



AMERICA'S CAR MUSEUM®

Shifting Gears with David Madeira, CEO of America's Car Museum

*As ACM drives into its 4th year, Madeira opens up on
the challenges of running North America's largest auto museum*

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TACOMA, Wash. (July 14, 2015) – Running the largest automotive museum in North America is sometimes an uphill drive. With hundreds of stunning vehicles, rotating exhibits and “Signature Events,” CEO David Madeira and his expert team keep the pedal to the metal.

Madeira, who has been with America's Car Museum (ACM) 13 years, has turned the Tacoma-based museum into an international destination. Madeira reflects upon the challenges and successes of running the sprawling 165,000-sq.-ft. museum in this interview.

Question: What have been some of the successes of America's Car Museum?

David Madeira: We have come a long way in trying to attain institutional maturity over the past three years, especially when compared to other young nonprofits with tight finances. We've had to juggle whether to keep or increase programming and staff, invest in things such as planned giving programs and development for long-term – as opposed to short-term – payoffs.

Our board of directors and administration have done an outstanding job in developing our institution as one that people can count on and continue to deliver for the long-run. Things like investing and adding fundraising staff give us the ability to keep this commitment.

Other car museums have one or two members of development staff, ACM has six, which should have a good long-term effect because fundraising is relationship-oriented. Many car museums have one marketing person, we have a team of three and an event staff, in addition to our local and national PR teams. Plus, we've just promoted our VP of operations Paul Miller to president and COO to help me focus more on the Museum's long-term strategic goals and partnerships. This is important because all of these teams and employees are integral to ACM's growing national presence including participation in auto shows such as New York and Detroit.

Events like the Vintage Motorcycle Festival: The MEET at ACM and Pacific Northwest Concours d'Elegance are entering their fourth year at the Museum, and our Wheels & Heels Annual Gala and other Signature Events are just a few examples of why people are beginning to recognize that this is a dynamic, quality institution.

The media coverage and visibility in places like New York and the recognition nationally from *USA Today* and locally from *Showcase Magazine* and *NBC KING 5* about the quality of this museum and its popularity in the region are all good things.

Question: What are some of the major challenges and rewards of running a museum?

DM: The biggest challenge so far has been raising money. Right from the start, it was apparent. Building a beautiful museum like this was very difficult in and of itself, it was something that had never been done in this country before in terms of a car museum.

We raised millions of dollars when we were building ACM, which was great because its impact was something people could visualize and put their name on. But we soon found that the bigger challenge was going to be keeping these programs going.

In the life of a young museum like ACM, it's difficult to operate financially in a healthy way because you're competing against countless other charities.

There is no museum in this country – whether it's cars or art – that sustains itself simply on admissions, membership or events. Encouraging people to provide cash for operations is probably the most difficult challenge of all, but it's necessary to build a healthy, sustainable first-class institution – it always comes down to fundraising.

It's rewarding when you see growth by pulling all of these things off, and people respond in a positive way. We see people having fun here, which is what I want them to do and feel like this is a great place to be. That's the reward inside.

Question: Education has been one of the driving forces behind the museum. How are your education programs expanding?

DM: Education is the reason that the Museum was granted tax exempt status in the first place. It is registered as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, so it has to have a purpose like that. Once we built the Museum, we began with creating a family zone, building a classroom and starting an educational resources library and center.

The Hagerty Education Program at America's Car Museum (HEP) is the centerpiece for our education programs, and we're integrating it into the center of our vision because the collector car market is somewhere around a seven-to-ten billion dollar-a-year industry.

The generation that built these cars and knows how to work on them are dying, and schools are failing to train young people to work on cars without computers or diagnostic equipment, with very few exceptions.

What's going to sustain the industry? If the cars aren't able to be preserved, restored or maintained, who's going to Pebble Beach? Who's doing a car show? What cars are available for auction? All of that goes away, and it goes away rather quickly.

So for us, it's natural to focus on education and provide opportunities for meaningful work and good remuneration to young people. And in our small way, we might have a real impact on helping Amelia Island, Pebble Beach, the auction scene and all of these things continue.

Education differentiates us from other museums, which primarily focus on showing their collections. They may do the kinds of educational programs that may serve young and elderly people

in the community, but if we're really thinking about making an impact – say in the way of preserving America's automotive heritage – it's going to be through the HEP. Hopefully, people recognize this and that gives them a reason to support America's Car Museum.

Question: You've increased your Signature Events from three to five, and you've hosted a flurry of other events and activities as well. How have they been received?

DM: I think they're great. This was our first year of doing Drive the Blues Away, which was packed with people and everybody had a ball. It attracted a younger crowd and created a place for fun in the wintertime. Plus, we got to work with Gibson USA, which was great.

Often when people hear the word 'museum,' they think of it as a dead space – it's the activities like our Signature Events, Drive-In Movie Series and Cruise-Ins at ACM that increasingly demonstrate that the Museum is a place where membership means something. You get to be part of all of these cool events and have fun at the Museum's functions.

The Wheels & Heels Annual Gala is always fun, first-class and raises several hundred thousand for us. Cars & Cigars is just a cool summer lifestyle event with Montecristo cigars. The Pacific Northwest Concours d'Elegance is important for the reputation of the Museum and is recognized for drawing high-caliber classic car enthusiasts from across the country. The Vintage Motorcycle Festival: The MEET at ACM adds another cool factor and brings an important part of the collector community into the Museum. Cars and motorcycles go together and those guys need to be given a place to participate. So, it all adds to a vibrant enterprise.

Question: You're trying to reach a lot of different audiences with new events and exhibits. How do you appease different groups of museum goers?

DM: I think that the more we throw out there, people will pick and choose what they like. We need to offer a breadth of opportunities for people of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds and interests, and refrain from being elitist and snooty. In essence, we need to be American. That's what America is all about.

When it comes to car enthusiasts, they all have the same DNA and we need to reach them all. From hot rods to tuner cars, lowriders, classics and motorcycles – it's hugely varied and we need to be a place for them all. We do it by emphasizing America's love affair with the automobile. That's who we are. Come out here and celebrate with us. You can pick and choose what you belong with.

Question: How does the Museum decide on what exhibits to open?

DM: Pretty intuitively. We have a curator and he's charged with thinking long-term. We pay attention to what's going on in the car world, so a newly-released Mustang or Camaro gives us a great opportunity to do a retrospective. Part of it is being opportunistic, with an eye toward what the manufacturers are doing, and how we can work with them. And again, thinking of the different demographics we need to reach. There's just an endless list of stories for us to present.

Question: The Museum was portrayed questionably in a Fox News *Strange Inheritance* episode. What's the Museum's position on some of the accusations?

DM: I'll say very clearly for Fox News and anybody else: it was a bullshit piece. They approached us saying that they wanted to do a story on the LeMay family and their inheritance. We said that was wonderful. They wanted to go out there and interview the family. That was wonderful. They wanted to come here and interview us. That was wonderful. And then all they did was go and interview family and friends. Whenever there's a transition from a private collection of long-standing years and lots of people involved, and you create something new, there's always people who aren't completely happy, or they don't think it's what the founder would've wanted, or how can you change something from what it was?

The truth of the matter is: unlike what they're saying – they portrayed things as if the family inherited this collection from Harold and worked to create a museum, and we somehow betrayed them in a lot of ways in what we created and what we did with the cars and all. It's just an outright fabrication, and I have given Fox News the complete details with specific dates and legal documents and all to show that the family didn't inherit the collection from Harold LeMay. He created this museum before he died, and his wife Nancy serves on our board along with their son Doug. We're working with them right now on a permanent display dedicated to Harold. She continues to give nearly half a million dollars a year to this place. We sit down for lunch regularly and we have a great relationship.

Fox News – or the producers – picked up on some disgruntled people, or those that didn't agree with the vision for the Museum. Rather than checking the facts and interviewing us, which was promised, they never came and created a one-sided story.

All we can do is continue to put the LeMays front and center here and remind people that Nancy gave \$15 million because she believed that our vision for America's Car Museum would continue to pay tribute to Harold's love for automobiles for decades to come.

Getting visitors to celebrate America's love affair with the automobile is exactly what Harold would have wanted when he began amassing his collection of cars – this place celebrates the character that Harold had, and what he did in Tacoma. So I'm really proud of what we've accomplished.

Nancy sent a letter to Fox News refuting the episode and explaining how happy she is with us and why she continues giving to the Museum.

So let me tell you: "fair and balanced," it was not.

Question: The Museum has won several awards in the past year and is gaining traction. What are you doing to keep that momentum going?

DM: We're real tenacious and aggressive around here. As long as I am here, we will do what we can to remain an aggressive and active in maintaining the principles behind our high-class operation – which is all about individual experiences.

I think if we maintain the philosophical approach that we want the Museum to continue varying and changing the exhibits, we can continue to make meaningful connections with our visitors. As long as people experience their own stories when they come here, the Museum will be a place of celebration.

I think that if we maintain that approach as we build our endowment, over time, we'll reach that maturity.

We strive to be the finest auto museum in America – I think we can be the Smithsonian for the automotive culture of this country if we stick to those ideas and really work hard at it.

Question: Getting awards and accolades from *USA Today* and others obviously must make you feel good, but does it also make you want to work harder?

DM: On a personal level, I try not to pay attention to press or accolades because as we just demonstrated in talking about *Strange Inheritance*, all that stuff's ephemeral. One day you're the good guy, the next day you're bad, so we almost have to ignore it.

On the other hand, when we receive an award like KING 5 naming us the best out of 70 or so museums in Washington, we want to repeat. Or, if *USA Today* wants to do that again next year. I think it encourages us, and it helps the staff feel good about their hard work. I see the impact that we've made in places far away when I travel, but the day-to-day staff might not. It encourages them that there's a "Good Housekeeping" seal of approval on the work they've done.

It's rewarding, makes us feel good and encourages us to work harder. I would be remiss if I didn't say that what's been accomplished here – not only to the generosity of some of the incredible donors and the corporate supports. We have 70 corporate supporters and that's phenomenal. It happens because of them, but it also happens because we have incredible staff and volunteers here who work tirelessly and do a great job.

Question: If you had to take just one car home from ACM, which would it be?

DM: I would pick the 1927 LaSalle Roadster that I drove in the Mille Miglia in Italy. Only about a half a dozen American cars have ever run in that historic race.

When the oldest car in the race makes it across the finish line after that three-day struggle, and you come into Florence with Italians screaming, "Americanos, Americanos," because they've seen only Jaguars, Porches and Mercedes, you can't help but fall in love with the LaSalle. If I could take it home, they'd never get it back.

About LeMay – America's Car Museum (americascarmuseum.org)

America's Car Museum (ACM), named one of *USA Today's* 10 Best Museums in Seattle and KING 5's 2014 Best Museum in Western Washington, is an international destination where families and enthusiasts gather to celebrate America's love affair with the automobile and how it shaped our society. The stunning, four-level, 165,000-sq.-ft. Tacoma, Wash., facility features 12 rotating exhibits, five annual Signature Events and serves as an educational center, hosting students of all ages. For more information on ACM, visit americascarmuseum.org.

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