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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TIRED OF THE ORDINARY? CHECK OUT WISCONSIN'S QUIRKY MUSEUMS

MADISON, Wis. (Oct. 25, 2012) – Whether it's mustard, accordions or angels, Wisconsinites have a unique way of taking a hobby and turning it into an exhibit hall. Our state is home to an eclectic mix of museums that go beyond the ordinary and are the product of a passionate person with a vision; a vision so strong that erecting a museum is quite simply the most reasonable option.

With the winter season approaching, spend a fun day indoors exploring this list of Wisconsin's unique museums. Both entertaining and educational, these museums offer an out-of-the-box perspective. In the spirit of unconventionalism, here are some of our favorite museums that fall under the heading, "only in Wisconsin."

If rocks could talk: House on the Rock, Spring Green

No words can truly describe House on the Rock in its entirety, but we'll try. This classic Wisconsin museum features hundreds of eclectic displays and out-of-the-ordinary collections. The world's largest carousel, standing 35 feet tall and illuminated with more than 20,000 lights, is a rare masterpiece. Another spectacular display is the daring Infinity Room, a glass-walled structure that projects 218 feet over the Wyoming Valley, which lies 156 feet below. There's also a giant sea creature longer than the Statue of Liberty. Is your mind spinning yet? This is a "see it to believe it" destination where the creative mind of architect and owner Alex Jordan lives and thrives. And seeing as he built the house by dragging stones to the top of a 75-foot chimney of rock, one at a time, that's dedication we simply can't ignore. Bravo Mr. Jordan, you've put House on the Rock at the top of our list.

All roads lead to Hartford: Wisconsin Automotive Museum, Hartford

Go from zero to amazed in three seconds at this museum. Dale Anderson is the driving force behind the Wisconsin Automotive Museum in Hartford. Twenty-six years ago, Dale, with the help of the community, opened the museum to showcase the city's history and connection with car making. The Kissel, a high caliber custom automobile was

A 1920 Kissel Speedster nicknamed "Goldbug"
Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Automotive Museum

manufactured in Hartford from 1906 to 1931. Of the 35,000 produced, only 200 exist today and many are on display here. But you won't just see cars here, you'll see trucks, an airplane and even a 250-ton operating steam locomotive – with tracks that run right into the building! Wisconsin car enthusiasts will also appreciate the display on the Nash, a car manufactured in Kenosha in the early 1900s. In fact, there is no other Nash museum in the U.S.

And all snowmobile trails lead to Eagle River: International Snowmobile Hall of Fame, Eagle River

Though we can't take credit for inventing snow, we can take credit for inventing the coolest thing to do in the snow. Snowmobiling has deep roots in Wisconsin, which is why it comes as no surprise that our state is home to not one, but two snowmobile halls of fame and museums. The International Snowmobile Hall of Fame in Eagle River showcases the sport's history and the people who have helped make snowmobiling one of the world's premier winter sports. And the museum is located where else? That's right, Eagle River. None other than The Snowmobile Capital of the World and just a stone's throw (literally it's 200 feet!) from The World Championship Snowmobile Derby. This year, 25,000 spectators are expected to attend the race on January 11-13, 2013 to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Visitors to the museum can take a self-guided tour that includes vintage sleds and groomers like the 1953 Ellison all the way to the high tech models of today.

Music in the ear of the beholder: World of Accordions, Superior

Whether it's polka music or simply the romantic tune of "That's Amore," there is nothing quite like an accordion to turn a song from "nice" to *unforgettable*. Walk into the World of Accordions museum in Superior and you'll see how these "squeeze boxes" have transformed throughout the years. Helmi Harrington is the living and breathing force behind the World of Accordions. At her Harrington Arts Center in Superior, she maintains the museum, repair shop, technicians' school and concert hall focused solely on the accordion. And this isn't a "nice" museum either; it's *incredible* and is the world's largest collection of accordion family instruments and cultural artifacts. But the music doesn't stop there. The accordion repair school is the only one in the U.S. and the Accordion-Concertina Hall, which was once a church altar, is now the stage for accordion performances. Scholars from as far as Austria have come to use the museum's archives. If you visit, you may be lucky enough to receive a short performance from Helmi herself.

Bergstrom-Mahler Museum in Neenah
Photo courtesy of the Fox Cities CVB

Holding the weight of the paper world: Bergstrom-Mahler Museum, Neenah

Hobbies come in all shapes, sizes and weights. At 10-years-old, Evangeline Hoysradt took an interest in a unique paperweight her grandmother owned. When her grandmother passed, the paperweight was given to another family member and forgotten. Years later at an antique show, Evangeline spotted a paperweight that looked just like it – no it wasn't her grandmother's, but it inspired her. Six-hundred and fifty-two paperweights later, she became a renowned expert. Her collection in the early 1940s was shown in exhibits across the country and today, can be seen in the now 3,000 piece collection at the Bergstrom-Mahler Museum in Neenah. In addition to having the world's most representative collection of paperweights, the museum has four permanent glass collections, a collection of Germanic drinking vessels and offers glass blowing

studio classes. Word to the wise, you might want to look with your eyes and not with your hands in this glass museum.

The handyman's dream: Wally Keller Tool Museum, Mt. Horeb

This museum really hits the nail on the head when it comes to unique. Wally Keller, a Mt. Horeb folk artist and sculptor, amassed a collection of over 3,000 hand tools dating back to the 1800s through the 1960s. Duluth Trading Company owner Steve Schlecht recognized the value in such a collection and the story it told about the history and ingenuity of America's working man. He put the tools on display at the Mt. Horeb Duluth Trading Company flagship store. You'll see hundreds of different wrenches, hand tools, unique railroad tools, tools used for wagons and buggies, woodworking and much more. And Wally was a pretty sharp guy himself; he knew how to use every tool in his 3,147-piece collection!

Sweet or spicy? Taste your pick: National Mustard Museum, Middleton

Standing in an all-night supermarket looking for the meaning of life, National Mustard Museum founder and curator Barry Levinson heard a voice, "If you collect us, they will come." That experience led to this most improbable museum, and a museum which now houses more condiments than you ever thought possible. Levinson has amassed more than 5,600 mustard varieties from 50 states and 70 countries. The museum is also home to hundreds of items of great mustard historical importance, including mustard pots and vintage mustard advertisements. Visitors can purchase mustard off the shelves at the museum, or from the first ever mustard vending machine. The museum also includes a tasting bar with free samples. The best part – admission to this wacky museum is free. And Barry or Mrs. Mustard (aka Patty, Barry's lovely wife) may be around to give a tour.

The birthplace of heavy metal: Castle Rock Museum, Alma

For a rare look at some of the most intricate and artistically fascinating armor out there, a Renaissance fair just doesn't cut it. You really need to visit the Castle Rock Museum in Alma. It all began when Gary Schlosstein, at age 10, acquired a Civil War musket for $3. Now his museum, which arose out of his personal collection and lifelong pursuit of historical weaponry, is the most complete arms and armor display in the Midwest. The museum takes you through 2,000 years of history and hundreds of pieces of arms and armor. Start with Rome, make your way through the Dark Ages, Crusades and the Renaissance. You'll be an expert by the time you leave the museum -- a real knight in shining armor.

Heaven sent: Angel Museum, Beloit

Every time a bell rings in this museum of 11,000 angel figurines, you can only imagine what happens. A love affair with an Italian bisque angel discovered in Florida by Joyce Berg was the impetus that began the world's largest angel figurine collection. Housed in St. Paul Catholic Church in Beloit, today the Berg Collection has over 13,600 angels in its collection – 11,000 on public display. Ranging from one-eighth-inch to full-sized, the angels are made in over 100 different materials from fine porcelain to macaroni. The museum also features a collection of 600 African American angels donated by Oprah Winfrey, who was given the angels by her fans.

Just your type: Hamilton Wood Type Museum, Two Rivers

Interior of the Hamilton Wood Type Museum
Photo courtesy of the Hamilton Wood Type Museum

Let us fill you in on the coolest new old thing: wood type. The art form of wood type is having a resurgence, and the Hamilton Wood Type Museum in Two Rivers is the only museum in the world dedicated to the preservation, study and production of printing and wood type. When a private collector almost purchased the equipment and patterns from the original Hamilton Wood Type Company, which was founded in Two Rivers in 1880, local businessman Jim Van Lanen persuaded the Historical Society to step in, keeping the history of wood type alive in the city. A museum was then created and now houses 1.5 million pieces of wood type and more than 1,000 styles and sizes of patterns. The museum is free and is also home to an amazing array of advertising from the 1930s through the 1970s.

Let's get to the pint: National Brewery Museum, Potosi

Psst…did you know there's a beer museum in Wisconsin? Go figure. But this isn't your run of the mill ode to grain; this is the National Brewery Museum. A brewery with mad hops, it's located in the small village of Potosi, population 700, which beat out cities like St. Louis and Milwaukee to become the site of the National Brewery Museum. Exhibits here include beer labels, bottles, coasters, glassware, advertising, signage and other memorabilia. And the museum offers a brewery transportation exhibit demonstrating how the area's trifecta of transportation (road, railroad and riverboat) influenced the local brewing industry. You'll work up a thirst taking all this in, so head to the Potosi Brewery on the first floor to sample a Good Old Potosi or seasonal microbrew.

Three rings make a right: Circus World, Baraboo

Baraboo is home to a deep circus history; in fact, the three largest circuses in the world were all located in Baraboo at one time. Today its history is preserved for future generations at the 64-acre Circus World Museum, the vision of a Ringling family attorney. Located on the original winter quarters of the Ringling Brothers Circus, visitors to this National Landmark Site can explore decades of circus history and a brand new animated miniature circus. A trip to the Circus World Museum includes walking around the campus to various buildings and seeing circus advertisements and artifacts. Did you know that Circus World is home to two-thirds of the world's surviving circus wagons? We're not clowning around.

WE CAN'T FORGET…

Not all of our favorites are open year round. Here are two other museums worth checking out when they reopen in the spring.

Whatever floats your boat: Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum, Spooner

Up a creek, without a paddle? Not at the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum in Spooner. This eclectic assemblage of boats is the vision of Jill Weber Dean and Jeff Dean. The Deans founded the Wooden Canoe Heritage Association in 1979. Active collectors of historical canoes, they donated the majority of canoes making up the collection. And this collection does not go overboard – it includes significant pieces from the golden age of North American canoeing as well as work by important contemporary canoe builders. The museum will reopen Memorial Day

weekend during Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Day with the unveiling of new exhibits and a wooden boat show.

Hook, line and sinker: Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum, Hayward
Fishing is ingrained in Wisconsin's heritage, so it is no surprise to find the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum located in the state's Northwoods. What you may find surprising – the Hall of Fame and Museum exists today because of the Jim Beam Whiskey Company. When the community tried to open the museum in the 1970s, finding funding was a challenge. After individuals and fish industry corporations would not bite on making the museum a reality, Jim Beam stepped in. The company started a 10-year program of collectible fish whiskey decanters for the museum. The decanters netted the Hall of Fame thousands of dollars in licensing fees and the rest is well, fishtory. What may stun the unsuspecting is the five-story-tall, 143-foot muskie replica that sits on the grounds. Visitors can venture inside this "Shrine to Anglers" to view displays and exhibits and enter the muskie's jaws, which serve as a 20-person observation deck. The museum is open April through October.

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