

Public art project to link Katy's past, future

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Katy burst onto the Texas landscape with the growth of Union Pacific Railway's "M-K-T" Line, according to city history. Short for the "Missouri-Kansas-Texas line," the railroad, deemed "KT," was a primary transporter of goods and services from the Midwest through Texas. During its heyday beginning in the 1890s, Katy was a busy stop for trains coming from the Midwest, said Mayor Don Elder. Because Katy served as a central hub for the MKT, the locomotive has been an important historic icon for the city. "In elementary school, we would load up on the train and go to Houston to see the circus," said Elder.

Carol Eckels Adams, executive director of the Katy Heritage Society said, "The MKT line is the reason Katy grew and thrived." But the track that carried the signature train shut down in 2001. Fortunately for residents, Katy continues to grow due to the expansion of the technology sector along the Interstate 10 corridor, Elder said. However, some members of the community say that Katy does not stand out from the rest of the metropolitan area.

"Visitors to Katy are not sure if they are in Katy or Houston, because we have no real identification that distinguishes us," Adams said.

Public art project

To revive Katy's distinguishing symbol as well as link Katy's past glory to its future potential, the Heritage Society has joined forces with the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce, the Texas Commission on the Arts, and the endorsement of the mayor to unveil a series of public art sculptures in the shape of locomotives. "Every community has to have an identifying source," said Elder.

Titled "All Aboard Katy!," the project has local artists creating designs on sculpted locomotives which will be exhibited throughout Katy. The first few locomotives are expected to be revealed this spring, said Adams. To facilitate the project, the Heritage Society had 11 plain 9-foot sculptures made. Sculptures will be sponsored by local businesses at \$4,000 apiece, with proceeds going to the nonprofit ARTreach, an organization that brings arts to underserved community members.

Each artist or team of artists who design the locomotive on behalf of a sponsor will receive a \$700 stipend. Although it is a public art project, no public monies will be used to fund it, said Adams and Elder. "For a company to sponsor a train (sculpture) makes good business sense," said Adams. "It can be considered a charitable donation or advertising expense. The sponsor name will be promoted for a long time and will be prominently displayed on the base of their train, which will be displayed in a location they choose. The sponsor's name and company logo will also be featured on all the publicity materials, maps and Web site for "All Aboard Katy!"

The Heritage Society has secured three sponsors for the sculptures: Christus St. Catherine Hospital, Academy Sports + Outdoors and Agave Road. "The project will increase awareness of Katy's history and the part the railroad industry played," said Christa Clifton, director of marketing & public relations for Christus St. Catherine Hospital. "We wanted our train to tell our story, our mission. We are a family here and our associates, physicians, patients and families feel it when they walk in the door." Architectural illustrator and Katy-based artist Catherine L. Gauldin, the designer for hospital's train sculpture, said she has proposed a train sculpture illustrated with hearts. "A public art project in Katy is a marvelous opportunity to advance trains and bring attention to the city of Katy," said Gauldin. Added Clifton, "We wanted her to include a heart because we care about the community and we have the only full-service heart program in Katy. We're very excited (to see the design) but you'll have to wait and see (the details) once we reveal the actual train."

Ann F. Hodge, president/CEO of the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce, said, "The All Aboard Katy! project will benefit our community much like similar projects have benefited other communities throughout the country. The trains will each have their own special personality." She added, "I believe our community will enjoy watching the trains be completed and placed throughout the community. We should also see an increase in visitors to our community as word spreads about this exciting project."

The idea for a public art project — which is art displayed in the public areas as opposed to a gallery, museum or private building — came from a meeting with the Katy Area Economic Development Council, said Adams, who serves on the Katy City Council. The group discussed how such a project would help brand Katy.

"Similar projects, such as 'Chicago's Cows on Parade' and 'Gallopalooza: Louisville's Sidewalk Derby,' are among those which have successfully inspired a craze for public art projects across America in recent years," said Adams. "Public art projects raise community pride and cooperation between local citizens, businesses and government. Local artists receive recognition they might not otherwise receive and public art drives local and tourist traffic to sponsor locations."

According to the Project for Public Spaces' Web site (www.pps.org), public art projects in other cities have boosted tourism, resulting in increased business for local hotels, stores, gas stations and restaurants. The organization did not respond to calls for comment.

Adams said the locomotives are expected to be around for a long time. "We plan to clear-coat the pieces so that they will last outdoors for many, many years. The point of the project is to unify the community."

The Katy Heritage Society is still seeking sponsors to design the remaining eight sculptures. For more information, call 281-391-2550 or e-mail katyheritage@aol.com. Or visit www.allaboardkaty.com or www.katyheritagesociety.com.



Sponsor Application

Yes! I want to come on board and sponsor a locomotive.

Company name _____

Contact name _____

Phone _____ email _____

Address _____

____ I know what I want our locomotive to look like and would like to have an artist contact me about the design details.

____ I know what I want our locomotive to look like and plan to have it painted myself (please provide a sketch of your design.)

____ I would like to review existing artist submissions of locomotive designs.

____ I don't know what I want my locomotive to look like, please have an artist contact me to work on a design.

Desired location for locomotive placement _____

____ I would like to sponsor a Concept Train ____ Waggin' Train ____ Reading Railroad at a level of ____ 25%(\$1000.) ____ 50%(\$2000.) ____ 100%(4,000.)

PAYMENT INFORMATION:

____ Please send an invoice for the entire cost of \$4000.00

____ Please send an invoice for my portion of the Concept Train. (as noted above)

____ Please send an invoice, to pay the cost in ____ installments. (2-4 installments)

____ Total payment of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Authorized signature

SEND COMPLETED FORM TO:

All Aboard Katy!
Katy Heritage Society
P. O. Box 359
Katy, Tx. 77492