

Helen Keller Statue and Exhibit Tour Alabama

Tour Raises Awareness of Alabama Native Keller's Legacy to Save Sight, Speech and Hearing

(BIRMINGHAM, AL) February 24, 2010 – A statue portraying the dramatic moment when Helen Keller was liberated from the “double dungeon of darkness and silence” is part of an exhibit now touring the state of Alabama to raise awareness of Helen Keller and the Foundations that carry on her work – the Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation and the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for the people of our state to learn more about Helen Keller and how her oft-stated goal to end preventable blindness and deafness continues to inspire our global efforts in medical research,” said Robert Morris, M.D., president of the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education.

Mike McMackin, president of the Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation said, “We hope those who visit the statue will also visit Ivy Green in Tuscumbia to gain a firsthand appreciation of Helen’s remarkable ascent out of darkness and silence.”

Created by noted sculptor Edward Hlavka, the 1,000-pound bronze statue poised on a base of Sylacauga marble matches one on display in the main hall of the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center in Washington, D.C. The statue depicts the moment in 1887, when Keller’s teacher Anne Sullivan spelled "W-A-T-E-R" into her hand while holding her other hand under a water pump and Keller realized meanings were hidden in the manual alphabet shapes Sullivan had taught her to make.

The life-size image of Helen Keller as a seven-year-old was designed to be approachable and inspiring, especially to children. It is fully accessible from all sides so that all visitors, regardless of their personal limitations, may touch and feel Keller’s likeness.

Helen Keller, who lost her sight and hearing as a child, later learned to speak and earned a degree from Radcliffe College, the women's branch of Harvard University. She traveled the world as an adult, wrote 12 books and championed causes including women's suffrage and workers' rights. She was an internationally celebrated advocate for those with disabilities.

“I’m thrilled that Great-Aunt Helen’s commitment to improving the lives of those with disabilities continues in Alabama, the nation and the world,” said Keller Johnson-Thompson, vice president of education for the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education. “She would be pleased to know that the disabled have a voice and that great progress has been made to improve their daily lives.”

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The tour, conducted jointly by the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education and the Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation, is scheduled to visit several locations, including:

- Huntsville Museum of Art – now through end of March
- Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind in Talladega – first week in April
- Birmingham Museum of Art – mid-April through May
- Ivy Green, Helen Keller Birthplace, Tuscumbia – June and July
- The Mobile Museum of Art– August and September
- Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts – October and November
- State Capitol in Montgomery – December (Final installation)

The statue's June and July visit to Keller's hometown of Tuscumbia coincides with the annual Helen Keller Festival sponsored by the Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation.

Also included in the exhibit are several items on loan from the American Foundation for the Blind in New York, including:

- The Presidential Medal of Freedom awarded to Helen Keller by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964;
- A Japanese lacquer musical photograph album presented by the people of Japan to Keller during her visit to their country;
- An openwork embroidered gold and silver silk thread necklace, also known as a tribal cloth, presented during a visit to Hyderabad, India in 1955;
- Academic regalia and doctoral attire presented when the University of Glasgow conferred upon Keller an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (L.L.D.) in 1932; and
- Braille Writer presented to Keller by the Royal Society for the Blind of London.

Tour sponsors include the Daniel Foundation of Alabama; AT&T Alabama; Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital; Alabama Power Foundation; HealthSouth Corporation; and BBVA Compass Bank.

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About the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education

Based in Birmingham, Alabama, USA, the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education strives to prevent blindness and deafness by advancing research and education. For more information visit helenkellerfoundation.org.

About the Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation

The Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation preserves and manages Ivy Green, the birthplace of Helen Keller in Tuscumbia, Alabama, USA. For more information visit helenkellerbirthplace.org.