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This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete County Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

HERITAGE HIGHWAY DIRECTOR WANTS TO INCREASE TOURISM IN MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

By Christian Probasco

For the National Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area

MT. PLEASANT—The head of the Heritage Highway Alliance in central Utah has some ideas for raising the profile of the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area (MPNHA), which the alliance administers, and increasing tourism within its boundaries.

“We’ve got a lot of brick and mortar work going on,” alliance Director Monte Bona says. “Concurrent with that, we need to work on our interpretive mission.”

By “interpretive mission,” he means taking advantage of educational opportunities and getting the word out about what the heritage area can offer visitors.

Bona says he was inspired to look more closely at his organization’s interpretive mandate during a recent visit he made to the MotorCities National Heritage Area in Michigan.

Before he moved back to his home state of Utah 37 years ago, Bona lived in the area where MotorCities was later established. His children were born there. He worked closely with officials from the Michigan heritage area, which celebrates the nation’s automobile industry, while developing the management plan for the MPNHA.

Bona says he was impressed by the visitation from schools around the state and beyond.

“They bring in busloads of children to Greenfield Village,” says Bona.

Greenfield

Village, Henry Ford’s birthplace, is a massive historical campus which includes Thomas Edison’s Menlo Park laboratory, the garage where Ford designed a prototype early automobile, the courthouse where Abraham Lincoln practiced law and the Wright brothers’ bicycle shop and home from Dayton, Ohio.

Bona also appreciated the heritage area’s use of technology



Esclante Interpretive Center: The interpretive center in Escalante, now in its first phase of construction, will educate visitors about the difficulties the San Juan Expedition of 1878 encountered building a road through the nearby stone bluffs. Heritage Highway Director Monte Bona says such centers will draw more tourists into central Utah.

(Courtesy Jerry Roundy)

to convey the story of automobile manufacturing in Detroit and Dearborn.

Although the alliance doesn't have the same resources as MotorCities, Bona says its members could learn from their success.

"When teachers (in Salt Lake City) want to educate their kids about Utah's pioneer heritage, they take them to 'This is the Place Park,'" he says. "But that only tells part of the story."

The missing ingredient, he says, is the landscape of central Utah, which acted as a barrier to settlement and shaped the pioneers' communities and character.

Bona envisions multiday school field trips to sites within the MPNHA. He says the interpretive centers the alliance is funding would go a long way toward facilitating those trips.



The Last Wagon: "The Last Wagon," a painting by Escalante artist Lynn Griffin depicting the pioneers at Hole-in-the-Rock, will be exhibited in the town's new interpretive center. The MPNHA contributed \$100,000 towards the completion of the center.

(Courtesy Jerry Roundy)

An example, he says, is the interpretive center in Escalante, now completing its first phase of construction. The initial development includes signage, building infrastructure and a mural. The MPNHA contributed \$100,000 toward its completion.

The center will educate visitors about the San Juan Expedition of 1878, which carved a road through a sandstone crevice known as "Hole-in-the-Rock" in the desert south of town to reach the Colorado River and then its final destination at present-day Bluff, Utah.

The alliance also contributed \$50,000 toward the heritage garden being developed in Manti across the highway from the Manti Temple and helped secure a \$190,000 earmark from Senator Bob Bennett for the project.

Bona says interpretive centers

will also be built at Big Rock Candy Mountain in Sevier County and perhaps in nearby Marysvale.

He says the alliance may soon fund two interpretive trails within the MPNHA. However, he did not want to reveal the details before the deals were finalized.

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