

## FIRST US INSTALLATION OF THE SENNHEISER guidePORT SYSTEM.

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TOPEKA, KANSAS: Ever since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution changed the course of Russia's history, artifacts of that country's tumultuous period of the Czars have been mostly hidden from public view. And, only on rare occasions since the fall of the Soviet Union have they been seen outside their permanent Russian home - The State Historical and Cultural Museum and Preserve of the Moscow Kremlin. This year, though, two U.S. museums are getting a chance to show a sampling of the collection of the trappings of ultimately doomed Russian royalty, whose long reign ended with the deaths of the Romanov family and the ascent of the communists. WONDERS: The Memphis International Cultural Series, Memphis, Tennessee had the exhibit from April through October, and the Kansas

International Museum, in Topeka, Kansas now hosts it through March 2003.

### Ability to Learn

Only at the Topeka exhibition of "Czars: 400 Years of Imperial Grandeur," however, will viewers get a chance to experience something as rare to the museum-going experience as the closely guarded Czar collection: the ability to easily learn about the artifacts and their historical context without having to fiddle with traditionally cumbersome personal audio guide systems.

That's because the Topeka museum is home to a breakthrough in exhibition audio made possible by Sennheiser's revolutionary new guidePORT, a wireless visitor information system that senses a visitor's location and automatically delivers - via a wearable headset/receiving unit - explanatory audio that corresponds to exactly what's being viewed. Unlike other systems common to the museum environment today that require users to press buttons that correspond to their location to activate the correct audio, as well as to start and stop the audio, guidePORT is virtually hands-free. The receiver unit's only button is one that stops the audio, another that restarts the location-specific recording from the beginning, and two that control volume.



### First in the US

Just as the Topeka museum stands out for being only one of two U.S. museums to show the Russian artifacts on the exhibition's current tour, it also has the distinction of being the first attraction in the United States to permanently install the guidePORT system. Earlier this year, guidePORT made its North American debut at El Rey Mayan



educational theme park on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. GuidePORT was brought to the museum's attention earlier this year by Larry Heilman, president of Smith Audio Visual Inc., a Topeka audio-visual contractor and longtime Sennheiser dealer. Aware that museum officials planning the exhibit were concerned about a repeat of audio system problems experienced in "The Treasures of the Czars" exhibition in 1995 that employed cassette tapes that had to be rewound after each use, Heilman contacted Sennheiser and discovered guidePORT might be the answer.

" I saw the system demonstrated at the National Systems Contractor Association (NSCA) show in Denver, and then a couple of months later gave a demo to the museum board," Heilman says. "They quickly said that was what they wanted." After comparing its price and performance characteristics with other possible systems, the board opted to purchase guidePORT, placing an initial order for 800 headset/receiver units and leaving the door open to eventually adding 700 more. "Ultimately, there wasn't that much difference in price between guidePORT and the other systems we could have gone with - only about 5 or 10 percent," says Eric Davis, chief operating officer of Cultural Exhibitions & Events, Inc., a Topeka-based company that helped arrange for the exhibition's Topeka stop.



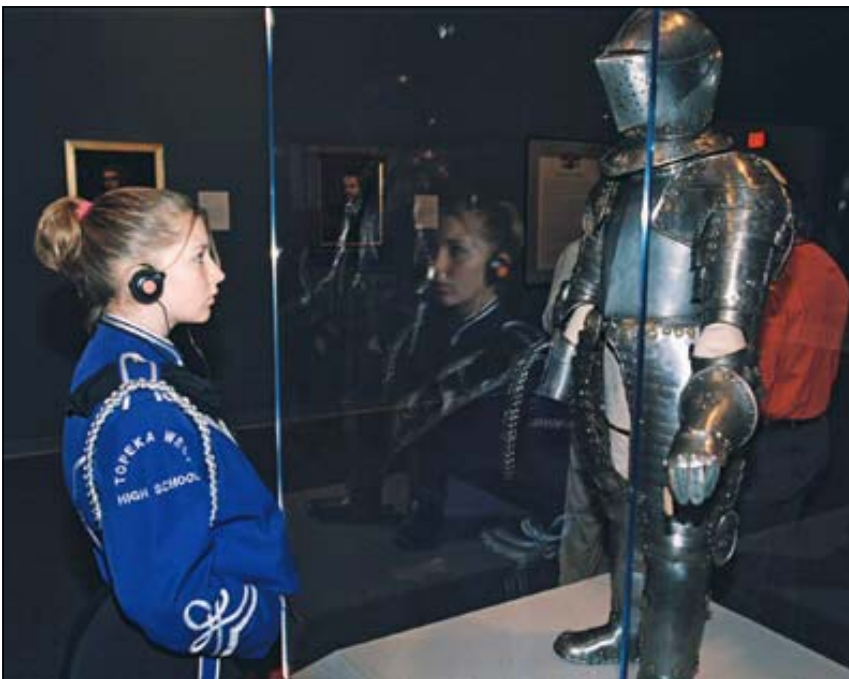
## Successful Start

In the days after the exhibit's October 15th opening, which drew several hundred, the head of the company that manages the museum says she was convinced the museum board made the right decision to install guidePORT. "What we like about it is that it's state-of-the-art and will be so much more convenient for our visitors because no one has to fool around with punching in numbers or pointing wands to get the right audio," says Betty Simecka,

president and CEO of Cultural Exhibitions and Events, Inc. "I've been in museums where you have to walk clear around a display case to find a number so you can punch it into an audio unit. With this system you don't have to think about those things, and you can stop where you want without going in any kind of order."

## Bill Kurtis is speaking through guidePORT

The exhibit's 267 artifacts, which include everything from royal regalia, church and state vestments and religious icons to weapons, portraits and ceremonial horse equipment, are displayed in 11 galleries of the new 30,000-square-foot museum, a converted Montgomery Ward store attached to a suburban shopping mall. The artifacts and exhibits are



*A member of the Topeka West High School Band exploring one of Kansas International's most exciting artifacts.*

described in nearly 50 total minutes of audio, narrated by Kansas native and veteran television newsman Bill Kurtis, who hosts award-winning historical and investigative programs on the A&E cable television channel. Visitors are able to listen to Kurtis' descriptions as they walk through the museum thanks to a system designed to deliver pre-recorded digital audio clips using radio frequencies. The exhibit floor is strategically partitioned into multiple cells, each of which covers the area of one or more galleries. Associated with each cell and program type (e.g. language) are a base transmitter and an antenna. All audio files reside digitally in the base transmitters and are continuously broadcast into their cell. As a cell is entered, an identifier triggers the visitors' receiver, initiating a rapid download of the digital audio and storage into the receiver's memory. As an exhibit is approached, another associated identifier triggers the receiver to play the corresponding audio file.

## Freedom of Movement

Because the receivers are continually downloading the audio pertinent to a particular area, visitors can freely move from zone to zone as they wish. As they step away from one attraction and approach another, the audio for the prior exhibit gradually fades, while that for the new one starts playing from the beginning. Upon returning to any zone previously visited, the audio is still available and any file again picks up from the start upon demand. The visitor has additional flexibility with buttons on the unit that stop and restart the audio from the beginning of the last file played. Norbert Hilbich, business area manager for installed sound for Sennheiser, who helped develop guidePORT and traveled from his home base in Germany to help fine-tune the Topeka system before its debut, says guidePORT 's software and RF platform delivers a system that does away with a lot of the headaches that can arise in operating more traditional mobile audio. "Unlike with a CD or tape-based system there



are no moving parts in this - with the exception of the visitor," says Hilbich. "This is really a new generation audio system for this environment. It was designed over a five-year period as a successor to both infrared and other radio frequency systems, with the goal of minimizing the need for visitor interaction with audio technology and making the receiver unit as comfortable and easy to use as possible." Along with other Sennheiser personnel, including technical manager Uwe Sattler, Hilbich worked closely with Smith Audio Visual's Heilman and James Hebert to get guidePORT up and running before the exhibit's debut. Only after the building renovation was complete could Smith Audio Visual begin installing the system, fixing the antennae in the building's open ceiling, positioning and fine-tuning the identifiers in the galleries for the correct sensitivity and uploading via computer the narrated audio files using specialized guidePORT software. The team ended up having to scramble to ready the audio files in time; uploading the 90, audio files from the recording studio via e-mail began late afternoon of the day before the opening and took until the wee hours of the morning of Oct. 15 to complete. With a successful exhibition opening behind it, the museum has its eye on opportunities to expand guidePORT 's utility and take advantage of the relative ease with which changes in the audio script can be made.

## Tracking Success

" After the exhibit's been open for a month or so, we'll probably do an evaluation and see if there's a gallery or area that's maybe not being explained well enough. We can go in and make changes relatively easily," Simecka says. "One of the nice things about guidePORT is that we can constantly improve upon the narration in the audio tour, whereas with a cassette system we were more or less locked in to what was produced." One of the ways the museum will be able to evaluate the quality of the audio tour is by taking advantage of guidePORT ability to closely track visitor traffic patterns. The system's software is capable of generating statistics that are highly valuable

to the museum, such as time spent in each zone and the exact path traveled. If an analysis shows, for example, that less time is spent at a particular exhibit, it may be a tip-off that there's a problem with the script that could be corrected. In a theater associated with the museum, guidePORT demonstrates its usefulness by taking advantage of its ability to provide live audio. Future possibilities include the ability to configure the system to deliver messages - such as announcements relating to impending museum closing or even emergency messages - to briefly cut into the recorded audio.

## **The Future**

While the Kansas International Museum makes plans to utilize guidePORT's capabilities for future exhibits, Sennheiser is looking to expand guidePORT's notoriety in the museum world. Designed specifically with the needs of museums and other exhibit-centric users in mind, guidePORT is viewed by Sennheiser as a tool that can revolutionize both the visitor's experience and the way museums design exhibits. Sennheiser envisions using the Topeka site as a means of acquainting both its dealers and the museum world with guidePORT's features. Already, the Topeka installation appears to have sparked the interest of some museum curators. Just prior to the Oct. 15th opening, some 90 museum representatives who were in the area for an American Museum Association meeting toured The Kansas International Museum and got to sample guidePORT's features.

" We showed them the system and they were amazed," Davis says. "I don't think the museum world has thought much about visitor navigation issues, but they're going to have to in the future." With all of its relevant features, guidePORT is indeed likely to have a strong future in the museum world. "It's like having a private docent go through the museum with you," says Hilbich.

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