

WESTERN RESERVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

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Western Reserve Historical Society Joins University Circle Construction Activity with Planned Renovations

State Funds to Provide Facelift and Repairs to Enhance Visitor Services and Collections Care

WRHS History Center – 10825 East Boulevard – Cleveland, OH 44106

CLEVELAND, OH (August 1, 2011) – The long-awaited release of \$2.8 million in State of Ohio funds will create a new look and better environment for visitor services and collection care at the Western Reserve Historical Society's University Circle headquarters, known as the History Center. This renovation project adds yet one more item to the string of recent positive developments at the 144-year old regional historical society.

The bulk of the renovations planned between October 2011 and August 2012 will be made to the first floor of the facility that houses the WRHS Crawford Auto Aviation Collection. Both lobbies on the first floor, off East Boulevard and the WRHS parking lot off Magnolia Drive, will also be renovated. Visitors will arrive to a more open, bright and welcoming space with new layout, flooring, lighting, ADA accessible bathrooms, gift shop and climate control systems. Two grand staircases will be added to create a stronger connection to the museum's lower level. A new elevator will also connect the two floors to the adjacent historic Bingham-Hanna House and adjoining exhibit galleries. Equally important will be the work to ensure the integrity of the museum and protection of the collections, including a new roof, ceilings, electrical, insulation and sprinkler system.

"It's almost overwhelming that so many favorable things are happening at once," said WRHS President & CEO Dr. Gainor B. Davis, referring to the construction project as well as two new endowments, a new family education center, the re-opening of the historic Hay House for tours and Sunday openings for the first time in several years. All of this comes with balanced budgets and being nearly debt-free. "Over the past four years, the Society, both Board and staff, focused on a vision to turn things around and we directly met the institution's challenges. As change occurs, good things start happening."

The renovations come as WRHS is completing a new strategic plan to transform the nonprofit into a vibrant, stable community-focused institution offering experiences onsite, offsite and online. "The onsite portion of our plan will certainly get a boost with the new look of our History Center in University Circle," Davis said. Cleveland-based firm Richard Fleischman + Partners Architects, Inc. is designing the project. Regency Construction Services, Inc., also Cleveland-based, is serving as owner's representative.

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The History Center will remain open during the 10-month renovation with full access to the Library/Archives & Genealogy Center, Kidzibits Family Education Center, the Bingham-Hanna and Hay-McKinney mansions, Chisholm Halle Costume Wing and exhibit galleries. Only the portion of the facility housing the Crawford Auto Aviation Collection will be closed during the entire construction period. The 94 cars and 6 airplanes currently on display will be moved into safe storage beginning in mid-September.

A public party to celebrate the upcoming renovations and see the cars and planes safely on their way to temporary storage is planned at the WRHS History Center for Friday, September 2. "We'll toast the cars and planes then," Davis said, "and then again when they return to the renovated History Center in the summer of 2012." Welcoming the cars will be an exhibit hall that will provide the proper environment for their care and maintenance, and proper gallery lighting, layout and amenities that will enhance the visitor experience.

Renovation plans for the WRHS University Circle location have been in the works for several years and with various iterations. A larger scale project was first envisioned along with a capital campaign to raise the funds. Dr. Davis concluded, upon her arrival as WRHS President in 2007, that the institution was in too much debt and had too many pressing issues to launch a major capital campaign. With the approval of the Society's Board, the project was scaled back to be more realistic and to align with a state appropriation that had been made to WRHS years earlier, but had not been released pending the institution completing its construction plans and meeting certain fiduciary requirements.

"We thought the state funds would be released in 2009 and again last year," Davis said. "We continued to address our budget matters and adhere to debt retirement plans in order to regain the confidence of the state and our private donors. The efforts have resulted in two straight years of balanced budgets; debt now standing at less than \$160,000; two new endowments totaling about \$15 million; and several new additions to the Board of Directors. All of this, capped by a facelift for our facility, brings a true feeling of renewal to the Society."

The \$2.8 million in state funds was included in the transportation bill (HB 114) signed into law on March 30 as an appropriation to Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) which is acting as fiduciary agent for the construction funds. In return, WRHS is entering into a special educational partnership with Tri-C to provide experiential learning and research opportunities for Tri-C students and faculty, as well as various in-kind contributions. "Under this arrangement," Davis said, "not only will WRHS undergo renovations, we will forge a long-term, committed relationship with Tri-C - one of the most innovative educational institutions in the region."

Some potential components of the renovation project remain open based on additional fundraising efforts. Architect Aaron Hill has designed an undulating glass wall to stretch the entire length of the current Crawford exhibit area along East Boulevard. The glass wall would replace the current windowless façade allowing visitors to the Circle to catch a glimpse of the Society's unique collections inside. "This new façade would provide us with greater curb appeal and fit in to all the other exciting projects in and around University Circle," Davis said. "However, we are being prudent and proceeding methodically - planning to build only what we know we have the funds to build. After retiring our debt, primarily caused by the failed lakefront project planned in the '90s, we don't want to find ourselves in that position any time soon."

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Included in the potential components of the project is the construction of a glass pavilion, connected to the main WRHS building at the corner of East 108th Street and East Boulevard to house the Euclid Beach Carousel. Rebuilding the iconic carousel and the pavilion to house it at WRHS is a project of the Cleveland’s Euclid Beach Park Carousel Society and Euclid Beach Park Now, in partnership with WRHS which owns the carousel horses and original mechanism. The two groups are fundraising to include the carousel pavilion in the current WRHS renovation plans.

Quick Facts:

Renovation location: First floor lobbies and Crawford Collection exhibit area of WRHS History Center in University Circle; 10825 East Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44106.

Renovation cost: \$3 plus million with \$2.8 million from the State of Ohio and remaining funds raised privately.

Construction Period: October 2011 – August 2012.

WRHS History Center Closure: Crawford Collection exhibit area only -- beginning mid-September 2011. All other areas of the History Center, including the Library, remain open throughout construction period.

Architect: Richard Fleischman + Partners Architects, Inc.; Aaron Hill, Architect.

Owner’s Representative: Regency Construction Services, Inc.

Grand Re-Opening: September 1, 2012 (tentative).

Photos Available Upon Request. Contact Angie Lowrie at 216-721-5722 x297 or alowrie@wrhs.org.

Western Reserve Historical Society was founded in 1867 to help preserve the early history of Cleveland and the Western Reserve. Over the years, WRHS collections have grown to be among the largest of any regional history museum and library in the country. The Library/Archives hold millions of items including books, photographs, manuscripts and documents making it a premiere research institute for scholars, the general public and genealogists. Highlights of the collections include Civil War materials, various ethnic and community collections including those of the African-American, Irish, Italian and Jewish histories of the region, and extensive business, industrial, entrepreneurial and political records. The museum includes two early 20th-century homes and houses one of the largest historic costume and textile collections in the United States, the country’s largest collection of items related to the Shaker communities, 3,500 decorative arts artifacts owned by early residents of the Western Reserve, and approximately 800 paintings reflecting the history of the region. The Crawford Auto Aviation Collection contains more than 140 cars, 10 airplanes, and numerous motorcycles, bicycles and other transportation-related items. The Historical Society also owns and operates Hale Farm and Village, a 19th-century outdoor living history museum in the Cuyahoga Valley with 32 historic structures, early American arts and craft demonstrations, heritage livestock and working gardens. For more information on Western Reserve Historical Society, please visit www.wrhs.org.

WRHS receives public support with local tax dollars from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, to preserve and enrich our region’s artistic and cultural heritage.

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