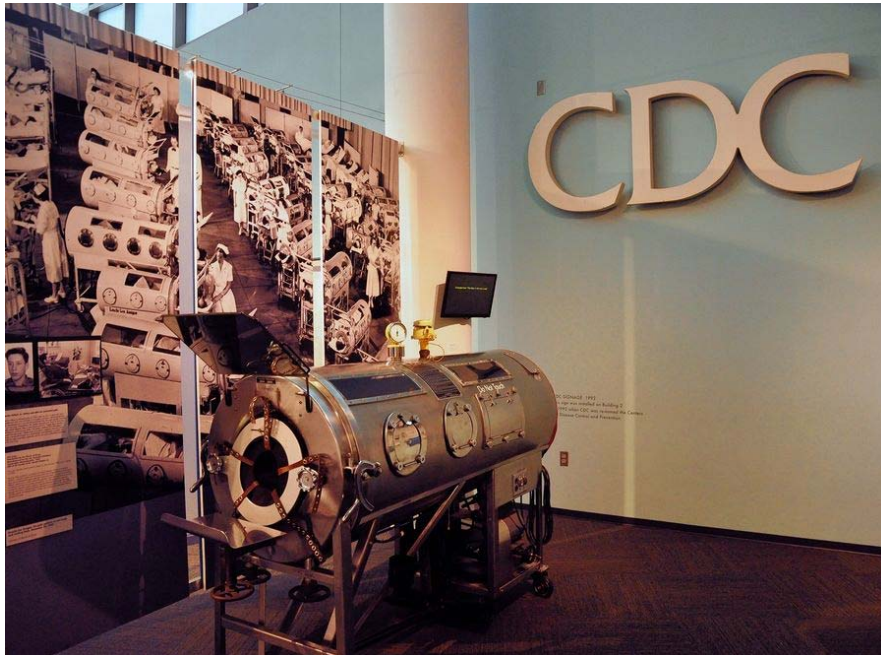


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Gerbusters on display at Atlanta CDC Museum



An iron lung, a relic from the early treatment of polio, is displayed at the David J. Sencer CDC Museum in Atlanta, Ga. *Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier*

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If you're a germaphobe you might want to stop reading now.

You could be freaked out by the displays in this museum showcasing, in sometimes graphic detail, the sorts of diseases that -- no pun intended -- plague humankind.

But on the other hand, you might be reassured knowing highly skilled scientists work 24/7 to fight worldwide health horrors at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia.

Georgia's capital has many great art and history museums. It also has some a bit more unusual and a few downright oddball. My favorite, the David J. Sencer CDC Museum, occupies part of the headquarters of the CDC, the only federal agency headquartered outside the Washington, D.C., area.

My first clue these folks are, um, deadly serious about their work here? Armed guards at the gate to this vast complex used mirrors to check for bombs under our tour bus and kept their eyes trained on us as we were escorted inside the building. We submitted photo IDs and went through a security screening that would make a TSA supervisor proud.

Visitors don't need to be part of a group to take a free self-guided tour, nor do they need an appointment unless there are more than 10 people in their party. But for groups of 10 to 30, I highly recommend booking tours guided by CDC employees who volunteer their time to tell visitors about the important work that percolates behind these walls. When she isn't guiding visitors on her lunch break, our docent, Latoya Simmons, told us she studies foodborne illnesses. She specializes in salmonella and e coli. Sweet.



The David J. Sencer CDC Museum displays a bottle of chiller water taken from the roof of Philadelphia's Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. It contains Legionella bacteria -- now dead -- first identified at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Ga. - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

The museum occupies two floors, the top devoted to temporary topics on global health. Now through May 1, 2020, "Changing Winds: Public Health and Indian Country" will demonstrate how tribal nations in the U.S. address modern-day health challenges while using traditional knowledge and practices.

Bottom floor exhibits explain the work and history of the CDC. The agency grew out of a desire to eradicate malaria, a big problem in the South in the early 1900s that drew the attention of Robert Woodruff, former president of The Coca-Cola Co. based in Atlanta. He had a hunting preserve and farm hit hard by malaria and created a fund to study the disease at Atlanta's Emory University. In 1946, the Communicable Disease Center, or CDC, was founded and began work in a small office in the city. Its mission: malaria. A year later, Woodruff helped make a deal with Emory to sell the federal government 15 acres adjacent to the university for the tidy sum of \$10. CDC employees ponied up the money, a dime a piece. On this site, the CDC expanded its mission to promote global health, prevent disease and respond to bioterrorism and other medical emergencies around the world. The museum opened in 1996 on the CDC's 50th anniversary and became an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, welcoming 90,000 visitors a year.

From historical exhibits about malaria I moved on to other chilling topics such as swine flu, smallpox, the Zika virus, Ebola and post-9/11 issues. Remember the anthrax scare?



Volunteer docent Latoya Simmons, a scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Ga., helps a member of a tour group into a Level 4 lab biosafety suit at the David J. Sencer CDC Museum. -
Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

Simmons helped members of our group try on head-to-toe biosafety suits worn in some CDC labs. After mugging for cameras we quickly peeled off the blue suits that had become suffocatingly hot and gained a new appreciation for the day-to-day work of scientists here.

In an area addressing polio -- Simmons emphasized the disease is far from being eradicated around the world -- stood an iron lung from the 1950s. It reminded me of a torture device from "Game of Thrones." I rounded a corner and came upon a clear glass bottle of icky yellow liquid containing bacteria -- now dead, thank goodness -- that causes Legionnaire's Disease, a notable CDC discovery. Another exhibit took me back to the 1969 moon landing. The CDC worked with

NASA to quarantine astronauts upon their return to Earth on the off chance they encountered nasty alien bugs in outer space.

Posters, films and artifacts addressed present-day health issues: obesity, cancer, diabetes, smoking, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Though not preachy or scolding, the displays prompted me to leave the museum vowing to lose weight, improve my diet, exercise more and get a flu shot.

More quirky Atlanta-area museums

The Waffle House Museum in suburban Avondale Estates sits on the site of the first Waffle House. It opened in 1955 after two neighbors decided their community needed a 24-hour restaurant. It has since evolved into a Southern institution with 1,700 outlets in 25 states. The museum is open on Wednesdays by appointment only. Restored to its 1950s appearance, it displays more than 60 years of Waffle House memorabilia, including aprons, uniforms, a jukebox and menus with 1950s prices. The museum does not serve food, but you'll find a Waffle House just down the street.



The first Waffle House restaurant has been turned into a museum in suburban Atlanta, Ga. - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

Enter the World of Coke museum in downtown Atlanta and you'll be greeted with a complimentary ice-cold Coke to enjoy as you admire a display of folk-art Coke bottles in the lobby. Continue the tour past historical artifacts, the vault where the Coca-Cola secret formula is kept, a 19th-century soda fountain similar to the one where Coke was first served and displays of artwork in a pop culture gallery. Take a selfie with the Coca-Cola polar bear, don some goofy glasses to watch a 4-D movie and get fizzy in the Bubble-izer. Still thirsty? You can sample more than 100 of the company's most popular beverages around the globe at tasting stations arranged by geography: Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America. Inca Kola, anyone?

Speaking of Coca-Cola, the mansion that once belonged to the son of the founder of the soft drink company is now the Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, a community arts conservatory. Tour the home completed in 1920 in Tudor Revival style in Atlanta's Druid Hills neighborhood planned by Fredrick Law Olmsted, landscape architect of the Biltmore Estate and New York City's Central Park. Check out the mansion's white Italian marble fireplace and Tiffany chandelier in the dining room and the Great Hall with walnut panels similar to those on vintage Pullman railroad cars. If you're a music lover, the most impressive object might be a 20,000-pound Aeolian organ with 3,742 pipes, largest of its kind in the U.S. that remains in playable condition. If it's hot outside, thank the Italian Consulate for installing the mansion's air conditioning before the Italian team took up residence during the 1996 Summer Olympics.



The Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, a Tudor Revival mansion in Atlanta, Ga., that once belonged to the son of the founder of Coca-Cola, is open for tours. - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

She called it "The Dump," but this tiny apartment on the ground floor of a home in downtown Atlanta is where Peggy Marsh, aka Margaret Mitchell, lived when she wrote "Gone With the Wind." Inside the Margaret Mitchell House you'll learn about the author's life before, during and after her Pulitzer Prize-winning book was published. You'll also learn what she thought of the film based on her book. When it premiered in Atlanta its African-American actors weren't permitted to attend.

A two-story Victorian house in suburban Avondale Estates contains the very definition of odd. Part thrift and consignment shop, part antiques store, The Odd's End displays a collection of curiosities from voodoo dolls to embalming machines. The owner used to hoard his trove of strange stuff in his home until his wife complained she was living in "The Addams Family" house. During my perusal I took note of bloodstained dolls, a clown that popped out of a coffin and jars of formaldehyde containing goodness-knows-what body parts. The inventory changes as new arrivals come in and purchases go out. Though it's not strictly a museum, there's no charge to go in and gawk.

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Metro Atlanta, Georgia

Information: Discover DeKalb Convention & Visitors Bureau, (866) 633-5252, discoverdekalb.com

David J. Sencer CDC Museum: (404) 639-0830, cdc.gov/museum/

Waffle House Museum: (770) 326-7086, wafflehouse.com/waffle-house-museum/

World of Coca-Cola: (404) 676-5151, worldofcoca-cola.com/

Callanwolde Fine Arts Center: (404) 872-5338, callanwolde.org

Margaret Mitchell House: (404) 249-7015, atlantahistorycenter.com/explore/destinations/margaret-mitchell-house

The Odd's End: (404) 434-0235, theoddsend.webs.com/

• Information for the article was gathered during a writers' conference sponsored by Discover DeKalb Convention & Visitors Bureau.

<https://www.dailyherald.com/entlife/20191006/germbusters-on-display-at-atlanta-cdc-museum->