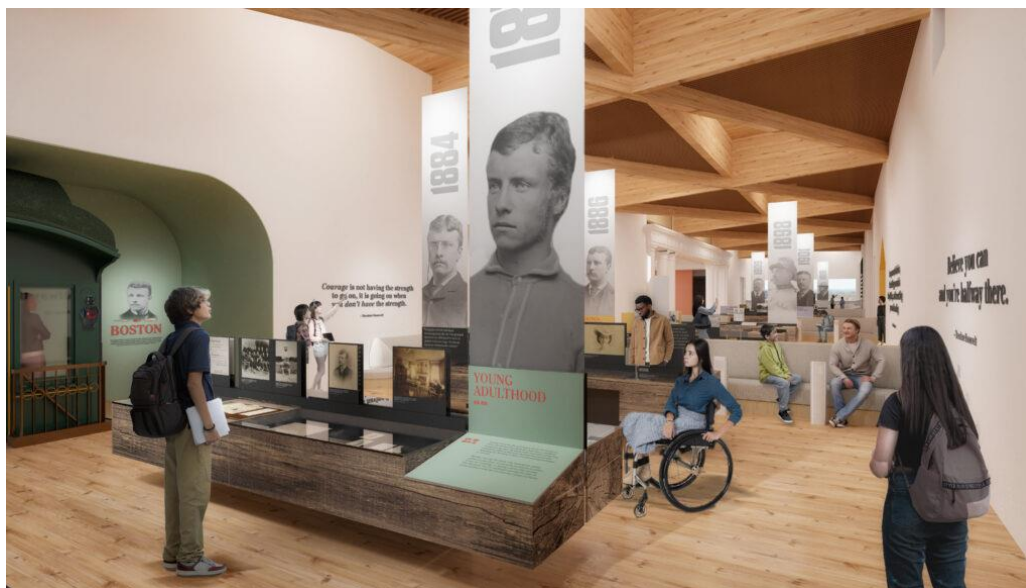
AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Partnering with Dickinson State University, and with a grant partnership with Microsoft, the library will contain archival material from Roosevelt's life and presidency. Among its attractions is a 45,000-square-foot exhibit area with a permanent exhibition gallery that

features a chronology of Roosevelt's life. Narrative Galleries tell Roosevelt's story and Adventure Galleries present hands-on experiences.

Groups will come here not only to see, says Matt Briney, the library's chief communications officer, but to experience. Immersive worlds, he says, will take participants into replicas of Roosevelt's childhood brownstone in New York, his Elkhorn Ranch in the North Dakota badlands, and the Oval Office. They will learn about the Rough Riders and come to a better understanding of Roosevelt's conservation efforts.

In essence, each Adventure Gallery takes a deeper dive into the topics that made Roosevelt who he was and what he did, such as the immersive experience of campaigning for political office. "We take you on a campaign trail, where you'll actually make your own campaign poster," Briney says. "And then you'll get thrust into the presidency, where you'll be immersed in his White House. ... You'll run your own presidency; you're going to make compromises and figure out public opinion, work with Congress, your own party, the media—what do they think—and balance all of that to see if you can make it to a second term."



Rendering of the Narrative Gallery at Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, Medora, North Dakota;

Credit: Local Projects/Future of Storytelling

THE OUTDOOR INFLUENCE

The library's setting at the edge of Theodore Roosevelt National Park makes it a unique facility, one that Briney says "is as much about getting outdoors as it is getting indoors." There's a 1-mile elevated boardwalk where visitors can catch breathtaking views of the

North Dakota Badlands. There's even a portion with netting where guests, amid cliffs, can see the Badlands below.

The building was designed to honor "Roosevelt's personal reflections on the landscape, his interest in environmental stewardship, and periods of quiet introspection and civic engagement in his life," reads information from the library's website. With sustainability at the forefront, the facility will produce much of its own energy. "No waste, zero water, and a lot of conservation efforts," Briney says.

Amy McCann, the library's group experience manager, says a lot of time and effort was spent "planting our roof and our grounds with native grasses and forbs from the area. And what is significant about that is there's just one location, this small area, where we have so much diversity. Groups and people who love their national parks, who enjoy identifying flowers and forbs, are going to get a great orientation about what's in bloom. They'll learn about it at the library before they go into the national park."

Groups will enjoy the outdoor offerings, including the national park, a nearby golf course, and other local attractions. Medora boasts quaint shops and eateries, including the popular Pitchfork Steak Fondue, a seasonal outdoor dining experience with steaks grilled on pitchforks. Afterward, many head to the Medora Musical, an outside theater enjoyed in the evenings of the warm months.

"There's so much to do in Medora," McCann says. "Not just the pitchfork fondue and the Musical but also a lot of other great little shows that happen in town." It's fun just being able to walk around town, she says, and adding the library to the experience will only increase the area's attractiveness. "We're excited about that, being able to add to that experience for them."

On opening day, a drone show called "Eyes on the Stars"—a nod to a famous Roosevelt quote, Briney says—is planned for that evening. It'll be a 12- to 18-minute show highlighting Roosevelt's time in the West and his conservation efforts with national parks. "That's kind of the big highlight" on Independence Day, says Briney. "We're an America 250 event, but I think a lot of [the celebration] will really be tied around our opening and specialness there."

By Andrew Weeks

Main Image: Lobby rendering of Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, Medora, North Dakota; Credit: Snohetta