

INDUSTRY WRAPUPS

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Pierce-Arrow project stays on Wright course

By Jim Fink

Thank you Mother Nature.

The January thaw, which actually didn't come until late February, finally gave businessman and civic leader Jim Sandoro enough of a break so he could start work on the next phase of his Buffalo Transportation/Pierce-Arrow Museum complex.

That next phase is a replica of a circa 1927 gas station that was designed, but never built by Frank Lloyd Wright. The two-level, 1,000-square-foot gas station is the primary calling card, especially given Wright's stature.

But, right next to the gas station will be a re-creation of a 3,500-square-foot greasing station that architecturally fits with the Wright design. The greasing station, with its steel and glass design, could easily pass as greenhouse.

The station was actually in operation and was torn down to make way for the Kensington Expressway.

Bringing the gas station, greasing station and transportation museum together gives Sandoro an automotive complex that will easily attract thousands of visitors.

Couple that with the influx of visitors who come - and will come in the future - to see the restored Darwin D. Martin House campus in North Buffalo and Greycliff in Derby, two other Wright-designed jewels and the region has the makings of something special.

"What we're doing (with the gas and greasing stations) is exciting," Sandoro said. "I'm actually rebuilding the corner of Michigan and Cherry."

With winter on its (hopefully) last days, construction on the two stations will begin this month. Both will make their debut later this summer. Knowing Sandoro, the splash will be big.

"I'm not going to do this in stages," Sandoro said. "We'll open both at the same time."

The bottom line to all of his efforts is that Sandoro, in just a few years, has taken a formerly desolate section of Buffalo and given it new life. The museum attracted 14,000 tourists in its first two years and that figure doesn't include all the people who came there for one of the many private parties booked there.

Last year, Sandoro's museum welcomed a handful of bus tours. During the last week of February, Sandoro booked 10 bus tours alone.

The museum/gas station Web site, www.pierce-arrow.com, is handling about 1,300 hits a day.

"This is getting bigger than we ever, ever dreamed," Sandoro said.