July 2015

**THE BARNUM MUSEUM – A STORY OF RESILIANCE**

**The Tragic Events That Nearly Toppled A National Treasure**

The Barnum Museum was established in 1893 by P.T. Barnum as the Barnum Institute of Science and History. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. On June 24, 2010 it suffered a tragedy as significant as the tragedy that beset P.T. Barnum himself.

At 2:15 PM on that fateful day, a category F1 Tornado formed over the City of Bridgeport. It came on with such ferocity that museum staff, which were preparing for an exhibition, barely had time to save themselves, let alone the Museum’s many treasures. A 100-plus-mile-per-hour wind tore through the city twisting the Museum’s massive doomed roof and causing the eastern side of the building to structurally fail. Huge century-old timber beams were lifted from their supports and splintered where they were bolted in place. Glass and debris soon covered all exhibition galleries and water seeped under piles of glass into galleries and storage spaces. The storm inflicted extensive and devastating structural and environmental damage to the Museum’s core structure and inflicted severe damage on hundreds of historic documents and artifacts stored and on display there.

After heroic cleaning and stabilization efforts, thousands of artifacts were saved. It then took an entire year to develop a plan and move the collection to safety. Gallery space allocated for programs and activities now serves as emergency storage for more than 25,000 artifacts.

Incredibly in 2011 Hurricane Irene dealt Bridgeport another smashing blow. The Museum, still staggering from the impact of the previous natural disaster, immediately went into disaster preparation mode. Massive timber support beams were lifted to the attic to shore up the fragile dome structure and recently repaired windows were again boarded-up. Finally in October 2012 Hurricane Sandy and its 115-mile-per-hour winds slammed into Bridgeport continuing to hinder any chance the Museum had for recovery. Sandy turned out to be the most destructive hurricane of the 2012 hurricane season and the second-costliest hurricane in U.S. history. As the Museum’s insurance claim negations continue, rebuilding has been a long and daunting process.

**A Long-standing Commitment to Community**

Through the unprecedented series of catastrophic events the Museum has become keenly aware of its kinship with the ongoing P.T. Barnum saga of resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity. This compelling and continuing narrative – in the great tradition of P.T. Barnum himself -- has come to define and expand the history of the Museum right now. And the story continues. Now it is time to rebuild the museum, create a new and wondrous attraction, and fulfill the promise of P.T. Barnum for the City of Bridgeport, State of Connecticut and, yes, the world.

*“Whatever you do, do it with all your might, work at it -- if necessary early and late, in season and out of season, not leaving a stone unturned -- and never deferring for a single hour that which can be done just as well now.”*

P.T. Barnum

**Vision:**

“Presenting the Fascinating and Inspiring World of P.T. Barnum to a 21st Century Audience”

More than 120 years after his death, P.T. Barnum’s spirit is still very much alive. His legendary presence is felt across the nation and around the word. When millions thrill to the hoopla, hype and humbug of TV, movies, or action-adventure entertainment, they are experiencing the theatrical magic invented by Phineas Taylor Barnum. When visitors enjoy the theatrical magic of Broadway, thrill to the visual artistry of Cirque du Soleil, or are gripped by a sports spectacular, they are participating in an entertainment experience descended from the monumental circuses and ground-breaking traveling shows invented by P.T. Barnum. In many ways we now live in the world P.T. Barnum invented.

Barnum was an energetic, optimistic entrepreneur who changed the world of entertainment forever. The New Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut is his ultimate tribute, a permanent showcase where people from around the world can get to know him, marvel at his achievements, and share the joy and commitment he brought to his life’s work. In this new Barnum Museum, P.T. Barnum will come to life and tell us -- through the magic of modern technology -- his own, uplifting American story of vision, audacity and enterprise. He will amaze us with his genius, impress us with his gift for creating awe and wonder and inspire us with possibilities beyond belief. We look beyond the legend and see his unique far-reaching, contributions to society. More important we learn how Barnum’s achievements teach all of us how to better our lives today.

**“The Show Must Go On” -- A Vision for the 21st Century:**

While the Barnum Museum has become a model for disaster recovery; it must now become a living, breathing symbol of rejuvenation and renewal in the face of adversity.

Despite its setbacks the P.T. Barnum Museum is now forging ahead with plans for the future. Working with BRC Imagination Arts (the award-winning, world renowned exhibit designers) the Museum is creating new and vibrant exhibits that offer learning through exploration, imagination and innovation, stimulating the power of creativity and sparking intellectual curiosity!

BRC was selected to design the New Barnum Museum based on their years of experience working with entertainment industry giants like Disney, Spielberg and many others. For the New Barnum Museum they have designed a modern-day Barnum extravaganza employing the latest digital artistry and fired by the kind of creativity and passion Barnum himself cultivated and admired. Barnum’s great stories will be presented by seamlessly combining rigorous and uncompromising scholarship and storytelling with traditional museum design, artifact display, and award-winning state of the art media, theater, technology and immersive environments.

The PT Barnum Museum of tomorrow will be a new kind of place designed for a new kind of audience. It will give 21st century guests the kind of experience they require –emotional, immersive, cinematic, and story-driven. Visitors will emerge with a greater attraction to, and fascination with, the life of P.T. Barnum. The re-imagined Barnum Museum will transform and expand perceptions of Barnum from showman to a remarkable thinker, entrepreneur, philanthropist, a force for good, and timeless role model for the power and strength of the indomitable human spirit.

 ***“When the blow fell upon me, I thought I could never recover; the event has shown, however, that I have gained both in character and fortune, and what threatened, for years, to be my ruin, has proved one of the most fortunate happenings of my career****.”*

***“The Noblest Art Is That Of Making Others Happy”***

P.T. Barnum, 1886

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