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Let computer do the walking in Bridgeport

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Article Text:

BRIDGEPORT -- Today the Web site that promotes tourism in Fairfield County unveils a virtual walking tour of downtown Bridgeport.

The 1.25-mile route laid out by the Fairfield County Convention and Visitors Bureau, at <http://www.visitfairfieldcountycct.com/walkingtours/>, will guide visitors past landmarks like McLevy Green, the Downtown Cabaret Theatre, the Barnum Museum and the Housatonic Museum of Art. There are 10 stops in all.

Taking a walking tour from the comfort of home is one thing, and actually walking the route is another. With that in mind, the Connecticut Post took an actual tour of the recommended route on foot. What follows are some impressions:

1. McLevy Green: People born in Bridgeport might find it necessary to visit here to get a copy of a birth certificate from McLevy Hall, the former City Hall, and now the repository for vital statistics. The hall sits on McLevy Green -- formerly known as City Hall Park -- a tidy, one-third acre of greenery that provides a respite after standing in line for papers.

Bounded by Main, Board, State and Bank streets, the green offers the shade of oaks and sycamores, under which are park benches and a furlong of low walls. The walls and elaborate paving-block walkways underfoot are the legacy of former Mayor Joseph P. Ganim,, who is serving a nine-year sentence in federal prison on corruption charges.

On March 10, 1860, Abraham Lincoln delivered a campaign speech at the old City Hall, constructed in 1853. Visitors can stand on the very steps where the legendary president-to-be stood.

2. Downtown Cabaret Theatre: From McLevy Green, walk west on Bank Street, and take a right onto Broad Street. Walk five blocks north. Visitors will be confronted with a prominent concrete staircase. About two-thirds of the way to the top, the stairs level off to a landing on which, to the left, is the Downtown Cabaret Theatre (www.dtcab.com) housed in a structure that once was a YWCA. Closed for a time earlier in this decade, the institution is back in business. On Saturday, "The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus" opens for children, and on Nov. 21, the musical "42nd Street" opens for a six-week engagement.

3. Bridgeport Holiday Inn: Walk back down the stairs and continue south on Broad Street for three blocks. Turn left (east) onto Cannon Street. While on Cannon, to the left is the Fairfield County Superior Courthouse, where, sooner or later, many area residents are summoned to serve jury duty. Straight ahead, on the other side of Main Street, is the Holiday Inn.

4. Bridgeport-Port Jefferson Ferry terminal: From the corner of Cannon and Main, walk south on Main for three blocks, past McLevy Green and the ornate, shuttered Mechanics & Farmers Bank building to State Street. Turn left on State and walk past the former bus depot and cross Water Street. Diagonally to the right is the pedestrian entrance to the ferry boat dock, which is accessed by crossing under the railroad tracks, which may be daunting for some. But the ferry terminal was recently rehabilitated, and it's a lovely spot to eat a brown-bag lunch on a sunny day.

5. Barnum Museum: Head back to State Street and turn south on Main. Walkers will pass the People's United Bank headquarters tower, officially called Bridgeport Center, designed by one of the greatest living architects, Richard Meier. Adjacent is an ornate, red sandstone building that opened in 1893 as the Barnum Institute of Science and History. Visitors who have a few minutes to spare and \$7 in their wallets should take time to explore this jewel box of a museum, housing a bizarre collection of the historic, scholarly and tawdry -- including the 2,500-year-old, mummified remains of Pa-Ib,

re-creations of Victorian-era rooms and even Tom Thumb's lilliputian carriage.

6 and 7. The Arena at Harbor Yard and the Ballpark at Harbor Yard: After exiting the museum, walk south on Main and proceed under Interstate 95. Along the route is a former Southern Connecticut Gas Co. building that's been vacant for decades. Across the street is a long, two-story building that's also been unused for years; it used to be a People's Bank office. The shadowy stretch under I-95 emerges at the Harbor Yard complex.

8. Playhouse on the Green: Walk north on Main. At State Street, turn left. Walk west a half-block and to the left will be the Playhouse on the Green. Next up: "The Santaland Diaries and Seasons Greetings," which plays for 10 performances, Dec. 5-21.

9. City Lights Gallery: Continue west on State for a few paces. Take a left on Markle Court, named in memory of one of the city's most famous radio announcers, Tiny Markle of the former WNAB. Walkers will come to City Lights Gallery, a hub of the local arts scene and a great place for those in the market for the avant-garde and the unusual.

10. Housatonic Museum of Art: Exit City Lights and continue south on Markle. A few steps away, take a right onto Cesar Batalla Way, named after one of Bridgeport's most beloved activists. This will take you to the Broad Street entrance of the Housatonic Museum of Art, with its holdings spread throughout Housatonic Community College. It's one of the most significant art collections of any two-year college in the nation and

includes works by Rodin, Picasso, Matisse, Miro, Chagall, Rodin, Mary Cassatt, Giorgio DeChirico, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Gustav Klimt and Ansel Adams.

The stops The Fairfield County Convention and Visitors Bureau (<http://www.visitfairfieldcountycct.com/walkingtours>) is posting a recommended walking tour of downtown Bridgeport on its Web site. Here are the stops on the tour:

1. McLevy Green
2. Downtown Cabaret Theatre: www.dtcab.com
3. Holiday Inn: www.hibridgeport.com
4. Bridgeport-Port Jefferson Ferry terminal: www.bpjferry.com
5. Barnum Museum: www.barnum-museum.org
6. The Arena at Harbor Yard: www.arenaatharboryard.com
7. The Ballpark at Harbor Yard: www.bridgeportbluefish.com
8. Playhouse on the Green: www.playhouseonthegreen.org
9. City Lights Gallery: www.citylightsgallery.org
10. Housatonic Museum of Art: www.hcc.commnet.edu/artmuseum

Caption:

John Burgeson/Staff photo The shuttered Mechanics & Farms Bank building on State Street in Bridgeport can be seen on the walking tour.

The Barnum Museum is a stop on the virtual walking tour of downtown Bridgeport.

John Burgeson/Staff photograph Playhouse on the Green in Bridgeport.

John Burgeson/Staff photograph McLevy Green in Bridgeport.

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