

Museum launches unique multimedia project

By Edwin Garcia
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SACRAMENTO — First lady Maria Shriver today will unveil an interactive Web site that allows computer users to click through multimedia presentations of California's rich history and cultural heritage.

Shriver and others who worked on the project believe it's the first time a U.S. museum that emphasizes state history has produced such a comprehensive multimedia site.

The project, known as California Legacy Trails, is an extension of the Sacramento-based California Museum, which in recent years has refocused its mission to show the world that the Golden State is not just about movie stars, beaches and amusement parks.

"We are more than hot tubs and Hollywood, and the museum is effectively telling that story through the diversity of people," Shriver said. She and her husband, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, both have close ties to the nonprofit museum.

The site, part of www.californiamuseum.org, lets users click through a series of animated pages to learn about people and places that often have national significance.

Hover the mouse over a map of the Bay Area, for example, and up pops famous personalities, such as author Amy Tan of Sausalito. Clicking on her image reveals a biographical timeline, photographs and a video presentation.

"It's really a very innovative way to tell the history and story of California," said Shriver, who wants the site to project the state as the capital of innovation, a place where women have attained remarkable achievements, and home to technology geniuses.

Shriver, who grew up in Massachusetts, said she got the idea for the project from the Freedom Trail in Boston, a touristy 2 1/2-mile brick road that leads pedestrians to 16 historic sites from the American Revolution.

The site was built by Euro RSCG San Francisco, a global advertising agency network, which relied heavily on Adobe Flash software to animate the content provided by the museum.

"There is no other destination that encompasses all of this content," said Mike Fung, an executive creative director for Euro RSCG. "We're bridging these incredible stories but also creating a platform to share incredible stories too."

The site allows users to share their own content, by uploading pictures and other multimedia components of themselves or their family members, to tell the world about their own personal achievements.

The site's target audience is broad — from school children to adults, to teachers to tourists planning a visit from around the globe.

And it's easy to use, Shriver said. "I am not, I would say, a skilled, savvy Web user, so I wanted it to be really simple," she said.

Educators can download engaging material that meets state curriculum standards. And at some point, museum officials hope to make software based on the site available for classrooms.

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The first Legacy Trails project highlights remarkable women throughout California's history; future "trails" will extend the online experience into other areas of the state's history.

California Museum Executive Director Claudia French considers the site an ideal match between technology and the institution's core mission of educating people.

Said French: "It's about taking the museum experience outside the museum walls."

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