



Montana Heritage Center FAQ

What's the difference between the Montana Heritage Center and the Montana Historical Society?

- The overall facility is the Montana Heritage Center, which is home to the Montana Historical Society.
- The Montana Historical Society includes several departments, or “programs”, including the museum, the library and archives, the outreach and education program, a publications program that produces books and a quarterly magazine, the state historic preservation office, and administrative services.
- The Montana Heritage Center is the central location for all of these programs, as well as the home of our museum galleries, reference room, and other public-facing amenities.

What's inside the Montana Heritage Center?

- The Montana Heritage Center features:
 - The Homeland Gallery, a walkthrough of Montana history dating from the Ice Age to today, represented across 7 time periods. It also houses a children's gallery and a Sovereign Nations exhibit.
 - Charles M. Russell Gallery, featuring the art and life story of the famed cowboy artist.
 - Changing Gallery, totaling approximately 5,000 square feet, which will be used to showcase a rotating selection of exhibits from our collections. The space can be divided into 3 separate sections to allow for multiple exhibitions at a time.
 - Big Sky Hall – A large event center for hosting events and activities. Can be reserved by members of the public, or by other government agencies for various use cases.
 - Two meeting/classroom spaces for events, student tour groups, and workshops
 - Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Library & Archives reference/research room
 - Norm's café operated by The Dive Bakery, featuring indoor/outdoor seating
 - The Gift Shop, a retail space in the Central Commons with a focus on Montana-made products and books about western history
 - A Habitats Trail representing Montana's diverse landscapes that winds around the outside of the building, with interpretive features throughout
 - An outdoor amphitheater for hosting outside events
 - Sovereign Nations East Entrance Arbor
 - A smudge room near the Homeland Gallery to allow smudging and quiet contemplation before engaging with the artifacts or exhibits on display

How big is the Montana Heritage Center?

- The new addition to the existing Veteran's and Pioneer's Memorial Building is 70,000 square feet. The existing building, which underwent extensive renovation, is approximately 95,000 square feet.

Does the Montana Heritage Center's increased size allow the display of more artifacts?

- More of MTHS' collections will be displayed thanks to the increased space of the new building, including collections that haven't been able to be displayed before that will be showcased in the Changing Gallery.
- In addition, many new stories and voices of Montanans throughout history are incorporated into the interpretation and information throughout the galleries.

Where is the Montana Heritage Center located?

- The Heritage Center is located at:
 - 225 North Roberts Street
 - Helena, MT, 59601
- Across the street from the State Capitol Building

Who designed and constructed the Montana Heritage Center?

- The Montana Heritage Center was designed by Cushing Terrell, and principal architects included David Koel (design), Anthony Houtz, and Martin Byrnes.
- The design of the north face overhang of the building is meant to evoke Chief Mountain in Glacier National Park with its overwhelming size and angles, including smaller details such as the crevasses and crags you might find on a mountain. The lower stonework was sourced from a local quarry in Harlowton, MT, and the upper stonework tiles were sourced to match the facades of the other buildings on the capitol campus.
- The boulders found around the trail are sourced from the Boulder Batholith formation between Butte and Helena, and were donated by Steve and Laura Marks from Clancy while Dennis and Priscilla Dickert donated transportation and installation of the stones.
- The primary partners responsible for the design of the galleries, exhibits, and media installations include: Main Street Design, Cinnabar, RLMG, Electrosonic, Clearwing, and Zone
- Construction of the Heritage Center was performed by: Sletten Construction Companies

How was the project funded?

- Funding for the \$107 million project includes:
 - \$60 million in private donations and grants
 - \$41.5 million in state funds
 - The Montana Museums Act added an additional 1% to the State Lodging Sales Tax (aka Montana accommodation or bed tax) with 20% of those funds through December 31, 2024, designated for construction of the Montana Heritage Center.
 - No property taxes were used to fund the facility or the exhibits
 - \$5.5 million in bonds

Why was the project more expensive than the initial estimate?

- Master planning for the project was completed in 2010, with plans finalized in late 2019 and early 2020 after the passage of SB338 in 2019. Construction on the building began in the fall of 2020. Since then, state of the art multi-media immersive exhibits have been added to the initial plans to enhance historic interpretation. Additionally, inflation, pandemic-related issues such as supply chain and labor shortages, and other factors have influenced the final price tag. However, **all additional funding needs were covered at no cost to Montana taxpayers.**

Who donated to the project?

- This project was supported by more than **1300 generous donors** from around the state and beyond.
- Major donors include the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation (\$25M), Norm Asbjornson (\$10.4M), and BNSF Railway (\$5M). For a full list of all donors to the Montana Heritage Center project, please visit: <https://mths.mt.gov/Donations/MHC-Donors>

What's the opening schedule?

- **December 2:**
 - Ribbon cutting, media event, and press conference.
 - Speeches by: Molly Kruckenberg, MTHS director; Governor Gianforte; Dennis Washington; Norm Asbjornson; and Tim Fox, president of the MTHS Board of Trustees
 - After the ribbon cutting, the public is welcome to explore the new building from 3:45pm (event conclusion) to 5:00 pm (closing).
- **December 3:**
 - Regular hours begin.
 - The Montana Heritage Center will be open to the public from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm on this day.

Will the full building be open on December 3?

- The Homeland Gallery, Charles M Russel Gallery, Changing Gallery, gift shop, and most spaces will be open and available to the public beginning on December 3.
- The Library and Archives will be open to the public **beginning in spring of 2026** once final touches have been finished in their space.

What are your planned hours?

- Montana Heritage Center Hours:
 - M-W & F: 9am-5pm
 - Thursday: 9am-6:30pm
 - Saturday: 10am-5pm
 - Sunday: 12pm-5pm
- Gift Shop Hours:
 - M-W & F-Sat: 10am-5pm
 - Thursday: 10am-6:30pm
 - Sunday: 1pm-5pm
- Norm's Café Hours: To be determined.
- Holidays: Open 7 days a week, year round, except for Christmas day and Thanksgiving day.

How much is admission to the Montana Heritage Center?

- Admission is **free** and open to all visitors.

Are public tours being offered?

- Guided public tours of the Montana Heritage Center's museum galleries will begin in February of 2026.
 - The public is welcome to explore the spaces on their own in the meantime.
- Tours of the Capitol and the Original Governor's Mansion presented by the Montana Historical Society will also continue to be offered. (Note: The Original Governor's Mansion is currently closed for repairs)

Is the white Bison still on exhibit? Where is he?

- Big Medicine still resides on the second floor of the historic part of the Montana Heritage Center and visitors are welcome to see him.
- Big Medicine belongs to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes but remains on loan to MTHS until the CSKT determines a permanent location for him.

What will be displayed in the Changing Gallery?

- The Changing Gallery will play host to a rotating series of exhibits from the MTHS collections that might not otherwise be publicly displayed. MTHS safeguards over 62,000 pieces of art and artifacts that must be properly rested and stored to ensure their preservation, and some of these collections will appear in the Changing Gallery.
- The initial exhibit will showcase the Poindexter Collection of Mid-Century Modern Art, which includes paintings from artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Robert DeNiro Sr.

Café Information:

- The Dive Bakery, a local Helena favorite, will be operating Norm's Café at the Montana Heritage Center. They will offer baked goods, such as cinnamon rolls, scones, crepes, and cookies, as well as lunch options such as sandwiches and salads, in addition to fresh coffee.
- The café will open beginning December 3 to coincide with the opening of regular hours for the Montana Heritage Center. It will offer grab-and-go items for the opening, with full café service expected to begin in mid-December.
- Norm's Café is named after Norm Asbjornson, founder of the HVAC company AAON and a native of Winifred, MT who donated \$10.4M to the Montana Heritage Center.

When is the Grand Opening Celebration?

- **June 25-28, 2026:** A three-day Grand Opening Celebration in partnership with Visit Helena, the Helena Chamber of Commerce, Cultural institutions and the business community is scheduled.
- This will be a community wide celebration of Montana History and the opening of the Montana Heritage Center. Expect community events across Helena from many partnering businesses and organizations.

What else is the Montana Historical Society working on?

- MTHS is raising \$10 million in private funding for the **Montana History & Civics Education Endowment**, which will be used to bring schoolchildren from across the Treasure State to explore the State Capitol and the Montana Heritage Center.
 - The program launched in fall of 2025 and field trips will begin in spring of 2026.
 - \$3.5 million has been raised so far

What event spaces are available to rent?

- Big Sky Hall
 - Occupancy: Up to 250 depending on setup style
 - Can be broken into two rooms
- Meeting Rooms
 - Occupancy: Up to 90 depending on setup style
 - Can be broken into two rooms
- Central Commons
 - Occupancy: Up to 450 depending on setup style
- Additional spaces such as the historic lobby, catering kitchen and atrium adjacent to the event center are also available for rent.
- Big Sky Hall and the meeting rooms have state-of-the-art AV, and we have a resident AV Specialist on staff to service our clients' events.
- MTHS does not have inhouse catering services, but our catering kitchen is fully outfitted and can meet any caterer's needs for large and small events. Clients may choose their own caterer as long as they are licensed and insured.

- Tables, chairs and most other equipment is included in the venue rental fee and setup and breakdown of events is performed by the MTHS staff.
- We are currently accepting reservations!

What other public engagement spaces are there?

- The Big Sky Hall event center, two classrooms, and the Library and Archives reference room will provide space to showcase other offerings the Montana Historical Society provides, such as community events, lectures, presentations, and access to educational resources and archival material.

How were Montana's Sovereign Nations involved with the project?

- MTHS has been working closely with a Tribal Stakeholders Group composed of cultural representatives from every tribal nation in Montana to ensure the art and artifacts related to the tribes are presented in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner.
- The Stakeholders' input also helped influence design decisions such as the addition of a smudge room outside the Homeland Gallery, and the Arbor outside the east entrance

How is the new building helping to preserve MTHS' collections?

- A new power plant was installed to ensure temperature and humidity controls are in place to help preserve and store art and artifacts.
- A new security system and new fire suppression were installed.