



## 12 Tips

### *To Planning a Successful Time Capsule Project*

A tips sheet to help you plan for permanence

*By Janet E. Reinhold*

#### *1: What s A Time Capsule?*

A Time Capsule is a container that holds records or objects which show today's culture. The capsule is sealed and deposited in a special place, such as in a cornerstone or vault underground, and it is planned someday to open it to ponder the contents, perhaps 50, 100, 200 or more years in the future. The time capsule is a "snapshot of today," which is a "gift for the future." The word was coined during the 1939 New York World's Fair. <sup>1</sup>

#### *2: How Do We Determine Size?*

It's easiest if you know what you'll be putting into it! First, estimate the largest size of item you expect to receive. For a golf course, this could be a golf club. This will be your height, or you could figure the length on the diagonal. Add width to allow for any photos, documents, and other items to fit in (along with their proper enclosures) over time.

#### *3: What Do We Choose to Put in It?*

Visit your local museum to see what has lasted longest and what of the past is most interesting to you, today. Then, envision yourself in a museum of the future. What sort of every-day activities do we have which might be thought-provoking? Hand-written essays, journals, or "Signature Scrolls" are often included, and are a special way of personalizing the event. A hand-written note or special scrapbook can be quite special to those opening the capsule. Photographs\* are popular, and they should have an AcidFree note of identification! Newspapers are a popular addition,\* and most organizations add items they feel are important to their existence, such as their charter, or the passing of a special law or funding. <sup>1</sup>

Start with a working list, with items by donor. Don't limit items at this phase. Large white envelopes, manila folders, or even Zip Bags work well for organizing & labeling. Later, they can be replaced with acid-free enclosures.

#### *4: How Do We Get Items?*

Most groups form a Time Capsule committee which consists of from 2 to 10 folks. The committee may be empowered to give the final "yes" or "no" to donated items. Or maybe you have an Administrative Officer or someone who is designated by the Director of the Organization (or Mayor's office) who is sponsoring the capsule. It may be the Mayor himself. You should be clear on this point from the very beginning!



### *5: What is a Dedication Ceremony?*

A very significant part of every time capsule placement, the Dedication Ceremony often includes short speeches by local dignitaries and/or clergy. It may include mentioning of time capsule items if they think them especially meaningful. You can dedicate a capsule before it is actually sealed. You can then use a Signature Scroll <sup>2</sup> at the ceremony to involve attendees with a message to the future, and include the Scroll in the actual time capsule to be sealed up later.

You might also consider a release of butterflies, or children's handwritten and school-addressed stamped postcards tied to balloons, or pre-made business cards with the placement and opening date on them. Many groups dedicate a special cast bronze plaque at the same time. <sup>3</sup>

### *6: How Public Should the Ceremony Be?*

Consider how private you want it to be. You might announce via press release to the local newspapers, city website, radio or local television media, if you want as many attendees as possible. Or, you may prefer special invitations to a select few. How many people attend your ceremony may depend on factors out of your control. Sometimes weather alone discourages attendance. A specified placement date and time may be difficult for many to attend. And as for the media, expect almost anything newsworthy to bump the coverage of your event. <sup>4</sup>

### *7: Do We Display Items at the Dedication?*

People always want to look at something. But unless you have a dark, protected place, avoid showing original items. Consider other effective ways of displaying: a photo display of items in the time capsule, or a parallel display that shows duplicates of items. Depending on your tolerance for publicity, you may send media press releases asking for public donations, contact local service organizations, churches, and the Chamber of Commerce, etc., to announce it in their newsletters & meetings. You could have a contest, run in the local newspaper or with the local schools. Local businesses may sponsor prizes for kids, whose essays/drawings could be included in the time capsule. Think of possible themes, such as "A Day in the Life of a Typical Cedar St. School Student," or "What the city will look like in 2099." <sup>4</sup>

### *8: Will Our Time Capsule Get Lost?*

Not if you take proper steps to prevent it! Consider an identifying cast bronze plaque. Another way is to make use of the International Time Capsule Insurance Registry, provided free for all of our capsules and located at Oglethorpe University in Georgia. You specify where the capsule is & when it's to be opened. <sup>3</sup>



### *9: What's A High Quality Time Capsule?*

Most real time capsules are not toys, but rather, have a lofty purpose of being a receptacle made of a lasting material and sealed well enough to protect the time capsule contents over time. For various reasons, we have determined stainless steel to be the best, most practical material for most purposes.<sup>5</sup> Special attention should be paid to how the container is sealed. A welded closure will last indefinitely. If the welded closure is done properly, and if the material is stainless steel, you need not be concerned with any heat migration damage to contents inside. Many people worry about how the container is opened. The welds are simply and mechanically filed away (no heat need be applied).

We realize that not everyone is a certified welder, and also that on-site welding is not recommended for the same reasons as a solar eclipse cannot be watched with the naked eye. The next best closure we know of for a time capsule is by use of a properly fitted O-ring and groove along with secure blind bolts, such as our Model 3000 has.

### *10: Why Do Items Need Preservation?*

First, be clear about one thing. The most important part of any time capsule preservation plan is the use of a high quality container. If your container leaks or cracks or corrodes, no amount of inner preservation will do much good.

You should still be aware of what happens inside over a long period, though. "Inherent Vice" is a fancy term that applies to certain items being made of materials that will change over time and may thereby harm something next to it. Polyvinyl sheet protectors may be the most obvious example (if you've ever placed a document inside and pulled it out months later only to see the print lifted off of the paper, you know what we mean). But many items, even the most interesting, will have some special circumstances surrounding its care. There are problems with almost any items people put in time capsules. But you shouldn't let that limit your imagination at the beginning. If preservation cannot be performed by a museum expert, or if you cannot afford our "Model 4000" (which includes both a quality stainless steel container and professional inner preservation), we offer preservation kits and instructions that are easy to understand.<sup>6</sup>

### *11: Can We Really Preserve the Items Ourselves?*

Yes, you can preserve most common time capsule items yourself if you have the right archival materials and use common sense along with basic how-to instructions for accomplishing your task. We sell preservation kits at discount from the regular prices of the archival enclosures if purchased separately, or you can order just the supplies you need.<sup>6,7</sup>



## 12: *Should We Bury the Time Capsule?*

Over 85% of time capsules placed today are buried. We feel it's fine for our higher-end (Models 3000 & 4000) stainless steel capsules to be buried. They are of high quality materials and workmanship. Advantages to burial include a stable temperature, a dark environment, longevity of area (a building will only last about 50 years) and less chance of vandalism. We do recommend an enclosure, but for physical & mechanical protection. Your particular circumstances may vary, such as the length of time interred, or whether burial is below sea level. Use of epoxy primer and paint may be appropriate. Alternative ideas to burial include placement into a building's cornerstone along with a marker, into an inner niche of a building (again, marked with a plaque to assure longevity), placement at the base of a sculpture, and archival storage or display within a local museum. It's safer, especially if you are using a low-end capsule, to plan for indoor storage.

<sup>1</sup> See our book, "A Sampling of Time Capsule Contents," for more detailed information and many more ideas.

<sup>2</sup> Ask for our free sales leaflet on Signature Scrolls for more information and ideas.

<sup>3</sup> Ask for our free sales leaflet on Cast Plaques for more information and ideas.

<sup>4</sup> See the book, "Your Time Capsule: Brainstorming Container & Ceremony," for many more ideas and information.

<sup>5</sup> For more info, ideas, and recommendations for placement, see our book, "How to Bury A Stainless Steel Time Capsule."

<sup>6</sup> See our book, "Time Capsule Preservation," for more details on preservation of time capsule items.

<sup>7</sup> Ask for our free archival supplies catalog, "Archivally Speaking."

\* These items need special care for long term storage.

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