

Tampa Bay History Center Brings Area's Past To Life

By Michael Smith

If you're thinking that all museums are the same, with nothing but a bunch of old, dusty exhibits, be prepared to be pleasantly surprised when you visit the new Tampa Bay History Center (TBHC), which opened January 17 next to the St. Pete Times Forum in downtown Tampa.

That's because even though the three-story, 60,000-sq.-ft. TBHC does have more than 40,000 artifacts in its extensive collection, making it the largest museum in the state (according to director C.J. Roberts), it also includes plenty of hands-on and interactive displays that help bring 12,000 years of the area's history to life.

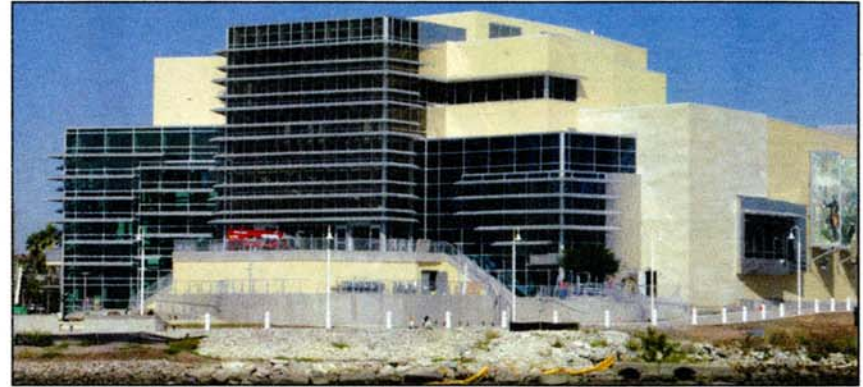
While the exhibit that shows the earliest chapter in the area's history, "Florida's First People," may in fact include some rather dusty relics, being that they include weapons, tools, pottery and other objects made and used by the first known people to live in the area 12,000 years ago, a unique exhibit entitled "Winds of Change" uses both movies and life-sized mannequins in a recreated Timucuan Indian village to tell the story of Spanish explorer Panfilo

Narvaez' landing in the area in 1528. Another multimedia presentation explores the history of the Seminole Wars as seen through the eyes of Seminole chief Coacoochee.

In the exhibit entitled "Cowmen & Crackers," which showcases Florida's cattle ranching industry, museum visitors can climb into the saddle and get a glimpse of what it was like to drive a herd of cows to market, while the "A Land Remembered" exhibit features a replica pioneer cabin where kids can try on pioneer clothing and play games in a hands-on Discovery Center.

Of course, the cigar industry played a large part in the area's development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and another life-size exhibit includes a model of an old-time cigar store, complete with now-politically-incorrect wooden Indian, and other displays showcasing the daily lives of the Cuban and other immigrants who were the backbone of that industry.

More modern exhibits feature a film of Tampa's port industry shown inside an actual shipping container turned theater, and a huge interactive map that allows visitors to take a virtual tour of the area's landmarks, including



The new 60,000-sq.-ft. Tampa Bay History Center opened in downtown Tampa on January 17.

an interesting "then and now" display that shows exactly how much things have changed.

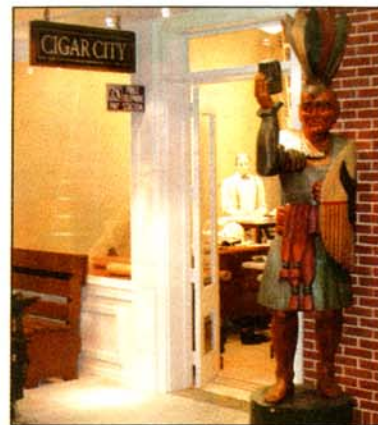
If you get hungry while you're taking in all of that history, the huge glass-walled atrium includes a café hosted by the owners of the Columbia Restaurant, and the museum store gives you the opportunity to take a bit of that history home with you.

Of course, this is just a small taste of what you'll find at the TBHC, which took more than 20 years to bring to fruition and cost more than \$51 million to build, much of which was funded

through private donations and grants, Duckwall says. To see it all, you'll just have to make the trip downtown.

The TBHC is located at 801 Old Water St. Hours of operation are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas. Admission costs \$12 for adults; \$10 for seniors (65 and up) and children ages 13-17 and students with ID; and \$7 for children ages 4-12. Children under 3 are admitted free. There also are special group rates.

For more information, call 228-0097 or visit www.tampabay-historycenter.org



Visitors to the Tampa Bay History Center can enjoy a snack at the Columbia Cafe (left) and a re-creation of a 1920s-style cigar store.