



theme

Snap! Crackle! Pop (Culture)!

The cornerstone of any healthy breakfast is the foundation of Kellogg's Cereal City USA, a themed attraction that traces how the ideas of John H. Kellogg eventually wound up in supermarkets all over the world. Based in Battle Creek, MI, the birthplace of the Kellogg's Corn Flake and the site of its inventor's famed sanitarium, Cereal City USA is the latest in a series of corporate visitor centers from Cincinnati-based Jack Rouse Associates (JRA), which has also worked with Hershey, CNN, Turner, Delta Airlines, and Volkswagen on projects that mix business with show business.

With Kellogg's Cereal City, JRA had a bowl full of ingredients to work with. Innovative marketing and advertising since the 1920s have spawned a variety of characters, from Corny the Rooster to Tony the Tiger, that easily make the transition from the cereal box to the themed arena. Rob Morgan, JRA's design director, says the more challenging part of Cereal City was living up to fond memories of Kellogg's factory tours, which attracted up to 400,000 visitors per year before coming to an end in 1986.

The Kellogg Heritage Foundation, made up largely of company retirees, had long wanted to reinstate some sort of "edutainment" at Battle Creek, and in 1996 contracted JRA to add two scoops of expertise. Rob Morgan, JRA's design director, says its first recommendation was to scrap the ware-

house that had housed the old tour, to build from the ground up the combination of fun and facts the foundation envisioned. JRA's entire staff of 60, including writers, designers, graphic artists, and architects, were enlisted to develop the \$18 million attraction. Cereal City houses 45,000 sq. ft. of interactive exhibits, historical artifacts (including a roster of toy premiums, which Kellogg's started adding in the boxes in the 1930s), theatrical presentations, a play area for kids and, the centerpiece, a simulated production line that takes the place of the factory tour.

"Cereal City was quite a luxury for us, because we had almost total control over the direction of the storyline and the architecture at the same time," Morgan says. A concerted team effort by JRA staffers and a few key sub-

contractors helped to complete the city for opening day, which was last June 1. "It was a fast build, but the foundation had clear objectives so it came together quite quickly."

A stay at Cereal City begins outside the building (brickfaced in "Kellogg red") with a program entitled "From the Field to the Factory." A silo-shaped talking glockenspiel (with mechanisms created by the Verdin Co. of Cincinnati) relates how Battle Creek's agrarian past shaped the development of the cereal industry. This introduction sets up the three-part interior walk-through, called "From the Factory to You." The heart of the project, located in the three-story volume of the building's atrium, is the stainless-steel production line.

"The line depicts the processing of Corn Flakes, from raw material to boxing to shipping preparations; guests get a cupful of warm Corn Flakes along the way," Morgan explains. "This was part of the old tour, which we couldn't entirely approximate, given its vast scale and our space restrictions. But we used as many of the visual and sensory cues as we could to simulate the process and put together a satisfying tour." A soundtrack that JRA created pours a factory-floor feeling over the "flaky" environment, to which Kellogg's donated used equipment, and Maltbie Associates of Mount Laurel, NJ, and Material Handling Services of Baltimore provided fabrication and conveyance systems, respectively.

Guests depart the production line for a historical timeline, which stretches back to cereal experimentation in ancient Egypt and Rome before alighting on John Kellogg and his radical notions about health, diet, and exercise, leading to the "Eureka!" moment of the dawn

of the Corn Flake and its puffed and popped brethren. The timeline also touches on Kellogg's humanitarian efforts during the Depression and the promotion of its brands through the century's media outlets. "They're very proud of him and his work," Morgan says. (As might be expected, there is no timeline entry for *The Road to Wellville*, a book, and subsequent film, that took aim at Kellogg's unconventional notions.)

Kellogg's is best known for its troupe of characters, integral to the company's marketing since Snap! Crackle! and Pop! exploded onto the Rice Krispies box late in the Depression Era. The ground-breaking trio, and the ones who followed, reside within Cereal City, a stylized, cartoon-like village with cobblestone streets that is "very intentionally bright, colorful, and cheerful," in contrast to the more muted production line and timeline. Here visitors, like flakes in milk, can further immerse themselves in Kellogg's lore. "The branded characters are used carefully, and not without a lot of discussion with the company," says Morgan. Most are featured as 2D representations, with a "live" Tony the Tiger popping by to occasionally greet weekend visitors.

An animated Snap! Crackle! and Pop!, along with Tony, co-host the Best to You Revue, a theatrical show where up to 70 guests sit atop an outsized breakfast table in a typical Michigan farmhouse setting. Bob Keshan of Captain Kangaroo fame toplines a film and video presentation about Kellogg's advertising in a second theatre adjoining Cereal City. A third theatre fronts the timeline and explains some of its highlights. Scenic Services of Utah provided some of the sets and theatrical painting in these and other areas of Cereal City, which also sports slides and tunnels (with oversized cereal-box and spoon facades) in a kids' play area.

The attraction features a variety of exhibit lighting, arranged by Available Light of Boston. Senior designer Kathy Abernathy says the illumination ranges from a "sepia, 'historical' kind of light" for the timeline to "Froot Loops" hues for the streets of Cereal City. "We highlight the signage in the production line, but not with much color; the goal was to keep it as realistic-looking as possible, so you feel like you're in the real plant," she says. Elsewhere, Cereal City becomes more theatrical, with a complement of SMPTE-cued ETC Source Fours, and, in the Best to You Revue, gobos featuring the Kellogg's characters, mounted on Martin 518s. Available Light also handled some of the specialty lighting for the exterior, illuminating JRA-designed signage visible from a distant highway in the evenings.

"In terms of overall integration of a project, Cereal City ranks No. 1 with me," says Morgan, a 10-year veteran of JRA. "We were able to bring all our resources to bear on it, which is very satisfying for all involved." With the building blocks of nutrition up and running in Battle Creek, JRA is focusing on blocks of another kind, working on Legoland in Carlsbad, CA, for a Spring opening.

Robert Cashill