

Dallas' shrine to JFK is sec

By SHERMAKAYE BASS

In Dallas, cumulative attendance at The Sixth Floor's JFK assassination exhibit is far exceeding projections.

"It has turned out beyond anyone's expectations," says Bob Hayes, executive director of the Dallas County Historical Foundation, which runs the exhibit. "By the end of the fiscal year, Oct. 1, 1992, we had 404,834 people" — an average of 1,109 visitors per day."

On June 24 of last year, the museum welcomed its millionth visitor — a benchmark that arrived several months before its target date.

"The Sixth Floor, in my opinion, is the No. 1 attraction in Dallas," says Jorge Herrera, vice president of sales and marketing for the Dallas Visitors and Convention Bureau Tourism Division. "Anyone who comes to Dallas is going to be asking, 'Where did it happen?'"

Through the end of January, the museum had

had 1,235,386 visitors seeking the answer to that question. And with plans in the works for observances of the 30th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Sixth Floor public programs director Bob Porter predicts that this year's attendance will again exceed 400,000.

There is an irony behind the figures, though, and it isn't lost on Bob Hayes. That the former Texas School Book Depository — a place Dallas wanted to forget — has become one of the city's biggest tourist attractions makes some citizens uncomfortable, especially those who lived here in 1963.

"There's a lot of sensitivity over that issue," Hayes says. But the county had "no choice but to address the needs of the hundreds of thousands of people who were showing up in Dealey Plaza."

In addition to accommodating tourists and conspiracy aficionados, the museum is a place for emotional healing, he adds.

In page after page of guest logs, visitors have scrawled their opinions of the exhibit. One mes-

ond to none

sage was particularly striking:

"I am no stranger to political tragedy," a guest from the former Yugoslavia wrote. "This is a very moving exhibit."

Japanese visitor Kaora Nakashima wrote: "I noticed that not only Americans but also every country's people loved him ... the words he said to people impressed me so much."

Throughout the ledger, names from Eastern Europe, the Orient, South America and Africa are listed alongside those from Texas and Alaska.

The Kennedy mystique extended well past American borders, and the success of The Sixth Floor is proof of the world's continuing obsession, almost 30 years after JFK's death. — Dallas Morning News