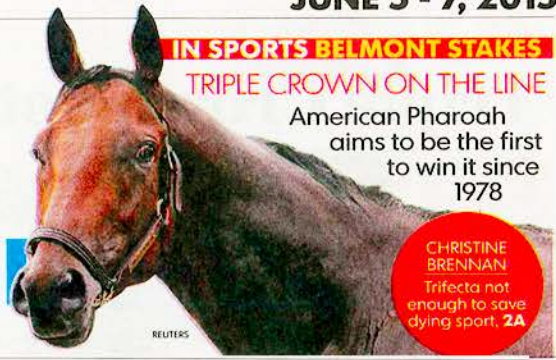


# USA TODAY WEEKEND

A GANNETT COMPANY



IN SPORTS BELMONT STAKES

TRIPLE CROWN ON THE LINE

American Pharoah aims to be the first to win it since 1978

CHRISTINE BRENNAN  
Trifecta not enough to save dying sport. 2A



## USA TODAY LIFE

Memphis means music — and more  
The city is getting a jolt of new energy 4D



# MEMPHIS

# Pyramid aims for new peak

THE PEABODY MEMPHIS

For 75 years the twice-daily red-carpet "duck march" from elevator to lobby fountain has been a crowd-pleasing fixture of the Peabody, Memphis' classic hotel.

**M**emphis is going to the birds. More specifically, to the ducks.

For decades, the Peabody Hotel has been the top lodging in The Bluff City, famous for its twice-daily Duck March. Every morning since 1940, a family of ducks has ridden the elevator down from their rooftop coop and walked a red carpet to the travertine marble lobby fountain where they spend the day. Perennially popular with hotel guests and the public, the marches pack the lobby.

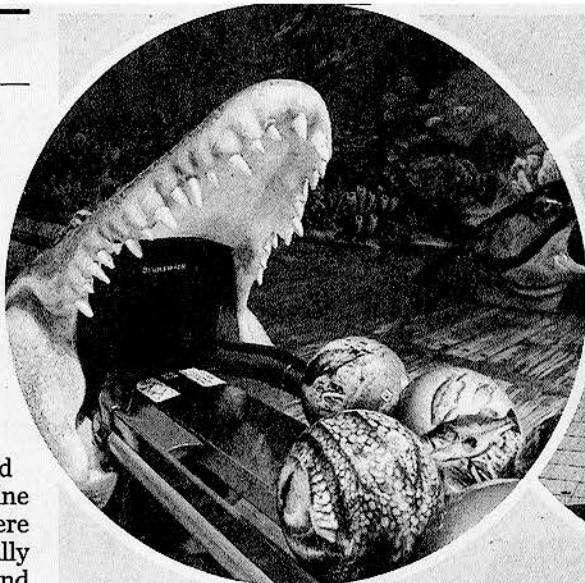
But suddenly the Peabody is not the only Memphis hotel featuring waterfowl. April saw the city's biggest grand opening in years, Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid, a Vegas-style architectural fantasy that combines a huge Bass Pro retail store, the Ducks Unlimited Water Fowling Heritage Center museum, a 32-story outdoor observation deck, the 120-room Big Cypress Lodge hotel and the Cypress Swamp Waterfowl Habitat. An ode to the nearby Mississippi River delta, the "swamp" occupies much of the ground floor, with ponds, streams, tanks and aquariums, spanned by footbridges and showcasing a floating selection of fishing boats. The waters are full of ducks, catfish, sturgeon and even alligators.

Long a white elephant along the Mississippi, the Memphis Pyramid was built as a sports arena in 1991 and once hosted the Memphis Grizzlies. But the NBA team moved in 2004, and ever since, the world's sixth-largest pyramid has sat empty, causing much local consternation. But after a major investment and early success, it has been received as a vital part of the city's larger renaissance.

#### REVIVING THE PYRAMID

"The Pyramid presented a remarkable opportunity for us to develop one of the most dynamic retail stores anywhere in the world," says Bass Pro Shops owner Johnny Morris.

Known as the "Walt Disney of retail," Morris executed the largest investment the company has ever made outside of its flagship Missouri headquarters. More than \$190 million later, the basketball court has been replaced with 600,000 gallons of water



**The former home of the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies has reopened as Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid after a \$191 million renovation. The new Pyramid includes a hotel, museum and an undersea-themed bowling alley.**

BASS PRO SHOPS

features containing about 2,000 fish, ultra-realistic faux cypress trees towering 100 feet in the air and dripping Spanish moss, and endless animal mounts. In the middle of it all, the world's tallest freestanding elevator glows in neon as it rises to a restaurant and observation deck.

More than 35,000 customers came for opening day on April 29, the best debut in the chain's history, and more than 500,000 in the first 27 days. "We are very optimistic about the future," Morris says.

The Bass Pro concept is retail as theater, but even by its standards, the pyramid is over the top. Families scramble in and out of boats tied up at indoor docks, the main restaurant has an undersea-themed full-size bowling alley with ball returns shaped like octopi, and life-sized fiberglass great white sharks hanging overhead. The store contains separate shooting and archery ranges. Many visitors come just for The Lookout and its views of the river and downtown Memphis.

But perhaps the most unusual touch is the hotel, the only one of its kind at any Bass Pro Shop. Ringing the second floor atrium and overlooking the swamp and retail space, lodging is styled on rustic cabins, and some are actual cabins on stilts. Balconies with rocking chairs open onto the swamp. All rooms have hand-hewn beams, virtual fireplaces and such luxe creature comforts as jetted oversized tubs, huge walk-in showers and generous welcome baskets of free snacks.

#### THE PLACE IS HOPPING

Arguably the world's most notable hotel opening of 2015, the Pyramid is a huge change to the Memphis tourism landscape, an instant must-see and maybe must-stay. But there is a lot more going on. The city already has the nation's finest collection of attractions for music buffs, with the Smithsonian's Rock N Soul Museum, Stax Museum of American Soul Music, Sun Studio and of course, Graceland, Memphis' signature attraction.

And now there are two more noteworthy newcomers, including the just-opened Blues Hall of

**"The Pyramid presented a remarkable opportunity ... to develop one of the most dynamic retail stores anywhere in the world."**

Bass Pro Shops owner Johnny Morris

Fame Museum, which spans two levels full of artifacts, exhibits and interactive displays honoring inductees. The museum was built and is run by the non-profit Blues Foundation, which also organizes the International Blues Challenge, an event that brings more than 250 performers to the Beale Street Entertainment District

each January. The new blues museum sits across the street from another can't-miss Memphis cultural attraction, the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel.

The even newer Memphis Music Hall of Fame is a satellite of the larger Rock N Soul museum down the street, a geographically-centered collection honoring musicians from or with ties to Memphis. The late B.B. King was in the inaugural class. The goal of the museum, which opens this month, is to showcase the individual behind the music, with a lot of personal artifacts, including Jerry Lee Lewis' Cadillac. "We want people to get to know the person beyond the performer," says Executive Director John Doyle. "So while we have one of Elvis' jumpsuits, we also have his first mobile phone."

While the museum has early rockers such as Presley and Lewis, it covers every genre — soul, gospel, R&B and local radio personalities. Honorees span Isaac Hayes to Johnny Cash to ZZ Top. The site is a stop on the looping shuttle that connects Graceland, Sun Studio, Stax and Rock N Soul, making most music attractions accessible without a car.

As one of the top places in the world to catch live music, there's more for fans in Memphis than just museums. Before the Beale Street area boomed, Overton Square was the spot for live music and theater. After years of decline, the neighborhood is suddenly thriving again and has become the trendiest area in Memphis, full of new restaurants, shops, brewpubs, yoga studios, and of course, music.

"There has been a resurgence of the Memphis music scene," says Darren Jay, headliner of Darren Jay and The Delta Souls and former president of the Memphis Blues Society. He predicts the Blues Hall of Fame will "add another place to visit" alongside the city's stalwart attractions.

No visit to Memphis would be complete without a stop at Graceland, and even this iconic attraction is changing. Much to the relief of fans, the new owners discarded a plan to remove Elvis' aircraft collection, and instead of shrinking, Graceland is expanding. Construction is underway on the 450-room Guest House at Graceland. Right next door to the fabled attraction, the massive new hotel will include VIP suites designed by Priscilla Presley.