Way before Wolf Blitzer reported or Larry King went live, the CNN Center was inhabited by a different breed of men in suits. Names like Bernard Shaw and Peter Arnett that made the network famous were preempted by the likes of Witchiepoo and Hoo Doo. Now, former inhabitants prepare to blow out the candles on their 25th anniversary cake. Though most people do not know about its past, the Cable News Network's building was once occupied by a less conventional cast of characters, Sid and Marty Krofft's creations. Yet, on the tour, guides do not tell patrons of the first occupants, making it difficult to discover the lost World of Sid and Marty Krofft.

To understand how the World of Sid and Marty Krofft came to Atlanta, it's important to understand Atlanta in the '70s.

The CNN Center was originally built as a part of the Omni International complex. The growing trend in urban development in the 1970s was large commercial centers, like the Rockefeller Center. “When I first came to Atlanta, the white power structure was dominant,” said Dr. Dana White, a professor of Urban Studies at Emory University and an accomplished urban historian. “[Maynard] Jackson was vice-mayor in 1973. When the Omni came into being, the only new thing was Peachtree Center, which was one third of the size it is now.” The task of building the Omni was contracted to Tom Cousins over John Portman at a time when Atlanta was just beginning to boom. The first to go up were the parking decks that remain today and the Omni Coliseum, which has since been torn down and rebuilt as the Philips Arena, in 1972. After that, the two main office buildings, the hotel and what is known today as the CNN Center were erected, completing the Omni International complex in 1976.

Though they were not the first inhabitants of the building, Sid and Marty Krofft brought national attention to a section that occupied 10 percent of the Omni International complex and made up 10 percent of its income. The Kroffts had humble beginnings hailing from Athens, Greece, where their family had maintained puppet theatres for generations and achieved national fame. After living in Canada, the Kroffts settled in Long Island where Sid and Marty grew up. As a young adult, Sid decided to study abroad at the Lido in France to hone his puppet skills, already nationally renowned from his performances on “The Jack Benny Show.” When he returned, he teamed up with his brother to set up a booth at Six Flags in Atlanta. “We had our show at Six Flags Parks and created a lot of the attractions for them,” Sid Krofft said. From there they set their sights on Hollywood and set up shop with a light budget for a fantastic, psychedelic show with full-body puppets and elaborate sets. They dipped into their own pockets and were soon enjoying success with their Saturday morning children's TV shows like H.R. Pufnstuf, The Bugaloos, Lidsville, Sigmund and the Sea Monsters, The Land of the Lost and Far Out Space Nuts. Most of their shows featured strange creatures ranging from dragon mayors to hats to a winged rock 'n' roll band whose lives were hampered by classic villains like Benita Bizarre. Their work in television, however, was not all puppets and fantasy. They also tried their hand at variety shows like The Brady Bunch Hour, Barbara Mandrell and The Mandrell

May 24 marks the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Kroffts’ theme park in the Omni International complex, which is now home to the CNN Center. This is a story of a city trying and failing to find itself. By Ben Mayer.
Sisters and The Donny and Marie Variety Show.

Soon thereafter, the Kroffts set their sights on a slightly more epic undertaking: a theme park. They decided to put what would they hoped would be the first of many iconic amusement parks on the edge of downtown Atlanta, seeking to bolster depressed urban areas.

“The whole idea of the park was to bring people together,” Sid told The Catalyst in an exclusive interview March 30. “It’s not like you were wandering around with just your friends. Everybody was having a huge party and people got to talk together and go get on the rides together, and you met people there. That was an important factor of the park.”

Great pains were taken to raise revenue and recruit several national banks and investment groups for the venture. Initial projected costs were estimated at $14 million for the park.

“We built the park in Los Angeles and we shipped it to Atlanta so we probably sold 200, 400 trucks going to Atlanta to deliver everything,” Sid’s brother Marty remembered.

The hoopla began with slews of advertisements from major Atlanta businesses like Rich’s, where park tickets were sold, bousing “Now all the fun is indoors.”

On the Sunday before it opened, Atlanta’s elite enjoyed a champagne toast, black-tie affair in the recently completed park. Prominent guests like Tony Orlando toured the park in what Mayor Maynard Jackson called “the greatest opening in Atlanta since Gone With the Wind,” and “the most fantastic-thing that ever hit any downtown in the world.” Performances included Kate Smith’s rendition of “God Bless America” and a Peggy Fleming routine in the ice skating rink located in the center of the facility. Yet Cousins was pessimistic from the beginning, telling the Atlanta papers about the great risk involved, even as the rest of Atlanta was basking in glow of a grand opening.

And Marty Krofft’s grand experiment officially opened for business on Monday, May 24, 1976, the same year as the Georgia World Congress Center. The park was an all-weather park, with each floor having a different theme. First, patrons took the 205-foot, Westinghouse elevator that still remains in the CNN Center today to the top of the park for the Fun Fair, which featured a midway with raking cars, tattered belly dancers, fire-eaters, snake-charmers and magicians.

“The whole park had everywhere but you didn’t go into a theatre; it was out in the streets,” Sid said. “As you walked down the streets there were all kinds of performers, hundreds of them. The park was a show just for you.”

“I remember the escalator and thinking it was gigantic,” McMahon said. “I loved my job. I got to show people around the country.”

“What did you think when it closed?” McMahon asked.

“McMahon: Why do you think the park closed?”

“McMahon: What do you remember most about the park?”

“McMahon: What do you think it was like?”

“McMahon: What do you think it worked?”

“McMahon: What do you think it was?”

“McMahon: What do you think it was like?”

“McMahon: What do you think it was for?”

“I think there was a feeling in the city that the Kroffts didn’t know what they’re doing,” Dr. White said. “They tried to make a fast buck and pulled out when it didn’t work.”

Not all signs pointed to the park’s imminent failure. The park attracted more than 300,000 guests in just five months of operation. Sensing potential, Omni officials and the city wanted to keep the park open, only in a different, more profitable format that would have been called Omni Fair. This plan would have employed 10 different firms that would have operated separate sections of the park. The Kroffts, however, contended that Omni did not have the right to do so without their consent and sought to block the move by appealing to Morgan Guaranty. Eventually, Kroff Productions, Inc. sued Omni International for $20.5 million in damages that accused the Omni of sabotage and conspiracy to malign the reputation of the Krofft name. The Kroffts wanted to remain the primary managers of the park, but an agreement could not be met with Omni officials.

Perhaps the Kroffts’ greatest success is yet to come. They are still very active in the public domain. In 1977, they sued McDonald’s “McDonaldland” characters, which included characters like Hamburglar, Grimace, and MacMcMouse. They alleged that, though the McDonald’s characters were

**PLEASE SEE ‘LOST WORLD,’ PAGE 25**
It was 25 years ago next month that the Kroffts told Atlanta to play rucked away in a corner of the CNN Center. Then advertising mogul R.E. “Ted” Turner moved headquarters of his 1980-s startup, 24-hour, international, all-news network, CNN, in 1987. Turner started his foray into television by purchasing the struggling WJR Atlanta TV Station, which would later become TBS, the Turner Broadcasting System, in 1970. From there it seeped into a myriad of networks including CNNSI (Sports Illustrated) and CNNFN (Financial Network).

Two entertainment giants with international ambitions sought to settle in one urban Atlanta building to conquer the entertainment world. One lasted for five months and another nears its 15th anniversary. One left its imprint on a generation while the other has changed the way over a billion people view the world around them. Sid and Marie Krofft’s legacy lives on in the hearts of countless thirty-somethings. Wavy of cartoon television, they searched for something with heart and originality. Yet, the fate of the Krofft’s endeavor was nearly foretold in a 1976, AJC article chronicling the glitzy, Sunday-night soiree: “The ride ended after the people-carrying pinhalls plunged into the dark innards of the machine. ‘GAME OVER,’ flashed the neon lights. ‘GAME OVER.?’”

- with reporting by Shane Avakian, Carra Berger, Lauren Cohen, Sarah Del Castillo, Sajjaad Hoossainy, Kelly Montgomery, Trang Nguyen, Clotilde Choyeungova, Luke Peterson, Elizabeth Reardon, Marcus Taylor, Alison Torres, Lauren Yarborough.

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CROWN TROPHY

The Wheeler High School

boys’ Varsity soccer
Pep Rally, Wheeler 0
Sprayberry, Wheeler 2
Roswell 2
Milton, Wheeler 0
Forsyth Central, Wheeler 1
Lassiter 6, Wheeler 0
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girls’ Varsity Soccer
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Sprayberry, Wheeler 0
Wheelers Roswell 0
Wheeler 14, Cherokee 0

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Wheeler 7, Houston (Tall) 2
Wheeler 5, Oak Ridge (Tall) 2
Osborne 11, Wheeler 5
Wheeler 7, Lovett 5
Roswell 11, Wheeler 2
Walton 12, Wheeler 12
Wheeler 7, Sprayberry 3
Lassiter 7, Wheeler 3
Wheeler 9, Woodstock 1
Chattahoochee 1, Wheeler 0
Wheeler 9, Cherokee 0

BOYS’ TENNIS
Milton 3, Wheeler 2
Walton 4, Wheeler 1
Wheeler 4, Sprayberry 1
Lassiter 3, Wheeler 2
Wheeler 5, Roswell 0
Centennial 5, Wheeler 0
Wheeler 4, Pope 1
Wheeler 4, Harrison 1

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the lost world

Proud theme park is a miniature model Omni cottages. The only item that remains of a once-found walls with murals of old English

Headline News graphic designer Dallas working on a pilot for the WB called “Electra-featuring Danny Devito with Jersey Films. A Pufnstuf movie and a Bugaloos movie Nickeloden and Paramount to make an H.R. way over a billion people view the world around them. Sid and Marie Krofft’s legacy lives on in the hearts of countless thirty-somethings. Wavy of cartoon television, they searched for something with heart and originality. Yet, the fate of the Krofft’s endeavor was nearly foretold in a 1976, AJC article chronicling the glitzy, Sunday-night soiree: “The ride ended after the people-carrying pinhalls plunged into the dark innards of the machine. ‘GAME OVER,’ flashed the neon lights. ‘GAME OVER.’

In addition, stories of the park still remain in the CNN Center. “They remodeled the Headline News studio about two years ago,” said Headline News graphic designer Dallas Howell. “When they tore the walls down they found walls with murals of old English cottages.” The only item that remains of a once-proud theme park is a miniature model Omni.