



Staten Island Museum will be 'Keeping Cool'

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By



Advance File Photo

The new geothermal heating and cooling system at the Staten Island Museum at Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden will be virtually invisible, tucked behind interior walls and extending into "wells" nearly 500 feet beneath the lawn west of the building.

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- When the Staten Island Museum opens its new home 18 months from now at Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden, it will be the only landmarked building in the city equipped with geothermal heating and cooling, and one of very few 19th-century buildings to have green, state-of-the-art temperature control.

No one will guess as much looking at the 1879 Greek Revival building, one of the "Temple Row" at the Harbor. The system will be virtually invisible, tucked behind interior walls and extending into "wells" nearly 500 feet beneath the lawn west of the building.

At that depth the temperature is a constant 55 degrees. Water coursing through building and down into 32 geothermal wells will cool the interior during warm weather and warm it during cold months.

The system will be the star of "Keeping Cool," a 20-minute documentary video that will debut among the museum's inaugural exhibits. "Keeping Cool," a project of Quest Media Entertainment, will document the installation of the geothermal system.

GREAT TEACHING OPPORTUNITY

The \$8,000 project recently attracted a \$4,000 grant from Consolidated Edison. Mark Irving, a representative of the utility, called the project "a great opportunity to teach students, educators and general visitors to the museum about an alternative source of energy that will help lessen the carbon footprint on Staten Island."

The system is economical. Elizabeth Egbert, executive director of the museum, noted, "We will need electricity for lights and computers and other appliances, but the geothermal system will cover the entire cost of heating and cooling."

The energy strategy dovetails with the history of the museum, which was founded in 1881 (as the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences) by naturalists, who were studying the borough's wildlife and fast-disappearing ecosystems.

"It's the right thing for us to do, to be energy-efficient is part of who we are," she added. "It's good for the environment, it's good for business, it's good for your health."

Demolition inside the museum's Building A has revealed the original ventilation and cooling system, a passive network of ceramic pipes and wooden ducts that carried warm air up and out of the building through a vented cupola on the roof. Remnants of the system have been kept and they will be used in a small exhibit about the history of the building.

In the process of adapting Building A as a museum, it has been gutted. A new three-floor, steel-framed interior is being installed inside.

Snug Harbor opened in 1831 as Sailors' Snug Harbor, a gated, privately endowed retirement home for indigent seafarers. The last residents departed in the 1970s. Since then, the 83-acre complex has been slowly transformed into a mixed-use cultural center.

OTHER ECO MEASURES

Other ecologically conscious measures have been taken on the grounds.

"We're very excited about green initiatives occurring on campus," said Harbor executive director Lynn Kelly, "from the Staten Island Museum's geothermal unit to the Staten Island Children's Museum's wind turbines to the Snug Harbor Heritage Farm. We will continue to be leaders in promoting green design and are proud to be working together to make our site more sustainable."

Some new buildings, including the Staten Island Mental Health Society headquarters in Tompkinsville and the Visitors Center at the Queens Botanical Garden, employ geothermal exchange systems. The Tompkinsville center, opened last year, has two geothermal wells and 96 rooftop solar panels.

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