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Where to admire great conspiracies

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Museum in Dallas home to many wild theories for both believers, bemused

By Michael Meachini

DALLAS — In the Conspiracy Museum, a voice talks in a dizzying spin of acronyms while pencil drawings on television screens show possible bullet paths, entry round locations, and a conspiracy time line leading to the conclusion that a "Professional War Machine" controls the presidency.

Along four walls, a mural depicts theories on how the "P.W.M." was involved in the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., as well as Sen. Edward Kennedy's Chappaquiddick scandal and the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007.

If there is a need for a conspiracy museum, then this seems the place for it. President Kennedy was shot around the corner in No-

vember 1963, an incident that has spawned scores of conspiracy theories.

For the believers or the bemused, the Conspiracy Museum gift shop sells commemorative coffee mugs, T-shirts, assassination theory books and copies of Paranoia magazine.

"We want to make people think," said Tom Bowden, the 57-year-old co-director of the museum. "They don't have to believe what we say here but, again, we hope they think and become more aware of what's going on."

The display opened Jan. 11, and about 800 paying customers have wandered in. Bowden expects those numbers to increase since the official opening Tuesday, the 27th anniversary of the assassination of civil rights activist King.

"You are only one short skip and two long jumps from Dealey Plaza, the birthplace of doubt," the museum voice intones, referring to the site of Kennedy's assassination.

"We could have put it in Springfield, but I don't think many people go there now," Bowden said of the Illinois burial place of Abraham Lincoln, whose assassination in April 1865 is the subject of photographs and news clippings on display in Dallas.

Brainchild of 'assassinologist'

The museum is the brainchild of

R.B. Cutler, an 81-year-old Boston architect and self-described "assassinologist" who has written several books, including "Umbrella Man," in which he theorizes that a man standing along the grassy knoll shot Kennedy with a dart that immobilized the president and made him an easier target for other marksmen scattered about.

It is Cutler, a practitioner of Zen and the editor of the Grassy Knoll assassination theory newsletter he published with a circulation of about 230, whose voice greets visitors and whose pencil drawings they see. His interest in Eastern philosophy influenced the mural, a mixture of mystical minimalism and Oriental symbols, and he ends each video presentation with the word "ahimsa," which, he says, means "non-forcefulness."

"The exhibit also has a sense of humor, admittedly at the expense of others. Members of the Warren Commission who investigated President Kennedy's killing and concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone are depicted as Asian figures prancing down a lane behind Jerry Flemmons, referring to the dance," according to the museum brochure.

In the gift shop, Gerald Posner's book "Case Closed," a defense of the Warren Commission's findings, is on sale — and listed as "Best Fiction of the Century" by the

"People will come." "I think it will make money. I think there will be enough interest that people will come," he said. "There's interest in the word 'conspiracy.'"

In his presentations, Cutler uses that word as a sort of descriptive blanket, covering everything that has happened around the presidency since World War II. He hopes visitors will see logic in his argument.

"Once that begins to permeate and gets across to people, I think they'll come and find out why things happened," Cutler said. "My guess is that they will have more people than the real museum on the simple theory that car wrecks attract large audiences," Jerry Flemmons, referring to the Sixth Floor Exhibit, a Dallas County Historical Foundation display in the Book Depository Building from which Oswald is believed to have shot Kennedy.

