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River museum adds another dimension

A California crew is working on a large-format cinema that will show 3-D films.

BY ERIK HOGSTROM TH STAFF WRITER



Photo by: Dave Kettering

Ramon Esquibias, with Edwards Technologies Inc. from California, wires huge speakers that will be hidden behind the screen of the newly expanded Mississippi River Museum.

Scurrying turtles and swimming sharks will provide the double bill when the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium's large-format cinema opens June 26.

"Turtle Vision" and "Sharks 3-D" are the first two films scheduled for the cinema that boasts a 40-foot-wide, 22-foot-tall screen.

El Segundo, Calif., firm Edwards Technologies Inc. has spent this week creating the grid to hold the screen. Massive speakers fit inside the grid.

"The sound comes through the speakers -- the speakers are perforated," said Edwards Technologies' Mike Kovach.

Kovach works under project manager Sam Hatcher. The firm has created 3-D cinemas at various museums and aquariums, as well as at Universal Studios,

Tokyo Dome, Dodger Stadium, Turner Field, Dubai's Wonderpark and others.

"We searched all over for the best, and they're the best," said Jerry Enzler, the river museum's executive director.

The cinema will offer films in "4-D," meaning patrons will view 3-D films that also incorporate effects such as shaking seats,

spraying water and wafting scents.

"It'll be cool," Kovach said.

Projectors and wiring should arrive next week. Crews will install carpet and seats the week of June 14.

Contractors raised one end of the roof of the former Diamond Jo Casino Portside building, increasing the height of a wall to provide for the massive screen.

Films will be shown hourly.

"We also have concessions," Enzler said. "For people whose favorite part of the movie is popcorn, we'll have that here."

Admission to the museum's large-format cinema will cost \$6 per film or \$4 per film with museum admission. Museum admission also entitles patrons to a \$6 total price to see both films of a double feature.

Also, museum officials have announced an admission increase -- from \$10.50 to \$15 per adult. The youth admission will go from \$8 to \$10.

when does it open?

Mark your calendars: The new rivers center of the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium opens Saturday, June 26.

Crews are putting the finishing touches on the \$40 million expansion, from the 2,600-square-foot gift shop to the nearly 40,000-gallon Gulf of Mexico aquarium. Hands-on exhibits are in place in the 4,725-square-foot RiverWorks interactive children's gallery, voyageur figures sit ready for placement in the 4,544-square-foot RiverWays gallery and a cascading "wall of water" feature is ready in the 5,700-square-foot Rivers to the Sea gallery.

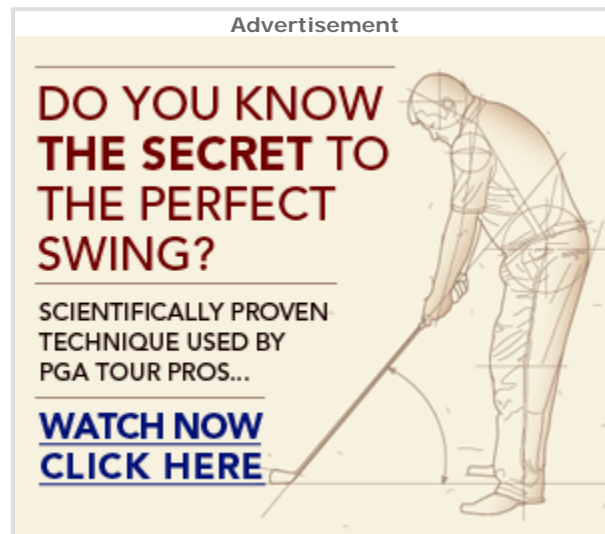
However, Enzler stresses price should not be a barrier to enjoying Dubuque's latest attraction.

"Any resident of Dubuque with economic challenges can talk to us and we can get them free admission," he said. "They just have to call us to find out how to do that."

While admission does increase, the expansion effectively doubles the museum's size.

The 50,000 square-foot addition into the former Diamond Jo Portside building will house three galleries, including four salt-water aquariums.

The new addition also will have several publicly accessible, nonticketed amenities, such as a river research center, cafe and gift shop.



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