

“Benjamin Franklin entertains at Expo”
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Aichi, Japan – The West Virginians on a business trade mission in Japan took a multisensory adventure Thursday afternoon during a tour of the U.S. Pavilion at the 2005 World Exp. The event is the first world’s fair of the 21st century. Strobe lights flashed like lightening, seats shook like waves of energy, and mist fell like rain on audience members during a presentation on six screens hosted by a 3-D Benjamin Franklin. “The Franklin Spirit” is the pavilion’s theme, in honor of the great innovator, and showcases American culture, values and technological achievements.

The pavilion featured a multimedia presentation where Franklin reflected on today’s technology, such as airplanes, spacecraft and digital cameras, and wondered what tomorrow’s advancements would be. “But, it all goes back to nature,” he said, tying into the Expo’s overall theme of “Naure’s Wisdom.” Visitors then walked through a hallway with a pavilion sponsor list and flags. West Virginia contributed \$1 million from the Governor’s Contingency Fund to Expo. “When we made our commitment to the World’s Fair, we were able to highlight West Virginia how we never have. I didn’t think of it as a donation, but an investment...a way to leap-frog ahead of other state,” Manchin said. “Rather than being a player we wanted to be a leader. This is a rich market for us to grow.”

Eighteen states and 42 corporations sponsored the \$30 million pavilion. West Virginia is one of the largest contributors, said U.S. Commissioner General Lisa Gable. “There are so many things people in Aichi have done to improve the lives of West Virginians. You have done so much for us,” Sen. Jay Rockefeller; D-WV said during a lunch reception for Japanese companies in the Franklin room, the pavilion’s posh, private VIP suite. The delegation also used the room to host a dinner for Toyota suppliers. Rockefeller and Manchin met with companies privately in the afternoon. Rockefeller threw his weight behind the Expo 10 years ago when Dr. Shoichiro Toyoda, the honorary chairman of the Toyota Motor Corp. asked for the senator’s support. Toyota’s head office is in the Aichi prefecture, which is like being in the same state as the Expo.

West Virginia was the first state to announce its support for the Expo, which provided big momentum for the United States’ participation, said Ioku Hiroyuki, deputy secretary-general of the Japan Association for the 2005 World Exposition. Visitors finished the 25-minute pavilion tour in The American Journey gallery, which featured a replica of the 1902 Wright Glider and the Mars Rover, a 27-foot-high display area showing same-day images of Saturn and its rings and a fuel-cell exhibit that turned hydrogen and oxygen into energy, producing water as its only byproduct.

Manchin and Rockefeller each test drove a Segway Human Transporter – a self-blancing, electric-powered scooter. “If I had one of them in Charleston, there wouldn’t be a

legislator who could get away from me,” Manchin joked. Later in the afternoon, Toyoda welcomed the West Virginians to the Toyota Group Pavilion. Toyoda led the West Virginians to an arena where a seven-member brass band made up of robots entertained the audience. Then, a robot on wheels rolled onto the stage and began rapping the phrase, “in movement is freedom, in movement is life.” Toyota’s main show, “The Three-Dimensional Mobility Opera” began with the birth of the universe and a person wrapped in fabric descending from the ceiling as the fabric unfolded. A globe rose up through a hole in the center of the stage and dancers emerged. Then, leaf-shaped robotic chairs with wheels shared the stage with the dancers.

The Expo started March 25, and runs through Sept. 25. there are 122 countries and 68 pavilions at the event. The governor and first lady hosted a 30-minute teleconference from their hotel suite with students studying Japanese at Buffalo High School in Putnam County. The students introduced themselves in Japanese and asked the Manchins questions about their Japan trip. The Manchins pointed out a few observations they’ve made throught the week: Not many Japanese people are over weight because they walk and bike a lot. They love fresh fish and live in smaller spaces. Society is very service-oriented and many students wear uniforms.