

Rebuilt Griffith almost ready for next generation to explore

BY DANA BARTHOLOMEW, Staff Writer

GRIFFITH PARK - Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa hopped off a Galactic Express shuttle Tuesday to gape at an all-new Griffith Observatory.

"Here it is," declared the mayor, echoing the famous words of L.A. water chieftain William Mulholland nearly a century ago. "Gorgeous, isn't it? Beautiful."

City officials announced the Nov. 3 grand reopening of the Griffith Observatory after a five-year, \$93 million renovation and expansion. They also unveiled a temporary "by reservation only" timed-entry and shuttle system ahead of an expected visitor crush.

The 71-year-old Beaux-Arts architectural icon has been painstakingly preserved, its art deco luster burnished after 70 million visitors.

With double its former exhibit space, the Mount Hollywood landmark features a new planetarium, theater, cafe, classroom, bookstore and more than 60 stellar exhibits.

New entrances and elevators were added for the disabled.

"This is the palace for all of Los Angeles," said City Councilman Tom LaBonge before a whirlwind media tour. "This is the hood ornament for all of Los Angeles."

With only 199 parking spaces, the observatory will allow no drive-in access in the first few months after reopening.

Instead, visitors must make reservations via the Internet or a toll-free call center, or in person at the Griffith Observatory Satellite near the Los Angeles Zoo.

Hours will be from noon to 10 p.m. Tuesday to Friday and 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Galactic Express buses will then shuttle visitors from either the Hollywood & Highland Center or the Griffith Observatory Satellite near the zoo.

General admission is \$8. The price is \$4 for children 5-12 and adults age 60 and older. Children under 5 ride free. With an expected 6,000 visitors to ride the shuttles in November, the city will issue 1,200 free tickets.

Hikers and cyclists can visit the observatory for free with a 48-hour advance reservation.

On Tuesday, officials ogled the gleaming, immaculate reconception of Col. Griffith J. Griffith's gift to Los Angeles.

"I remember coming here as a young boy and being awestruck by the limitless universe that we're a part of," Villaraigosa told reporters.

"When people come here, they come here with this dream that is the American dream, but they come here because this is a city in which you can make it," he said. "This is a city where we have an observatory where you can have the opportunity to get a glimpse of the universe - without limits."