

# ARKANSAS

## *America's Art Mecca*



*Mrs. Theodore Atkinson Jr.* (Frances Deering Wentworth), 1765 Oil on canvas by John Singleton Copley

Bridges are an architectural theme

**W**ith the November 11 opening of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, population 35,000, is poised to rival Manhattan as home of the world's most significant repository of art made in the U.S.A.

The Crystal Bridges Museum, named for a stream located near the facility, encompasses 201,000-square-feet and is more than twice the size of New York's Whitney Museum of Art. It's accessed via the Northwest Arkansas Airport, a facility serving a metro area including Fayetteville, Springdale and the working artists colony of

Eureka Springs. Prior to the Crystal Bridges launch, the region's most significant tourist attraction was an old-fashioned five-and-dime store dominating a block of Bentonville's decidedly mid-twentieth-century downtown. That old storefront is a pretty important piece of real estate. The dime store, founded by Sam Walton, now houses the Wal-Mart Visitor Center where guests can get a sense of how Americans shopped before this specific five-and-ten birthed the Wal-Mart empire. As the whole world knows, that business phenomenon revolutionized retail. In turn, it also made Bentonville's Walton family exceedingly prosperous.

The largesse of one of those heirs, local resident Alice Walton, funded the Crystal Bridges Museum. The project reflects both her commitment to American art and an effort to benefit Bentonville and the surrounding heartland—economically and culturally. Designed by Boston architect and urban planner Moshe Safdie, the plan encompasses six galleries, a research library, classrooms and a grand hall for special events. A 120-acre park, carved from Walton family land, surrounds the sweeping structure with lush landscaping. Eventually, more than three-and-a-half miles of trails will meander among the grounds' streams, ponds and wetlands. Currently a one-and-a-half mile, multi-use, hard-surface trail punctuated with sculptures includes an observation deck overlooking the museum. A pedestrian path features picnic areas and access to Crystal Springs and the site's largest and rarest trees. A stroll around the museum's exterior immerses visitors in the lovely Ozark landscape. The building's spectacular design incorporates bridges throughout and is befitting the mission to span the distance between the traditional art world and a more general audience. Crystal Springs is the first new museum to be built exclusively for American art in 50 years.

The rapidly growing permanent collection is as impressive as its new home. The approximately 600 paintings and sculptures at its core include the works of American masters from the 17th century to present day.

Even the most casual student of art history will recognize well-known pieces such as Gilbert Stuart's 1797 portrait of George Washington, and Norman Rockwell's iconic *Rosie the Riveter* created in 1943. The vast array of genres pursued by more than four centuries of American artists are well represented. There are classical portraits, Hudson

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Crystal Bridges Museum

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in Eureka Springs!

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\*Vineyard photo courtesy Kathleen Hoevet



The Wal-Mart Visitor Center housed in Sam Walton's original dimestore.

River School landscapes, 20th-century cubists, surrealists and abstract expressionists. Contemporary stars are also given a share of this exceptional forum. Roxy Paine, whose sculptures have appeared in New York's Central and Madison Square parks, created *Yield*, a large tree sculpture that graces the entrance area.

The on-site restaurant is located in a glass-enclosed bridge overlooking ponds fed by the Crystal River. It celebrates the region's "edible culture" with a menu long on Lower-Midwest, Upper-South cuisine.

Wal-Mart generosity fuels the Crystal Bridges experience. The corporation donated \$20 million to ensure there would be no cost to view the permanent collection. However, reserved time tickets are available and advisable. The museum is popular with tourists and locals. (Three thousand members joined during the first week of last July's initial support drive.) Complimentary timed passes ensure access to the museum at the time you plan to visit no matter how long the lines or thick the crowds. They can be reserved online or by phone. The museum is closed on Tuesdays. During the rest of the week, hours vary.

Crystal Bridges is well on its way to achieving international superstar status. Regionally it is already the main attraction. That's not to say it's Northwest Arkansas's only point of interest. Here are some other very good reasons to explore this part of America:

**THE WAL-MART VISITOR CENTER** on Main Street includes a multi-level experience ideal for every member of the family. The store itself is a well-preserved time capsule where retro-toys and candies of yesteryear crowd the shelves and are available for purchase. Instead of a lunch counter there's a trendy café touting designer coffee, a diverse menu (including some gluten-free items) and a commitment to environmentally friendly practices. Adults will find the adjacent museum fascinating. An eight-minute video presents Sam Walton's

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up-by-the-bootstraps life story. Ample Walton family memorabilia, including Sam's 1979 pickup truck, are also on display.



Quapaw Pottery at the Museum of Native American History

**THE MUSEUM OF NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY**, 202 SW "O" Street in Bentonville takes visitors through 14,000 years of human experience. Five time periods—Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian, Historic, Pre-Columbian—are explored in multi-sensory presentations and artifacts created by the nation's earliest artists and craftspeople. The museum's content transcends the people groups associated with the Ozark Region. Significant Native American civilizations ranging from the Clovis people of New Mexico to the Mayans and Incas of Central and South America are represented. There is no admission fee.

**EUREKA SPRINGS**, 35 miles from the Crystal Bridges Museum, hugs the sides of forested limestone bluffs and hills. Long known as an art colony, this charming Victorian village boasts more art galleries per capita than any other U.S. town. Eureka Springs' 20 galleries mingle with boutiques selling Ozark craft items, sidewalk cafes and

antique shops. More than 20% of its 2,300 residents are actively engaged in artistic endeavors. Of those professionals, 30% have garnered national recognition for their art. The entire town is on the National Register of Historic Places. Eureka Springs is also home to the Eureka Springs School of the Arts, the only institution of its kind in the region. For the past 20 years it has conducted workshops for regional artists. With the Crystal Bridges museum opening the school intends to enlarge its offerings and scope. ■



Eureka Springs artists J.D. Harris welding a sculpture and Susan Morrison pictured with one of her paintings.



QUAPAW POTTERY: MATT ROWE  
SUSAN MORRISON: COURTESY SUSAN MORRISON SIGNATURE GALLERY  
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**Special Thanks from XNA**

**Crystal Bridges** and XNA would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of Alice Walton. Her generosity has enriched the lives of all the residents and visitors of Northwest Arkansas. Thank you, Alice, from your friends at XNA.

