



Interpretive center adds a new chapter to Alex Haley Museum

The Alex Haley House and Museum has broken ground on its next chapter, an interpretive center to be located behind the best-selling author's boyhood home in Henning. The concept for the center has been in the works since 1994 when the museum's board of directors had a vision to expand its focus to include Haley's work, his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Roots: Saga of an American Family*.

"The project had been on the Tennessee Historical Commission's priority list for ten years, but funding was dependent upon the state's financial condition improving," says State Representative Craig Fitzhugh, who was instrumental in securing the funding for the project. "We were fortunate that Governor Phil Bredesen and the Conservation and Environment Committee included the item in the budget."

"The interpretive center will help attract even more visitors to Henning and help the community's economy," says Mike Allmand, President and CEO of Ripley Power & Light. A \$1.2 million grant from the state of Tennessee has allowed construction to begin on the 6,500-square-foot facility.

The Alex Haley Interpretive Center is scheduled to open in May 2008. It will provide interpretive education, interactive exhibits and artifacts from



At left, work begins on an Interpretive Center at the Alex Haley Museum. An architect's rendering of the center is above. Below, the commemorative marker for Chicken George and other Haley ancestors is in a nearby cemetery.

the life and career of one of Tennessee's most renowned writers.

Designed by Louis R. Pounders, FAIA, of Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects of Memphis, the center sits on a one-acre site behind the house where Haley grew up, hearing stories of his African ancestors who had come to America as slaves.

The one-story interpretive center will feature a wall of windows, which frame the view of the historic home. The center, designed to reflect the style of the 10-room home built by Alex Haley's grandfather, Will Palmer in 1919, even uses the same type of brick that was used in the original home.

Inside, the center will have exhibits that focus on various aspects of Haley's life and will feature mementos from his career, including his Pulitzer Prize. This



will be the first public display of this honor. Other exhibits include the recreation of a slave ship and his grandparents' front porch. Voice-overs will tell the stories Haley heard as a child. "Alex Haley is known throughout the

the world for his writing, and it is only fitting that Henning have a suitable memorial to honor him and his legacy,” Fitzhugh says. “The interpretive center will allow Mr. Haley’s home to be kept as it was during his life. The new structure will give the museum the additional space it has needed for a visitors’ center, a gift shop and a meeting area.”

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Alex Haley Home and Museum is operated by the Tennessee Historical Commission and is the first stateowned historical site devoted to African Americans in Tennessee.

The home has been restored to the way it was when Alex Haley was born and features many pieces from the Haley family.

“The collection of family pieces and artifacts was greatly helped through the efforts of U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander,” says Baris Douglas, Henning mayor and museum director. Since it first opened in 1985, the home has attracted visitors from around the world, Douglas says. “From an economic standpoint, Henning has benefited tremendously from the museum and the tourists it has brought to our city. It has been a great image for us to build around, giving business a reason to stay and attracting new ones. The museum’s expansion will only enhance the draw the center has in bringing tourism revenue to Henning.”

BY RIPLEY POWER & LIGHT