

New book about Allen Park's Giant Tire nominated for Michigan's Notable Book List

Every year, the Library of Michigan selects up to twenty of the most notable books, either written by a Michigan resident or about Michigan or the Great Lakes. Published January 31, 'The Giant Tire' is already being considered for this year's list, which will be announced in January, 2020. This book represents a little over a year's worth of research, by local historian and author, Steven J. Frey.

He got the idea to write about the Giant Tire after reading posts about it on local interest Facebook group pages. "So many people posted comments about the tire that were just repeats of rumors and hearsay", Frey said. "It was also amazing to read that most of the comments were from people that had no idea that it used to be a Ferris wheel." That is when he decided that he wanted to learn all there is to learn about the landmark that has been a fixture in the City of Allen Park and metro Detroit since 1966.

Frey's biggest challenge was the fact that none of the company records of the structure have survived. Originally, U.S. Rubber sponsored the tire-shaped Ferris wheel for the 1964-65 New York World's Fair. At the conclusion of the fair, the Ferris wheel portion was sold off to an amusement park, and the outer, tire-shaped sections came to Allen Park to be reassembled as a roadside billboard. Since that time, U.S. Rubber changed its name to Uniroyal, relocated its tire division from New York City to Detroit, merged with BF Goodrich, and was finally sold to Michelin Group in 1989. At some point in time, all of the information about the Giant Tire was lost or destroyed.

"For research, Facebook is both a blessing and a curse", says Frey, "So many people feel the need to jump into a conversation and add their two cents about a subject, even if they have no idea what they are talking about." But every once in a while, Frey finds small clues which lead to great discoveries. "I was on a Facebook page dedicated to fans of the 1964-65 New York World's Fair, and saw a photo of a young woman holding one of the souvenir toys made of the Ferris wheel, next to a current photo of the same woman, now over 50 years older, holding another of the same toy", recalls Frey. The woman, Sue Oliverson, actually worked at the World's Fair selling ride tickets and those souvenir toys. Frey was able to make contact with her, to interview her. She also provided several rare, behind the scenes photographs which are included in the book. "Even though I don't have much use for what people have to say on Facebook, I never would have found Sue without it, and I never would have such great photos for the book", explained Frey.

Frey also found a post which lead to an introduction with Mr. John Townsend, who is the nephew of the man responsible for reconstructing the Giant Tire in Allen Park, and actually worked on the crew as a young man. In 1994, Townsend's company was responsible for giving the tire its new look, and the big nail in 1998. In addition to information, Townsend provided several photographs taken during the transition, all of which appear in the book.

"I drive past the Giant Tire every day on my way to work", Frey comments. "It was a lot of fun piecing together all the little fragments of information, to be able to preserve its history."

To order a copy of the book, go to www.GiantTire.info.