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OR deserves to have National Manhattan Project Park

Guest Column

By **Bill Wilcox**

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OAK RIDGE, Tenn. — An Oak Ridge team of folks anxious to do what we can to increase both general, as well as heritage visitors, to our fair city has been working with both the National Park Service (NPS) and with Cindy Kelly for the past 3.5 years of their study. The NPS has held very close through that whole period what they were thinking with the result that we here were surprised and disappointed to learn that the NPS has decided they can't manage the complexities of coordinating the telling of the Manhattan Project at all the three main sites.

They say they can only handle Los Alamos and propose to have the National Park there -- where the effort was less than four percent of the Manhattan Project's total. They chose it because of the concentration of scientific talent there, also the historic preservation there involves just a few very historic sheds/small structures where the "Little Boy" bomb and "Trinity" device were developed, the Slotin building, a Quonset hut, a concrete basin, maybe other things, plus a few historic homes. And they really like the isolated and unique mesa site that still looks a lot like it did in wartime.

We think all that is great and the Los Alamos story must be told and their relics saved. But we also feel future generations ought to learn the 96 percent "rest of the story" too. The enormous Hanford site with their one-of-a-kind Pu production reactors and "Queen Marys" chemical separation buildings was a vital supplier of Pu during World War II and long after. So too Oak Ridge, the uranium-enriching site with the largest of the three "Secret Cities" and with three signature facilities representing the most costly and complex plants of the project, and which also served as the home of the U.S. Engineering District that administered the entire project across the United States and Canada.

Oak Ridge also needs to have its National Park for another reason -- because we can best show and tell the story of the greatly beneficial legacies of the Manhattan Project to mankind that have been the product of our scientists and engineers' inventiveness in application of nuclear science over the 60 years since. Future generations need to learn these stories too, not just the story of the bombs that brought peace to an aching world. Our legacies include the great story of our stable and radioactive isotopes put to work in nuclear medicine and in industry and in agriculture, and the story of the development of civilian nuclear power reactors that have brought an increased quality of life to peoples all over the world.

NPS has through their fine national park system garnered the trust of the public wherever their arrowhead symbol appears inviting people to come see. We'd like their help in telling our story, with a few of their park rangers as our key attractions. We will be making a counter proposal that should overcome their stated concerns about geographic boundaries and other issues at the public hearing the NPS has scheduled for Jan. 26. The hearing will be at the Department of Energy Information Center, 475 Oak Ridge Turnpike, and they will have two sessions, 1 to 3 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. The comment period will be open until March 1.

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