

# “PICK BRISTOL”

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BRISTOL, Tenn. – Lorie Hand was blown away when she saw the 20-foot-tall guitar the Bristol Tennessee-Virginia Chamber of Commerce put in its front yard.

“It’s awesome,” said Hand, a Piney Flats, Tenn., resident who was walking through downtown Wednesday with some friends from New York. “It fits right in to the area.”

Chamber executives and local businessmen unveiled the guitar statue Wednesday to mark the group’s 100th anniversary. Made of aluminum and fiberglass components attached to a steel frame, the statue weighs 1,100 pounds, said Snyder Signs owner Dan Synder. His company built the statue, which was designed by Thompson and Litton engineer Scott Wilson.



Trevor Petry with Snyder Signs tightens a strap on the neck of the new guitar sign at the Bristol Chamber of Commerce Wednesday morning. Including the base, the new sign is 20 feet tall.

“It’s beautiful,” said Jim Fleischman, one of Hand’s friends from New York.

Fleischman and Hand said they wanted to return to the sign with a camera so they could get their pictures taken in front of the structure. Fleischman also said that when he saw the sign, he wanted to learn more about Bristol’s musical heritage.

That’s just the reaction Chamber President and CEO Lisa Meadows hoped the new sign would produce.

“There’s only one Birthplace of Country Music,” Meadows said, adding that the chamber spent \$43,000 of its own money designing and building the statue.

The city is known as the “Birthplace of Country Music” because of the Bristol Sessions, music recordings that took place here in 1927. During these sessions, New York talent scout Ralph Peer produced the first commercially successful country music album.

Wilson said he was thinking about that legacy when the chamber hired him to design a statue to commemorate its 100th anniversary. He also thought about using the city’s stock-car racing history at the Bristol Motor Speedway as a theme for the statue. But chamber officials said they went with the country music theme because it had the potential to attract tourists year-round rather than for just one or two events a year.

“Music can sustain Bristol as an economic driver,” said speedway President and General Manager Jeff Byrd, who chairs the chamber’s 100th Anniversary Committee.

Meadows said unveiling the statue is the first in a series of events commemorating the chamber’s anniversary. Others include building a commemorative brick pathway and a 10-panel sundial with photographic prints highlighting events in the city’s history. Meadows said she’d also like to make over-sized guitar picks that chamber visitors can take home as souvenirs to mark their trip to see the giant guitar.

“Pick Bristol,” Meadows said while contemplating her guitar pick idea. “That’s such a great marketing plan. I wonder who thought of it.”