BEAR ALERT

Incredibly Rare Red Bears Arriving at Museum in Branson, Missouri

Branson, Missouri (September 8, 2023) – Tomorrow (Saturday, September 9) is National Teddy Bear Day, which gives us the perfect reason to share news about some new arrivals coming to the Titanic Museum Attraction in the Ozark Mountain community of Branson, Missouri. Though “black bears” in these parts have fur in a variety of colors – black, brown, cinnamon and blond – for this year’s holiday season, the museum will welcome some incredibly rare red bears … of the stuffed variety.

These critters, who will appear among the holiday décor throughout the attraction from November 4 through December 31, are a reminder that this is the museum’s “Year of the Titanic Children.” A special exhibit highlights the 135 passengers and crew members who were age 15 or younger when the Titanic set sail, and dozens of artifacts share the very personal stories that demonstrate the lengths families went to in their attempts to protect their next generation. (Of the 135 young passengers, the ultimate outcome was evenly split: 67 survived, 68 perished.) The exhibit is the largest display of Titanic children’s artifacts ever assembled.

As the museum’s crew wondered how to mark the holiday season while also honoring the children aboard the Titanic, they decided to create a special collection of teddy bears (fun fact: a group of bears is called a “sloth” or “sleuth”) that visitors can spot amidst a forest of Christmas trees. Those trees are decorated in a manner that pays homage to the Edwardian era, named for the British ruler during the years the ship was built. At that exact same time, Theodore Roosevelt was president of the United States, and it’s for him that the “teddy” bear was named. Roosevelt, a celebrated hunter, refused to shoot a bear cub because – if legends are to be believed – he said he couldn’t have looked his son in the face again if he had.
We know for sure that there was one very well-traveled teddy bear on the Titanic, and he was a Christmas gift in two different ways … but he was definitely not red. “Polar” was the constant companion of 6-year-old Robert Spedden, one of just seven children who traveled in First Class on the fateful journey. When the ship hit the iceberg, Robert arrived on deck clutching the snow-white teddy bear his aunt had given him the previous Christmas, and he fell asleep once safely in a lifeboat. Five hours later, he was put inside a cargo net and hauled up the side of the rescue ship Carpathia. Shortly afterwards, a crew member found a teddy bear on the floor of one of the lifeboats; a steward recognized it and sought out the Speddens on the Carpathia to reunite Robert with his bear. A year later, Robert’s mother wrote and illustrated a book that related the story of a bear named Polar who went on an adventure in Europe and ultimately survived the sinking of the Titanic. She presented it to Robert for Christmas in 1913 and shortly thereafter, that book – now called “Polar: The Titanic Bear” – was published widely.

That’s just one of thousands of stories that visitors to the Titanic Museum Attraction can learn during their time on the ship. The goal of the museum has always been to provide a stimulating connection to history that families can experience together. Honoring the memories of all those aboard is at the core of what museum President and Co-owner Mary Kellogg envisioned when the Branson attraction opened in 2006, and that human (and bear) focus is what makes the Titanic Museum Attraction one of the most visited sites in Branson.