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Pierce-Arrow Museum to grow in Buffalo

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A \$15 million expansion of the Buffalo Transportation/Pierce-Arrow Museum will kick off this spring with a new brick facade for the existing building.

Artist's Rendering

A \$15 million expansion of the Buffalo Transportation/ Pierce-Arrow Museum is moving forward.

James T. Sandoro, executive director of the nonprofit museum, located at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Seneca Street, said Wednesday he is shooting for a fall construction start.

"It's a reality. It's now going to happen," Sandoro said. "It's just slower than we would have hoped."

The project, which has been on the drawing board since 2002, will feature a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed gas station, housed inside a new 60,000- square-foot wing. Sandoro had originally planned to build the filling station as a stand-alone attraction on the museum grounds.

However, concerns about weather-related damage to the one-of-a-kind filling station — most notably the threat of lightning strikes to its 40-foot-tall copper towers — led to the decision to put it indoors.

"Enclosing it protects the structure and makes it a year-round attraction. Its tourism impact is greatly increased," said Sandoro, who envisions the museum a big draw for automotive and architectural buffs, alike.

The existing museum currently logs some 10,000 visits per year, which includes a calendar of parties and special events held at the facility. Sandoro expects the larger quarters and added attractions will triple that head count.

The new museum wing will also house a mini-theater where visitors will view films on local transportation and Pierce-Arrow history. It will also provide room for Sandoro to display artifacts that are now in storage because of a space crunch.

"We'll have room for our collection of antique bicycles, automobile accessories and Buffalo lithographs. We have so many things we've never been able to show anybody," he said.

Sandoro will kick off the museum upgrade this spring with a new brick facade on the existing building. The current timetable calls for the new wing to be under construction late this fall, with the historic gas station and expansion to be complete in early 2011.

The project is being funded through \$6.3 million in state funds, with donations and private funds covering the remainder of the costs.

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