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Contact:

Claire Mullins

Director of Marketing

410.727.4808 x119

cmullins@thebmi.org

Baltimore Museum of Industry Invites Public to Help Choose Paint Color for Historic Crane

Restoration of WWII Whirley Crane Nearly Complete

BALTIMORE, MD – What color should the Baltimore Museum of Industry (BMI) paint the 100-foot-tall crane that oversees the museum’s waterfront campus: orange, green, blue, or red?

This summer, the BMI is gearing up to paint the 1942 shipyard crane that graces the museum’s campus, and is soliciting input from the public. Since the museum launched the Save the Crane Campaign with an online, crowd-sourced fund drive in 2016, many individuals, corporations, foundations, and public funders have helped to make the crane’s on-going restoration possible. The first phase of restoration—cleaning and sealing the crane’s cab, including removing some 350 lbs. of pigeon guano—was completed soon after.

Now the museum invites the public to weigh in on the most exciting step yet—choosing the color that will transform the crane. Once freshly painted and dramatically lit, the crane will take its place as a symbol of economic progress and a beacon on Baltimore’s skyline.

Votes can be cast online at www.thebmi.org or by texting the choice of color—red, orange, green, or blue—to 484848. Voting closes August 31. The winning color will be announced on September 6.

Built in 1942 and dubbed a “whirley crane” for its ability to turn 360 degrees, this Bethlehem Steel Clyde Model 17 DE 90 crane was instrumental in Bethlehem Steel’s prolific World War II shipbuilding effort. The crane’s unique full rotation feature allowed it to help the Bethlehem Steel Fairfield shipyard hit record-breaking production numbers of Liberty and Victory ships during the war. With more than 44,000 workers and dozens of whirley cranes, the yard was building one vessel per month by mid-1943, and launching an average of one ship every thirty-five hours.

Unlike many of its counterparts, this particular crane's service continued long after peace was restored. Following World War II, it was transferred to Bethlehem Steel's Key Highway shipyard. In an unprecedented experimental project in 1951, the crane helped "jumboize" a former Victory war ship for commercial use. This process involved adding a large midsection to the ship, and its historic success paved the way for many similar projects.

The crane remained in active service until 1982, when the yard closed. That's when the Baltimore Museum of Industry, eager to help Baltimore hold onto its incredible shipbuilding heritage, sought it out as a donation. The shipyard's new owners obliged, and the property's last standing crane was disassembled, sent down the Inner Harbor on barges, painted, and reassembled where it still stands today.

Unfortunately, after decades of weather exposure, the crane's appearance and structural integrity are in serious jeopardy. As the largest and most visible artifact in our collection, the whirley crane is poised to be a celebrated and cherished icon for decades to come.

ABOUT THE BMI:

The Baltimore Museum of Industry celebrates Maryland's industrial legacy and shows how innovation fuels ongoing progress. Our exhibitions, educational programs, and collections engage visitors in the stories of the people who built Baltimore and those who shape the region's future.

VISITOR INFORMATION:

The Baltimore Museum of Industry is located at 1415 Key Highway, Baltimore, MD 21230. The BMI is open Tuesday – Sunday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., and closed Mondays and some holidays. Free on-site parking is available. Admission prices, general museum information and directions can be found at www.thebmi.org. Follow us on Facebook at [BaltimoreMuseumofIndustry](https://www.facebook.com/BaltimoreMuseumofIndustry) and on Twitter at @BMIatWork.