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Cedarhurst begins major capital project

Construction crews onsite to replace marble facade of Mitchell Museum

MT. VERNON - Exterior renovation began this week on the Mitchell Museum building at Cedarhurst, as the organization takes on a major capital project in replacing the marble facade for which the building is known. The museum will remain open to visitors during regular hours throughout the project and will adjust entrance and exit doors as necessary.

The marble is original to the building, which began construction in in 1971 and opened to the public in 1973.

“The extreme weather of the Midwest has caused the large marble panels to bow, and in some areas the overhead fascia system has started to crack and fall, posing safety issues,” said Executive Director Hillary Esser. “We reinforced the fascia last year and began working to find a suitable replacement immediately, keeping the safety of our patrons top of mind.”

Esser said the need to replace the current marble, which was selected by museum founders John and Eleanor Mitchell, is daunting and costly.

“Thankfully we have known this project was coming, and we have saved accordingly. We will replace the marble with as similar a material as is available: a white Carrara marble veneer system that mirrors the original material,” Esser said. “We feel a responsibility to maintain the original aesthetic intentions of the Mitchells and to preserve the appearance for which Cedarhurst has become known.”

The veneer product Esser mentioned is attached to a honeycomb aluminum backing that should better withstand the variety of weather conditions. The marble squares will be slightly smaller, dictated by what is available in the current market.

In conjunction with the marble replacement, Cedarhurst will also be replacing the wooden courtyard areas that connect the original museum building to the expansion that was built in 2008.

“When we took a closer look, we determined the decks, too, needed to be replaced. Several of the wooden planks have weathered and detached and started to pose safety concerns, and we decided that replacing them at the same time as the marble would be ideal,” Esser said. “A new design should create a more accessible and welcoming space that better invites visitors into the courtyard areas. We look forward to this transformation that will enhance the visitor experience.”

A portion of Cedarhurst's recent \$182,000 grant award from Illinois' Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity has been allocated toward the Courtyard project. Much of the rest has come from a generous donor.

"In truth, many of our large projects - such as our new signage at the corner of 27th Street and Richview Road, and now the courtyard project - are only possible because of donor generosity. Cedarhurst would not be where we are today without the support of our community," Esser said.

The prominent Jun Kaneko sculpture and Josh Garber sculpture located in the Courtyard areas have been temporarily relocated while construction takes place. Work is expected to last several months, but should be completed before Cedarhurst launches its new holiday program, The Lights, in November.

Cedarhurst is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday 10 am to 5 pm and Sundays 1 to 5 pm. Find more information at Cedarhurst.org