

# Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

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## *A gala opening for the new gateway to Monticello*

**A** NEW ERA FOR Monticello and its visitors began April 15 with the Grand Opening of the Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith Education Center.

All features and facilities of the 21st-century gateway to Monticello were opened to the public on that date amid fanfare befitting such a significant occasion.

The public debut of the center's interpretive aspects – a powerful introductory film, four groundbreaking exhibitions, and a hands-on activity room for children – was preceded by events saluting both Jefferson and significant contributors to the project. Though rainy weather forced the relocation of some activities from Monticello's West Lawn to the new center's Courtyard, the bulk of the program went on as planned and a celebratory atmosphere prevailed.

The first phase of the proceedings included a ceremonial ribbon-cutting at the Robert H. and Clarice Smith Gallery, which houses the four exhibitions, and the formal unveilings of the Monticello mural in the lobby of the Carl and Hunter Smith Education

Center and the statue of Thomas Jefferson on the upper level of the new complex.

The centerpiece of the opening-day program was a celebration of Jefferson's lasting legacies that featured remarks by Annette Gordon-Reed, winner of a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize for *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, and Michael Beschloss, NBC News' presidential historian and the author of numerous books, including *Presidential Courage: Brave Leaders and How They Changed America, 1789-1989*. The audience of about 400 also heard words from Gerald L. Baliles, former governor of Virginia and current director of the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia; Thomas Jefferson Foundation Board of Trustees Chairman Alice W. Handy; and Foundation President Leslie Greene Bowman. Music was performed by Charlottesville Municipal Band; the



TJF/Mary Porter

**The Williamsburg Field Musick fife and drum corps performing in the Courtyard.**

Combined Choir of the Union Run Baptist Church in Keswick, a congregation founded by former Monticello slaves; and an ensemble from the UVA Marching Band.

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Thomas Jefferson  
MONTICELLO

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*Gala opening*

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The official opening of the new center took place at 12:30 p.m., signaled by music from Jefferson's era played by the Williamsburg Field Musick fife and drum corps. Also present to meet, greet, and entertain visitors were Bill Barker, portraying Thomas Jefferson; Tara



TJF/Stephanie Gross

**A young guest taking in the 'Boisterous Sea of Liberty' exhibition.**

Wheeler, the reigning Miss Virginia; and fiddle player Pete Vigour.

The 42,000-square-foot Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith

Education Center is the largest capital project and most ambitious educational initiative in the history of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which has owned and operated Monticello since 1923. Located on the lower slope of Monticello mountain, the center comprises five pavilions around a central courtyard. The three-level complex follows the contour of its hillside setting and blends into the wooded landscape with natural building materials, two "green" roofs, and other environmentally sensitive elements.

The center's visitor amenities – a café with indoor and outdoor seating, a spacious gift shop, and an indoor ticket and information counter – were put into operation in November 2008. The features that were opened April 15 – the exhibitions *The Words of Thomas Jefferson*, *Thomas Jefferson and 'the Boisterous Sea of Liberty,'* *Making Monticello: Jefferson's*



TJF/Stephanie Gross

**Annette Gordon-Reed speaking during the Grand Opening program.**

*'Essay in Architecture,'* and *Monticello as Experiment: 'To Try All Things,'* the introductory film *Thomas Jefferson's World*, and the hands-on Griffin Discovery



TJF/Michael Bailey

**First-day attendees viewing the exhibition 'To Try All Things.'**

Room – transform the visitor experience through dynamic content presenting fresh perspectives on Monticello and the enduring significance of Jefferson's life and ideas.

Surrounding the Grand Opening, the Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith Education Center was featured in a number of major media outlets, including the New York Times, Washington Post, Associated Press, USA Today, Boston Globe, Baltimore Sun, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Orlando Sentinel, and BCC World News America.

Videos and additional photos from the April 15 Grand Opening and detailed information about all aspects of the Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith Education Center are available online at [www.monticello.org/featured/new\\_vc.html](http://www.monticello.org/featured/new_vc.html).



TJF/Mary Porter

**Bill Barker welcoming young visitors to the new Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith Education Center.**



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TJF/Stephanie Gross

**Members of the crowd observing the opening ceremonies.**



TJF/Michael Bailey

**Michael Beschloss delivering his remarks.**



TJF/Stephanie Gross

**Willis Carter singing with the Union Run Baptist Church Combined Choir.**