



Staten Island Advance

Staten Island Museum to begin preparing its new home

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By Michael J. Fressola



The Staten Island Museum will break ground March 23 on a \$25 million renovation/construction project in its long-designated new home in the Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden complex.

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Two years from now — roughly — after its \$25 million city-funded retrofitting is finished, the

130-year-old Staten Island Museum hopes to welcome guests into a new 18,000-square-foot, green facility with state-of-the-art areas devoted to science, art, and local history.

In one corner, a 20-ft. mastodon charging through an interior wall will recall the days when those behemoths ambled about on what is New Dorp Lane today.

The Staten Island Museum will break ground March 23 on a \$25 million renovation/construction project in its long-designated new home in the Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden complex.

The conversion/construction will take place in Building A, on the “Front Five” of the cultural center. As soon as construction is safely under way, museum director Elizabeth Egbert will begin raising funds to complete a similar project next door, in Building B.

The first stage of the project in A, a three-story, 170-year-old Greek Revival building, will involve “emptying the building from the cellar to the roof,” Ms. Egbert said. “Essentially, what we’re doing is building a new building inside the old one.” Only the original wrought-iron staircases will be retained.

The new facility will have a closed-loop geothermal system for heating and cooling. Some 32 vertical loops buried 500 feet beneath the surface of the ground will help warm the building in the winter and cool it in the summer.

“For a while in the beginning,” Ms. Egbert said, “people will see nothing but big piles of dirt next to the building. It’s part of the process.”

The project isn’t the first Building A expansion attempt on behalf of the Staten Island Museum. In 1984, the city funded a \$2.4 million reconstruction, intending to develop a new home for the museum. But unforeseen construction challenges intervened, absorbing the budget long before the work was finished.

Subsequent museum administrations promoted alternative plans for new homes adjacent to the Staten Island Ferry terminal.

In separate proposals, two of the world’s pre-eminent architects, I.M. Pei and Peter Eisenman, produced preliminary designs for new Staten Island Museum buildings on the St. George waterfront, but neither developed beyond the drawing board.

The museum (officially the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences) has been linked to Snug Harbor for many years. Both Harbor buildings, A and B, were earmarked as the museum’s future home in the early 1970s.

Two departments of the museum — the archives and a new conservation center — are already established in the Harbor’s Building H, having relocated there in the past few years. The museum opened its first show at the archives and history center, “Portraits of Leadership: African American Entrepreneurs on Staten Island,” last month.

The museum was established in 1881 in St. George by local naturalists. It had a succession of temporary headquarters, including Borough Hall. By 1918, it had its own building at 75 Styuyvesant Pl., St. George. Even then, it was widely acknowledged that the building was too small.

Today, the collections contain well over a million objects. They preserve 500,000, entomological (insect) specimens, 500,000 pieces of ephemera, 40,000 botanical specimens, 400 paintings, 1,200 works on paper, 60,000 photographs, and a 16,000 volume library.

It is world-famous among certain entomologists for its cicada collection, the biggest in North America.