

RV Hall of Fame

By Jaimie Hall Bruzenak.

I've just visited the RV capital of the world! That's Elkhart, Indiana, for those who don't know. More than fifty percent of recreational vehicles produced come from this area. Fully one out of every four jobs in Elkhart is tied to manufacturing RVs or component parts and services directly connected to the RV industry.

Is it any wonder that the RV/MH (Recreational Vehicle & Manufactured Housing) Hall of Fame would be located here? Actually, the Hall of Fame recently moved from downtown to its new facility close to Exit 96 off Interstates 80/90. It is still under construction, but several areas are open to the public.



The main thing that brought us to Elkhart was warranty work at Mor-Ryde. Mor-Ryde supplies custom suspension products for fifth-wheel RVs. However, my personal goal was to visit the new Hall of Fame. My mission, besides seeing the exhibits, was to present copies of my books, *Support Your RV Lifestyle! An Insider's Guide to Working on the Road* and *RV Traveling Tales: Women's Journeys on the Open Road* to the Hall of Fame's extensive collection of RV books and publications.

We entered into a two-story entrance area. A young volunteer collected our admission fees: \$1913 Earl Travel Trailer & Model T8 for adults, \$6 for seniors, and \$3 for youths. (RV parks in the area have maps with \$2-off coupons.) We first visited the "Go RVing" exhibit. You can watch a video and see examples of a pop-up trailer, a fifth wheel, and Class C and Class A RVs.

VINTAGE UNITS: STAR ATTRACTIONS

The main exhibit features a collection of vintage units from 1913 up to the 1970s. These old RVs are always fun to see. We started with a 1913 "Earl" travel trailer and Model "T" Ford, the oldest travel trailer in the world.



Two custom "housecars" were especially eye-catching. One was a 1931 Model A housecar built by an unknown custom carriage maker and woodworker. It was discovered by the donor in an old barn in 1991 after being stored there for more than 40 years; the engine still ran fine! Bobby White and a friend restored it, dubbing it the "Tennessee Traveler." A woodstove provided the heat. The driver and passenger sit on wooden chairs bolted to the wooden floor.





The other was Mae West's housecar. Built on a 1931 Chevrolet chassis, this chauffeur-driven lounge car was built by Paramount Studios to entice Mae West into making movies for them. She could sit out on the back porch in her rocking chair.

Some of the trailers were absolutely darling. A tiny ten-foot 1957 Serro Scotty tear-drop trailer had a crawl-in bed plus a kitchen compartment in the back. Tear-drops were popular in the 1940s and '50s and are making a comeback. All sorts of vintage travel trailers and even a 42-foot mobile (reminding us of Lucy and Desi's "long, long trailer") catalogued the history of the development of RVs.



Bathroom facilities weren't included in trailers until the 1960s, and even then they were tiny. We peaked in one RV, and the toilet was a wooden plank with a hole cut out over a toilet bowl- reminiscent of an outhouse! Some of the RVs of the 50s and 60s seemed quite spacious until we realized they had no microwave, entertainment center or other amenities that are now standard. These "bare bones" units, some with electrical wires exposed and possibly added later, led the way to the RVs we have today.

LIBRARY

Upstairs, the RV/MH Hall of Fame Library houses thousands of magazines, photos and books. This is the only library dedicated entirely to the archives of the recreational vehicle and manufactured housing industries. Besides professionals doing research, many individuals come to search out more information about their older units. I checked for copies of all my favorite RV publications. Yes, they were there.

Historian/librarian Al Hesselbart was in California supervising the moving of the David Wentworth collection, which has been purchased and will be housed here. Administrative assistant, Charlene McNulty, stood in for Al and accepted copies of my books for the library.

The hall housing the Wentworth collection is under construction but should be ready shortly. In fact, they hope to use it for the induction dinner on August 5 for the Hall of Fame class of 2007. Each inductee has a photo on the wall upstairs. We located Joe and Kay Peterson, founders of the Escapees RV Club and members of the class of 2001.



The staff is excited about their new home. It is more than three times the size of the old space and has plenty of room for expansion. Conferences and even RV shows will one day be held here. It will be fun to stop back on trips through Elkhart to see the vintage RVs from the David Wentworth collection, check out new exhibits, and to see the progress being made.

Getting There



The RV/MH Hall of Fame

(<http://www.rv-mh-hall-of-fame.org/>)

21565 Executive Parkway
Elkhart Indiana 46514

Exit 96 off the I-80/I-90 (Indiana Toll Road).

See map (<http://www.rvmhhalloffame.org/location.cfm>).

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