



SPACE NEEDLE FACT SHEET: HISTORY

THE NEEDLE BY THE NUMBERS

- 1962: The year the Space Needle opened for the Seattle World's Fair.
- 4.5 million: The number of dollars it cost to build the Needle.
- 400: Approximate number of days it took to build the Needle, which was dubbed the "400-day wonder."
- 5,600: The number of tons of concrete poured into the Needle's foundation. At the time it was the largest continuous pour of concrete west of the Mississippi.
- 74,000: The number of bolts holding the tower together.
- 3.92: The hourly wage in dollars the ironworkers who built the Needle were paid.
- TK: The current weight of the Needle in tons.
- 2.65: The number of people who visited the Needle during the fair, in millions.
- 605: The number of feet from the ground to the top of the Needle's red aircraft warning beacon.
- 120 x 120: The size of the lot the Needle was built on. It was the site of an old fire station.
- 75,000: The cost of that lot for the Needle's original investors in 1961, in dollars.
- 848: The number of stairs from the Needle's basement to the Observation Deck.
- 125: The current estimated height in feet of the Needle's center of gravity.
- 1: The number of motors and horsepower it took to turn the Needle's original turntable.
- 12: The number of motors it takes to turn the Needle's new glass turntable.
- 6.5: The magnitude of the first major earthquake that shook the Needle, in 1965. The main thing broken: a bottle of champagne.
- 200: The number of miles per hour of wind the Needle was built to withstand.
- 1982: The year the Needle opened its new Skyline event facility at the 100-ft. level.

- 1999: The year the Needle was designated an official Seattle landmark.
- 25: The number of people who can be carried in a Needle elevator.
- 43: The number of seconds it takes to go from the ground to the Top House.
- 800: The speed per minute of the elevators, in feet.
- 45: The number of minutes to make one revolution of the glass floor.
- 60 million: Estimated number of people who have visited the Needle from 1962-2017. The Needle is the number one tourist attraction in the Pacific Northwest.

NEEDLE PEOPLE

- The idea for Needle was first doodled on a napkin or placemat by Seattle hotel executive Edward “Eddie” Carlson during a visit to Stuttgart, Germany in 1959. He saw the potential of a Space Age tower as a symbol for the 1962 fair and the Seattle skyline.
- Five Seattle investors organized the “Pentagram Corporation” to build the Space Needle. They were financier Bagley Wright, contractor Howard S. Wright, architect John Graham, Jr., financier Ned Skinner, and timber magnate Norton Clapp. The Howard Wright Construction Company was the general contractor. In 1977 Bagley Wright, Skinner and Clapp sold their interests to Howard S. Wright. The Pentagram Corporation has since become the Space Needle LLC.
- Chief architect John Graham, Jr. oversaw the design. He wanted a top to the Needle that resembled a UFO. He also had built a revolving bar in Hawaii and adapted that turntable technology to the Needle, making it the first free-standing rotating restaurant in the world.
- Elvis Presley made a movie at the fair that featured a love scene in the restaurant.
- During the fair the Needle was a magnet for ‘60s leaders, artists and celebrities including The Shah and Empress of Iran, King Olaf of Norway, Prince Philip, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Bobby Kennedy, Walter Cronkite, John Wayne, Walt Disney, John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Johnny Mathis, Billy Graham, Peggy Lee, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Leontyne Price, Chubby Checker, and scores of other.
- Many celebrities have visited the Needle since, including Kelsey Grammer and all the cast of Cheers, Mike Myers, Demi Moore, Melanie Griffith, the original cast of Star Wars, John Travolta, Vanna White, Michael Douglas, Tim Robbins, Claudia Schiffer, Scott Bakula, Paul Reiser, Bruce Lee, and numerous others.
- Renowned moon-walking astronaut Buzz Aldrin visited in 2012 to present the winner of the Space Race promotion celebrating the Space Needle’s 50th Anniversary. The grand prize: a sub-orbital trip into space.

- Many Seattle musicians and bands have visited or performed on the Needle, including Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Mudhoney and Macklemore.
- Not all musicians were attracted to the Needle. In 1964, John Lennon did not go up. “I don’t like heights,” he said.
- In 1966, a young Bill Gates won a dinner at the Needle from his church for memorizing the Bible’s Sermon on the Mount. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the world’s largest, is now located right across the street.
- A number of famous Hollywood films have featured the Needle. Elvis Presley’s crooned in “It Happened at the World’s Fair,” Dr. Evil commandeered the Top House as his super villain headquarters in “Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me,” and the political thriller “The Parallax View” starring Warren Beatty featured a dramatic chase scene on top.
- The popular children’s book character, the Wheedle, is said to live on top of the Needle where his red nose glows. The Wheedle was also a mascot of the SuperSonics, Seattle’s onetime championship NBA basketball team.
- The Needle hosted the first challenge of Season 10 for the popular TV Show, Top Chef. In this season opener, celebrity judges Padma Lakshmi, Tom Colicchio, Emeril Lagasse, and Gail Simmons were featured at the Needle. Tom Douglas also served as the local judge.

UNUSUAL FACTS

- The original name of the Needle’s restaurant was “Eye of the Needle” after the name “Top of the Needle” was rejected. There have been three restaurants at the Space Needle since its opening – Eye of the Needle (1962-1979); Emerald Suite (1980-1999); and SkyCity (2000-2017). The Space Needle currently working with world-renowned restaurant designer Tihany Design to reimagine dining at the Space Needle.
- The Needle’s original colors were Astronaut White (the tower), Orbital Olive (the core), Re-entry Red (the halo) and Galaxy Gold (the top). Galaxy Gold was actually more of a tangerine.
- The original Needle was topped with a flaming natural gas torch that lit up at night with rainbow colors.
- In July, 1962 the Needle was featured in the first live trans-Atlantic TV broadcast which reached 200 million viewers
- At the turn of the 21st century, the Needle unveiled a new Legacy Light that projects a beam straight into the night sky. It was first used on New Years Eve, 1999-2000.
- The Needle graceful, wasp-waisted tower shape was inspired by an abstract sculpture by artist Don Lemon titled, “the Feminine One.”

- Due to a design error, the Needle elevator with the best view, facing downtown and Mt. Rainier, wound up as the freight elevator.
- The first Space Needle Manager, Hoge Sullivan, had acrophobia, a fear of heights.
- In 1982, the Needle staff “buried” a time capsule in the structure. It was found and opened during the Needle’s renovation in 2017.
- Plans to build a stork’s nest atop the Needle were canceled when it was learned that storks could not live in Seattle’s climate and would migrate to warmer climates.
- The city of Fife, Washington, offered \$1 million to move the Space Needle to its downtown.
- The Committee Hoping for Extra-Terrestrial Encounters to Save the Earth (CHEESE) claims to have plans from the 1962 World’s Fair that show the Space Needle was constructed to send transmissions to advanced beings in other solar systems.
- There have been six parachute jumps from the Needle; two were unauthorized and the other four were part of a promotion.
- As an April Fool’s joke a local television station aired a phony report that the Space Needle had fallen over. Emergency phone lines were swamped with calls. The Space Needle received more than 700 calls, even though there was a flashing alert during the entire report telling the audience that it was a joke. One Spokane man even jumped in his car and began driving to Seattle because his daughter worked at the Space Needle.
- The Space Needle moved 312 feet SW in June 1987. The move was only on paper, however. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began a 10-year project of re-mapping the earth by satellite. Major structures, such as the Space Needle, were used as landmarks.
- In 1988 Tim Firnstahl and Mick McHugh divided up their \$16 million Seattle restaurant empire with a coin toss from the Space Needle.

EVENTS AT THE TOP

- The Space Needle has been hosting New Year’s at the Needle and city’s firework show every year since 1982. Each year, crews mount pyrotechnics along the entire Space Needle structure from top to bottom to transform Seattle landmark into one massive fireworks show. The show is broadcasted regionally as well as picked up internationally as the endcap of the Sydney-to-Seattle global fireworks shows.
- In May 1996, the Space Needle welcomed the Olympic Torch Relay with a special fireworks show as it passed through Seattle on its way to Atlanta for the Summer Games.

- In June 2010, the Space Needle was one of the high-profile buildings in the city to raise the Pride Flag during Seattle's PrideFest. The Pride Flag raising is usually a private event for Space Needle team members, but occasionally the Space Needle will host media events such as the year marriage equality passed. In 2013, instead of the Pride Flag, the Space Needle worked with the GSBA and the local chapter of HRC to create a special flag for marriage equality. The first lesbian couple to be legally married in the state, along with city and state officials, raised the flag.
- In July 2013, Seattle celebrated the 25th anniversary of Sub Pop Records, the label that helped launch some of the most iconic acts of the grunge music scene of the late '80s and early '90, with a historic concert atop Space Needle featuring legendary Sub Pop rockers Mudhoney.
- The Space Needle has saluted the success of Seattle's sports teams over the years by painting the white roof with logos and congratulatory messages, hoisting flags and more. These paintings have included the logos of the University of Washington Huskies football team, the Seattle Mariners, and the Seattle Supersonics. In 1995, the Needle caught baseball fever and placed an oversized inflatable baseball on the halo surrounding the Observation Deck to celebrate the Mariners first-ever playoff appearance.
- Mariners great Jay Buhner raised a flag in honor of Seattle's most iconic athlete, Ken Griffey Jr., after Griffey's election to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Buhner, Griffey, Edgar Martínez, and more have been on the roof of the Needle to celebrate Seattle sporting milestones.
- The Space Needle has raised the 12th Flag for Seahawk fans well as flags for the Mariners, Sounders, Storm, Reign, and the HNL. Those hoisting these giant 20' x 30' flags include notable athletes and coaches such as Russell Wilson, Walter Jones, Cortez Kennedy, Mike Holmgren, Sue Bird, Megan Rapinoe, and many more; local music greats Pearl Jam, Dave Matthews, and Macklemore; politicians and media personalities; and some very lucky contest winners.
- In 2013 during Super Bowl XLVIII, the Space Needle shot off fireworks after every Seattle Seahawks touchdown. It got to the point where the pyrotechnic team had to ration them so that there would be enough for the end of the game as the Seahawks won 43–8.
- In 2015, the Space Needle hosted the first Base 2 Space: Seattle's Most Iconic Climb. The annual charity stair climb occurs the first Sunday of October and is the only time the stairs leading to the observation deck are open to the public. The 832 open-air stair climb benefits the Space Needle Foundation and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, raising more than \$1 million for cancer research.