Freedom Tower looking for memorabilia for Cuban exile experience exhibit

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Miami's historic Freedom Tower is unveiling a Cuban exile experience exhibit in September and it is asking the community to help them locate memorabilia to tell the story of the building and the refugees who passed through it.

Sponsored by Miami Dade College and the Miami Herald Media Co., The Exile Experience: Journey to Freedom, is a pictorial account of the struggles that the Cuban exile community has endured since Fidel Castro's 1959 rise to power, and the successes they have achieved in the United States.

The exhibition, overseen by Jeremy Mikolajczak, the tower's executive director and chief curator, will be part of a permanent collection at the national landmark building.

Commonly known as El Refugio, the tower is significant because it represents the important story of the Cuban exodus to America and resettlement during the Cold War. It is also referred to as the “Ellis Island of the South,” Mikolajczak said. Built in 1926, the tower was the original home of the Miami Daily News.

The tower is asking the public to donate or lend memorabilia for the exhibit and is inviting anyone who wants to contribute to bring items from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, July 26, to the tower at 600 Biscayne Blvd.

Once the exhibit opens in September on the second-floor of the tower, it will be divided into two areas:

A permanent display will showcase the Freedom Tower's role as a processing center for Cuban

The second hall will be showcasing different Cuban exodus, starting with Operation Pedro Pan, which took place between 1960 and 1962 and brought more than 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children to Miami. Many of the children later received medical care and other services at the tower once they reunited with their parents in Miami. The Pedro Pan exhibit will last about two-years.

The tower is asking those who took part in that exodus — in any capacity — or who were processed at the tower, to lend or donate their memorabilia to the exhibit. Photos, trinkets, official paperwork, passports, immunization card, toys, clothing worn during the trip to the U.S. are wanted. Anything that captures the feel of the time.

Helping launch the exhibits are Pedro Pan veterans, along with the Operation Pedro Pan Group Inc. organization, Barry University Archives and Special Collections, the University of Miami’s Cuban Heritage Collection and the Florida International University Libraries.

Parking will be available next to the tower for those attending.

For more information on the collection of items, call MOAD at 305-237-7700. You can also contact Luisa Yanez of the Miami Herald at 305-801-3781 or at lyanez@MiamiHerald.com

More information

IF YOU GO:

What: Cuban exiles are being invited to drop off memorabilia related to Operation Pedro Pan or the Freedom Tower as a refugees processing center for upcoming exhibit.

When: Saturday, July 26

Time: 12 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Where: Freedom Tower, 600 Biscayne Blvd. (Parking is available)