

Atlanta '96: Shaping an Olympic and Paralympic City Opening at Atlanta History Center on September 18, 2020

30th anniversary of the announcement of Atlanta's selection as an Olympic host city—New signature exhibition examines the effect of the Games on Atlanta and how residents can spur change in their communities.

Major support of this exhibition has been generously provided by the James M. Cox Foundation, John A. and Marine Fentener van Vlissingen Family, Bank of America, The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, The Coca-Cola Company, Martha and Billy Payne, The UPS Foundation, Martie and Dennis Zakas, and The Rich Foundation.

Media Contact
Claire Haley
404.814.4129
chaley@atlantahistorycenter.com

Interviews and images available upon request



Atlanta '96: Shaping an Olympic and Paralympic City opens to the public on Friday, September 18, 2020, the 30th anniversary of the announcement that Atlanta, an unlikely contender, secured the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. More than 20 years after the 1996 Olympic and Paralympic Games, this new signature exhibition considers the impact of the Games on the city and our lives. The Games mean something different to everyone, including individuals involved in preparations, people living near venues, competitors, and fans. The exhibition places this recent past within the context of Atlanta's longer history of reinvention and growth initiatives, prompting visitors to think about how we can change the places in which we live.

Atlanta '96 tells new stories and expands on memories of the Games, placing Atlanta's Olympic and Paralympic histories in the context of the city itself. Drawn from Atlanta History Center's distinctive collections, the exhibition creates a visitor experience coupling iconic and unexpected objects, archival materials, and still and moving images along with specially developed touchless interactive experiences. The exhibition invites visitors to examine the people, events, and decisions that shaped the Atlanta we know today.

“The exhibition examines the long-term impact of the '96 Games on Atlanta with thoughts about how all of us can have an impact on our community,” says Sheffield Hale, President & CEO. “We tried to break out of the typical sports exhibition format that looks exclusively at the events and medals and look at what the Games meant to the city before, during, and after.”

Atlanta '96 features:

- Approximately 150 objects
- 200+ photographs and archival reproductions
- Historic footage from the Olympic bid, and Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Specially developed touchless interactives to expand the exhibition's urban history learning objectives
- 2600 square feet



The new exhibition is the next step in Atlanta History Center's work with the city's Olympic legacy. After the close of the 1996 Olympic Games, the Georgia Amateur Athletic Foundation, the organization that led Atlanta's Olympic efforts from the bid through the Games, designated Atlanta History Center as the repository for their artifacts and archives. This unique collection includes detailed professional records that document the Olympic candidacy, venue construction, mascot development, and other topics through photographs and visual archives, film footage, and artifacts from the Games.

Atlanta History Center has produced prior exhibitions on the topic of Olympic history, including the Centennial Olympic Games Museum (2006-2016), and partnered on community oral history and collection projects. Preparations for the new exhibition have spurred collecting initiatives that help Atlanta History Center document a fuller story of the city's time as host, including a focus on objects and records from the Paralympic Games.

Atlanta '96 focuses on the city's late-20th-century urban landscape and regional development, placing the Games in context with the city's history of growth initiatives. The exhibition starts with a timeline experience, introducing the visitor to the urban history approach and putting Atlanta's history in context with other Olympic cities.

Once the visitor enters the gallery, *Atlanta '96* is organized along four themes. These themes communicate the steps of a major project, from ideas and intentions through impacts. They invite the visitor to consider the massive undertaking of the Games. The four themes follow:

- **Envisioning.** This theme highlights the profiles of eleven notable leaders who shaped the city's future in the years before the Olympic and Paralympic Games. These profiles attempt to capture a cross-section of Atlanta during the 1970s and 1980s, including former mayors, artists, athletes, activists, philanthropists, and disability rights advocates.

Media Contact

Claire Haley
404.814.4129
chaley@atlantahistorycenter.com

Interviews and images
available upon request



- **Campaigning.** This section tells the story of Atlanta’s bid for the 1996 Olympic Games, including the process of gaining funding and public support in the years before the summer of 1996. It highlights parallel activities, such as the push to include the Paralympic Games and the Olympics Out of Cobb protest movement. In the process, it reveals the way that actions and ambitions clashed and collaborated with the Games.
- **Realizing.** This theme highlights the work behind the Games—developing infrastructure, building and repurposing venues, stagecraft—and the impact on local communities and venue-adjacent neighborhoods. This section also presents visitors with the opportunity to relive select Olympic and Paralympic moments and view items from the Games.
- **Reflecting.** The final thematic section invites visitors to think critically about the benefits and costs of the Games, and similar events on Atlanta and cities in general. It asks visitors to think about the future of Atlanta and their ideal vision for their own communities.

“Visitors will see that the Games changed Atlanta and Atlanta changed the Games. But we also want this exhibition to encourage understanding of how urban change has historically happened, how people have felt those impacts in different ways, and, most importantly, spark imagination and interest in how we might do things in the future,” says Olympic and Paralympic Exhibition Curator Sarah Dylla.

The exhibition draws heavily from the Georgia Amateur Athletic Foundation Collection while weaving in objects and materials from individual donors and local organizations to expand the stories of how this major event impacted the city’s residents, how they got involved, and how the Paralympic Games grew during this time.

Highlights of the collections on view in the exhibition include:

- **Torches and medals from the 1996 Olympic and Paralympic Games** and previous Olympic Games
- **Design prototypes and planning records** from the Olympic bid effort and Games preparations

Media Contact

Claire Haley
404.814.4129
chaley@atlantahistorycenter.com

Interviews and images
available upon request



- **Artifacts of the early commercial internet** designed for a technologically advanced Olympic Games
- **Izzy and Blaze**, the mascots of the 1996 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- **A 15-foot mural** painted by athletes from across the world during their stay in the Olympic Village
- **Documents** from Atlantans who organized Olympic-related projects or movements
- **Architectural models**, including a model of the Olympic Cauldron by artist Siah Armajani, and a model of Centennial Olympic Stadium alongside Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium by the Atlanta Stadium Design Team
- **Sports equipment, clothing, and athletic memorabilia** from Olympians and Paralympians
- **Souvenirs and merchandise** sold for revenue generation in advance of and during the Games

Atlanta '96: Shaping an Olympic and Paralympic City is on view beginning September 18, 2020. Visitors are encouraged to visit atlantahistorycenter.com or call 404.814.4000 for information on updated visitation guidelines due to COVID-19. Face coverings are required indoors. Atlanta History Center is open Tuesday–Sunday, 9am–4pm, last entry at 3:30pm.

About Atlanta History Center

Founded in 1926, the Atlanta History Center is an all-inclusive, 33-acre destination featuring the Atlanta History Museum, one of the nation's largest history museums, including *Cyclorama: The Big Picture* experience; three historic houses—the 1920s Swan House, the 1860s Smith Farm, and the 1830s Wood Cabin; Goizueta Gardens; Kenan Research Center; the Grand Overlook event space; a museum shop; Souper Jenny café; and BRASH coffee shop. In addition, the Atlanta History Center owns and operates Atlanta History Center Midtown, which includes the Margaret Mitchell House. Atlanta History Center Midtown is currently closed due to COVID-19.

Media Contact

Claire Haley
404.814.4129
chaley@
atlantahistorycenter.com

For more information, visit atlantahistorycenter.com.