

The Indianapolis Star

Going Back in Time

■ Museum is opening in September to feature American culture and icons of the past.

By John M. Flora

STAFF WRITER

FISHERS, Ind. — Fishers seems an improbable place to celebrate the greatest American cultural icons of the 20th century, but it makes perfect sense to Mark Roesler.

For nearly two decades, Roesler has built a business in licensing and merchandising famous names and faces, especially those who have died.

"We're known as the company that started the business of protecting famous deceased people," Roesler said.

Curtis Management Group, or CMG Worldwide, looks after the licensing, merchandising and advertising rights of such 20th century luminaries as Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Babe Ruth, Will Rogers and Malcolm X. Headquartered in Crosspoint, their growing list of living clients includes Sophia Loren, Ivana Trump, and Chuck Berry.

"As we went through the 1980s and '90s, it hit us that we represent most of the great legends of the 20th Century," said Roesler, chief executive officer of CMG Worldwide.

"For 10 years, I've wanted to put together a museum and teach young people who these great legends were," he said. The Legends of the 20th Century Museum soon will occupy much of the 37,000-square-foot, glass-and-granite building that looms along I-69 a short distance north of the 96th Street interchange.

"I never really collected things, even though I've been in this business a long time. I wouldn't even collect autographs, because they didn't mean anything to me," he said.

But as he began sharing the idea with his clients, he found they were eager to get involved with a museum project.

"As this project unfolded, our clients got so excited about it," he said, noting that the extensive collection on hand now is only about 20 percent of what will be on display when the museum opens to the public in September.

The centerpiece of the collection is a replica of James Dean's 1955 Porsche Spyder sports car, on loan from the James Dean Foundation in Fairmount. The silver-gray, open-cockpit racer with its red leather upholstery stands in the sunny atrium of the building. It wears the same "130" racing number Dean had painted on the hood and doors a short time before he



PAST LEGENDS: Colleen Kearney, a spokeswoman for CMG Worldwide, fields questions from second- and fourth-graders from Fall Creek Elementary School. The group got a sneak preview of the Legends of the 20th Century Museum in Fishers.

was killed Sept. 30, 1955, driving to a race in Salinas, Calif.

Display cases, designed and built by the same craftsmen who made the cases for The Indianapolis Children's Museum, show off other artifacts. There's one with Babe Ruth's jerseys and a baseball autographed by the Bambino. Across the atrium, a visitor can see the black Armani gown Sophia Loren wore as a presenter at this year's Academy Awards. Next to it is a jacket worn by Bette Davis in her 1942 film *Now, Voyager*. Nearby is a case displaying the dressing gown worn by actor and legendary acting coach Lee Strasberg in 1974's *The Godfather: Part II*. To its right is a case with a racing helmet and suit worn by NASCAR competitor Bill Elliott.

Upstairs is a gallery celebrating the lives and achievements of Jim Thorpe, Jackie Robinson, Arthur Ashe, Vince Lombardi, Hank Williams and others.

About 40 second- and fourth-graders from Fall Creek Elementary School got a sneak preview of the museum Friday morning to learn about the origins of their popular culture.

Noting that most of her second-graders were born in 1990 and have no memory of most of the featured celebrities, teacher Roni Green said, "The sports figures definitely rang a bell with the boys. As far as the movie stars are concerned, I'm not sure there was a big connection. There were a lot of blank stares."

"But for me, it was very neat. I'm very impressed with the museum," she said.

When the museum opens to the public in the autumn, Roesler said, admission will be free and he plans to be open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays.