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Transportation museum moves ahead

Business First of Buffalo - by [James Fink](#)

The oft-discussed and anticipated expansion of the **Buffalo Transportation Pierce-Arrow Museum** is expected to begin this year.

Museum founder and executive director James Sandoro said he hopes to start construction on the \$15 million, 60,000-square-foot addition to his facility by fall at the latest. The expansion is one of several projects Sandoro has in store for the museum. Also in the works is a new facade for the museum that will give it more of an early 20th century look.

Sandoro presented his plans at Wednesday's **Buffalo Place Inc.** board meeting. The formal plans are just beginning to work their way through City Hall.

The expansion has been designed to house a late 1920s-era filling station that Frank Lloyd Wright designed for a Buffalo businessman, but was never constructed. The station would have stood along Michigan Avenue, not far from the Kensington Expressway.

Sandoro, nearly a decade ago, acquired the Wright designs and began his quest to build the station adjacent to his Seneca Street transportation museum. Originally, Sandoro hoped to build the station outdoors but several factors prompted him to change his plans and move inside as the anchor to the museum's expansion. Among his concerns: The buildings wide wing span that would have run the risk of being heavily and routinely damaged by the wind and two 40-foot tall cooper poles that Wright designed but Sandoro feared would become lightning rods.

"It just became more feasible to build it (the filling station) inside," Sandoro said.

The new wing will be at least 60-feet tall, so Wright's design will not have to be altered.

By moving it inside, the filling station becomes a year round attraction inside of one that is more seasonal in nature.

"It will also be the first Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building that doesn't leak," Sandoro joked.

The project is being jointly financed through a number of different sources, including \$6.3 million from New York state and approximately \$4 million from private sources and area foundations. Other financing is in the pipeline for the remaining \$5 million.

"It's a reality," Sandoro said. "It's going to happen. It has just taken longer than we thought."

The expansion and filling station is expected to significantly boost attendance at the museum, which has averaged 10,000 annual visitors for the past few years. The museum has also hosted more than 400 private events in recent years.

Sandoro said with the new expansion, he will be able to host four events simultaneously in the complex.

"The main thing is build the shell," Sandoro said.

The museum hosts a unique collection of antique and classic vehicles ranging from Pierce-Arrows to Mustangs and Corvettes. Many of the cars and exhibit pieces come from Sandoro's private collection. Others have been donated to the museum.

Sandoro has created a number of special events that highlight Buffalo's automotive history. This summer, he is organizing a cross-country trip that commemorates Alice Ramsey's drive across the U.S. Ramsey was the first female professional driver to race across the country when she did it in 1909 in a Maxwell — a car that was made in Tarrytown. A Seattle collector has donated a Maxwell for this year's run, which begins June 9 from Times Square in New York City and will work its way across the country, including a stop in Buffalo.

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