



TVA exhibit in Clarksville presents a vision of public good

BY STACY LEISER • THE LEAF-CHRONICLE • NOVEMBER 1, 2009

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Some people still remember losing their family farms to TVA, the peril of annual floods replaced with the permanence of a man-made flood that covered their ancestral homes for all time.



In the collective memory, the Tennessee Valley Authority is often associated with poignant loss, but TVA was also life-changing in ways that people would find impossible to live without today.

TVA brought electricity to until-then ignored rural areas of Tennessee.

"They were shaping the land. They were electrifying one of the poorest parts of America in the depth of the Depression," said Tennessee Architecture Foundation board member Jim Frierson. "This was a concerted Federal effort, a grand experiment."

TVA presented itself to people as a powerful entity and engine of change that would improve their

lives forever.

"The marketing ploy worked," said architect Jim Christain.

"Nothing on this scale had ever been done. My ancestors had a lovely home on the French Broad, and they were displaced, but they loved TVA."

The Tennessee Architecture Foundation, on the occasion of TVA's 75th anniversary last year, looked at another lasting revolution TVA wrought.

"We had this idea before all the coal ash spills and environmental maladies," Frierson said. "The part that could be told by us is the architectural history."

Along with electricity, the Authority brought bold architectural style to areas that had lacked it.

"Certain buildings, certain projects, are larger than life. Industrial designers, graphic designers, all of the arts were brought in to do a project that really only needed an engineer. There was a concerted effort, from the lettering down to the doorknobs," Frierson said, pointing at a curved-fronted control house of a Tennessee Valley dam.

"All were part of a statement — TVA is something profound in Tennessee history and will have a lasting impact on the people and the land."



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Jim Christain looks over artwork on display in the Tennessee Architecture Foundation exhibit "Power and Domesticity" at the Customs House Museum. (Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle)



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Jim Christain, left, Lane Lyle and Jim Frierson are part of volunteers from the State of Tennessee Architecture Foundation who put together a new exhibit, currently on display at the Customs House Museum. (Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle)

IF YOU GO

"Power and Domesticity: The Architectural Legacy of TVA"

WHEN: On display at Customs House Museum and Cultural Center now through Nov. 29. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays and 1-5 p.m. Sundays.

WHERE: Customs House and Cultural Center, 200 S. Second St.

COST: Free to Museum members. Adults, \$5; seniors over age 55, \$4; college students with picture ID, \$2; children ages 6-18, \$1; no charge for children under age 6. General admission is free to all on Sundays.

CALL: 648-5780.

As a visual reminder of the architectural mark TVA left on the region, the Tennessee Architecture Foundation commissioned a book about it.

ONLINE: www.customhousemuseum.org

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