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Baron Von Opperbean immersive adventure to be built at Mud Island

Project to rely on crowd-investing campaign as well as traditional funding sources

Baron Von Opperbean and the River of Time, the second iteration of artist/technologist Christopher Reyes' signature immersive experience, will be built inside the former site of Mud Island's Mississippi River Museum.

The transformation of the 33,000-square-foot, 18-room facility will take place in phases. Project spokesman Marvin Stockwell says the team hopes to be open by spring of 2025, with additional areas being "unlocked" after that.

"Mud Island is an iconic Memphis destination," Stockwell said. "We're all fans of adaptive reuse, so to have the new BVO make good use of an existing facility and play a role in Mud Island's comeback is something that makes this all the more special to us."

The contents of the museum have been transferred to the Museum of Science and History, and are under the supervision of its curatorial team. Reyes and his team have signed an operating agreement with Memphis River Parks Partnership, which manages the operation of riverfront parks for the City of Memphis.

"Memphis River Parks Partnership has been very encouraging to us from the start," Reyes said. "We are grateful for the opportunity to bring together artists, musicians and other local creatives to create something truly unique for locals and tourists alike to enjoy."

In addition to traditional investors and funding sources, Reyes and the BVO team intend to give all Memphians a chance to invest in the project. They are using Wefunder, a leading equity crowdfunding platform, where anyone can invest in the project and gain a return from its success.

For investment details or to invest, visit wefunder.com/BVO. The campaign is currently accepting early reservations from potential investors.

"This isn't a donation," Reyes said. "It's your investment in a more vibrant and creative Memphis. With \$100 or more, you can help foster significant social and economic impact."

The BVO team is working to raise \$10 million dollars, which includes \$5 million for the project's first phase. A recent [economic impact report](#) estimated the project will make an economic impact of \$66.2 million and create 566 jobs.

"That will be an incredible lift for our local economy, especially our downtown," Reyes said. "More people coming downtown will mean more traffic to restaurants and other businesses."

The new BVO immersive adventure follows on the success of BVO's Quadrant 360, an installation housed at Off the Wall Arts in the spring of 2020.

"People loved Quadrant 360, and I learned so much from participants about what worked and what didn't," Reyes said. "We have new ideas, concepts and stories, and we're excited to see our vision take shape at such an iconic place!"

Even though Quadrant 360 had to pivot in the pandemic's quarantine period, Reyes was able to share the experience with more than 4,000 people in just two months through private, one-hour bookings. Reyes credits the social media buzz to early supporters who were the first to experience BVO.

"Tickets sold out in a matter of hours with no advertising," he said. "It was all due to our supportive community, and people just blowing us up with incredible reviews from the heart."

Reyes said that public comments he received encouraged him then and have fueled his work on BVO ever since.

"This has been a fantastic journey that I want to *continue* to share with Memphis," Reyes said. "It's a Memphis thing. It's from Memphis, made by Memphians, and supported by the Memphis community."

Reuben Brunson, the project's business-strategy lead, said he and the team are inspired by the success of immersive experiences across the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. Meow Wolf's national expansion, and the emergence of other similar immersive experiences, show the economic viability of experiential entertainment, he said.

In addition to Meow Wolf, Brunson pointed to the City Museum, Area15, Otherworld, Wake the Tiger, and others as proof that immersive experiences can flourish even in smaller communities like Santa Fe, NM, where MeowWolf – valued at more than \$900 million by one estimate – is headquartered.

"If Santa Fe can do that, think of what Baron Von Opperman at Mud Island could do for Memphis, especially when you consider that there's no immersive experience on this scale in the South," Brunson said. "BVO will give visitors and locals alike something else that's fun to do downtown. In hot or cold weather, an indoor attraction like BVO will add to downtown's vibrancy year round."

At this scale, Reyes says the BVO team will need the help of the Memphis community.

"We're engaging our local community – artists, filmmakers, creatives, and others – for their support and collaboration," Reyes said. "Much of the technology for projection mapping, spatial audio, and interactive elements isn't cheap, and we're building a space 15 times larger than the first BVO, so we'll need to raise a good bit of money, but I'm confident that our community will respond."

Beyond raising money, the group is once again asking the public to help them find and gather reclaimed materials.

“We’re looking for everything from cardboard, foam and plywood to chicken wire, concrete mix, electronics and old tires,” Reyes said. “We want to do all we can to upcycle useful materials to be as green as possible.”

To contact the BVO team about donating materials or to volunteer/intern, visit bvoexp.com/connect.

Creature Studio Founder Kathryn Hicks, who is the project’s XR* lead, will expand the BVO experience through the use of advanced interactive technologies. (*XR (extended reality) is an umbrella term for augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality (MR))

“For me, this is a dream project that allows me to work on immersive experiences that are rooted in themed entertainment design. I’m excited to bring my nine years of expertise in the extended reality (XR) industry to this endeavor,” Hicks said. “We will create naturalistic, personalized interactions that feel genuine and immersive. This project holds tremendous potential for Memphis, setting a new global standard for immersive experiences, and showcasing the city’s creativity and innovation on an international stage.”

Hicks said BVO’s strong commitment to the artistic community is a big part of what makes the project special to her.

“Local artists and creatives are integral to the process and will be given opportunities to showcase their work within this groundbreaking experience,” said Hicks, who says she was inspired by BVO’s Quadrant 360 in 2020. “That was a transformative experience for me. The fact that Christopher was able to use techniques similar to those used by Universal and Disney, all while working with the community and using recycled materials was incredibly impressive. The positive response Chris got from the community after the first BVO speaks volumes about his vision and the new BVO’s potential impact on our city.”

Reyes said the creation of BVO has been an incredible journey for him so far, and that BVO at Mud Island “will be an amazing, collaborative community project” that will require creatives from all disciplines and skill levels, including people who “just want to volunteer.”

“Memphis has the talent and expertise, we have the community’s support,” he said. “We need capital and we need investors to create a destination that’s truly unique to our community and that will transform our city.”

For Reyes, who has two daughters, ages 6 and 9, creating a family friendly attraction downtown is personal.

“I want my daughters to have these kinds of experiences before they grow up without having to leave Memphis and without having to drive five hours away,” he said. “Let’s make something that’s authentically Memphis, and put Memphis on the experiential map.”

For more information, visit bvoexp.com.