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Renovation gains traction at Pierce-Arrow Museum

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After moving in fits and starts for seven years, the \$15 million expansion of the Buffalo Transportation/ Pierce-Arrow Museum is gaining traction.



The Buffalo Transportation/Pierce-Arrow Museum at Seneca Street and Michigan Avenue is covered by bricks and scaffolding.
Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News

A muted-red brick facade nearing completion at the 20,000-square-foot building at Seneca Street and Michigan Avenue is the first exterior sign that the project, in the works since 2002, is no longer stuck on the drawing board.

Installation of museum signs above the windows will signal the end of the \$6.3 million first phase, with Phase II, including the erection of a glass and steel atrium containing a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed gas station, due to begin next spring.

The L-shaped, 60-foot-tall structure extending from the east wall of the existing museum will serve as the new main entrance. The third and final phase will be a two-story, 60,000-square-foot building connected to the atrium's east side. Funding for that step is not in place, and no construction timetable has been set.

President James T. Sandoro hopes to open the atrium by fall 2011, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation will hold its annual convention here for the first time.

"That's our prime objective, but we have to be realistic. Look how long it took to get this far," said Sandoro, who has learned to be patient as terrorist attacks and severe economic downturns played havoc with the nonprofit museum's fundraising efforts over the past decade.

Members of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, convening here Oct. 7-11, also will be welcome to stop by for a peek at this work in progress.

Completion of the expansion will allow Sandoro to bring out many more of the "tens of thousands" of artifacts reflecting the history of motorized transportation that he has accumulated over the years and stowed away in various other locations.

The collection includes many automobiles, including six Pierce-Arrows, as well as carriages, motorcycles and bicycles that were made in Buffalo in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Sandoro's holdings also include thousands of parts and other Automotive Age memorabilia.

Women who have contributed to the industry locally will be honored at an Oct. 23 event in the museum. Emily Anderson of Seattle, who recently drove a 1909 Maxwell from New York City to San Francisco by way of Buffalo to celebrate Alice Ramsey's transcontinental trip a century earlier, will be the special guest.

Tickets will be \$125. Call 853-0084 for information.

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