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UTPOST

A Free & Independent Newspaper

Volume 7 • Issue 32 • May 13, 2004

Old Faithful Inn at 100

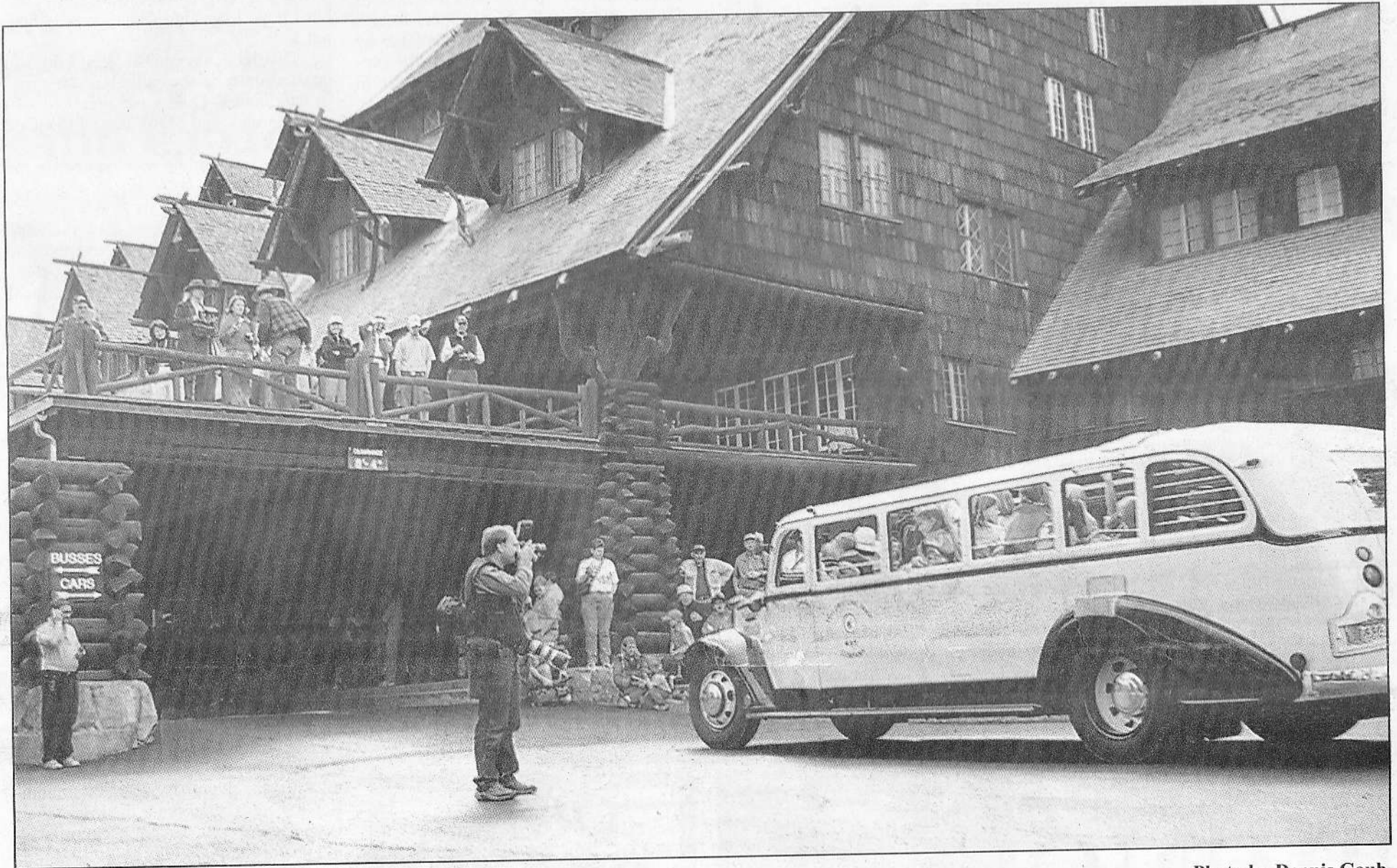


Photo by Dennis Gaub

One of several vintage White Co. touring buses pulls into the Old Faithful Inn's porte cochere at ceremonies last week.

Inn makes plans for next 100 years

By DENNIS GAUB

For The Outpost

Friends and admirers of an international landmark celebrated its 100th birthday last week, knowing that measures have been taken to help ensure Old Faithful Inn will stand another century - or longer.

About 400 people joined a rousing party last Friday to open Old Faithful Inn for the 2004 season and to honor the famed hotel in its centennial year as a centerpiece of Yellowstone National Park, the world's first national park.

Programs during weekend festivities also paid tribute to thousands of individuals involved in the design, construction and operation over the decades of the rus-

tic and ornate building that has awed millions of visitors since opening in the spring of 1904.

Much of the acclaim focused on Robert Reamer, the San Diego architect who was hired in 1903 to design the inn by Harry W. Child, president of the Yellowstone Park Association. Reamer's work in Yellowstone and other national parks is credited with the popularity of "parkitecture," or park buildings designed to harmonize with nature.

Paul Hoffman, deputy assistant secretary of the Interior for fish, wildlife and parks, told those who crowded the lobby and looked down from balconies above that a three-year, \$30 million renovation project will restore much of the inn's early

20th century grandeur. When the remodeling is complete, the building will meet seismic standards and fulfill fire and safety codes, he said.

The project, described as a birthday present for the inn, will repair damage caused by the 1959 earthquake. It also will reduce the risk of future damage to a building located in one of the world's most active earthquake zones, Hoffman said.

Making the gigantic log lodge as fire-safe as possible took on added importance after epic forest fires raged through much of the park during the summer of 1988. The holocaust swept into the Old Faithful area on Sept. 7, 1988, and threatened to destroy the inn before firefighters controlled the blaze.

One of the most notable improvements of many planned will repair the inn's towering fireplace, built of native volcanic rock. Crews will remove chimney brick that fell into two of the four flues during the 1959 quake. Then, the flues will be scoured and lined with reinforced concrete. And once again, Old Faithful guests will enjoy the warmth and light of fires burning on the north, south, east and west hearths of the main fireplace.

The project will require delayed openings of Old Faithful Inn for the next two seasons, Hoffman told the gathering.

"This is a cost to visitors that will pay dividends over the next 100 years,"

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said yes to the requests for funds for our

Inn: Repairs on 'icon' to continue through 2006

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he said.

Xanterra, the concessionaire for Yellowstone's lodging and transportation, also will sacrifice revenue during the project, Hoffman noted.

"It's a substantial investment, but I can think of no building more worthy of it," he said.

The 40-minute ceremony ended with a ribbon cutting and the singing of "Happy Birthday" to the inn, led by students from the Mammoth Hot Springs elementary school. Later, park employees dressed in clothing similar to what was worn when the inn opened served birthday cake to party attendees.

Later, at a press briefing, Hoffman and Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Suzanne Lewis described how repairs to the inn would affect guests.

Lewis outlined the inn's schedule of operations for this year and the following three seasons:

- Open in 2004 on May 7, closing in early October.
- Open in 2005 on July 1, closing on Sept. 1, for a shortened, 60-day season.
- Open in 2006 on July 1, closing at a normal time in late September or early October.
- Open in 2007 for normal operations, with the project complete.

Park visitors will see continuing work in other areas: Congress has appropriated

funds for further road improvements plus water and sewer projects, Lewis said. "We're making good headway" in areas where maintenance needs had been backlogged, she said.

Hoffman likened the process of keeping Yellowstone in good operating condition to upkeep on a house that needs a variety of repairs over many years, such as repainting and roof replacement after a hailstorm. Improvements are not a "one-time opportunity" for either a house or a national park, but need to be planned and budgeted over time, he said.

Lewis said all Yellowstone structures are being inventoried and their condition assessed in a systematic way so that necessary improvements can be done in a timely fashion - the first time this has been done.

She singled out Old Faithful Inn as a "significant landmark for not only the National Park Service but for the nation. To think, 100 years ago the park was a wilderness and (the inn) was put in, and

it's still here today, it's still loved, and people return year after year.

"It's truly an icon and has become interwoven with the culture," she said.

Lewis and Hoffman were each asked to express how they might try to determine the inn's birthday wishes.

Lewis said she would ask: "What can we do for you? How can we make it better? How can we assure (that the inn operates) for another 100 years, and 100 years after that?"

Hoffman said Old Faithful Inn "symbolizes the romance" between the American people and national parks. The inn has inspired countless stories woven into the culture, and it represents a "perfect blend" of the National Park Service's mission to protect cultural and natural resources, he said.

"I think the best way of putting it is, had this inn burned down during the '88 fires, heads probably would have rolled - that's how strongly the American people feel about it," he said.