

## Building a museum from the bottom up

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM  
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/021314/hsSM.png>

### Port Historical Society begins construction of interactive project, set to launch fundraising campaign

Construction of an interactive museum in downtown Port Washington has begun.

While most of the work has been structural, largely unseen to passers-by, the Port Washington Historical Society has been working to ensure the building at 118 N. Franklin St. is protected from the elements.

At the same time, work has been proceeding behind the scenes to procure funds for the \$2.5 million project and to raise awareness and support for the museum.

“Things are moving along quite well,” said Bill Moren, chairman of the museum advisory board.

Wayne Chrusciel, who with Mark Dybdahl and Marc Eernisse is spearheading the construction of the museum, said people will begin to notice changes in the building this week.

That’s when new windows will be installed.



“Most of our work so far has really been to button down the building and make it watertight,” Chrusciel said, adding the work included installing a new roof.

“The weather hasn’t been the most cooperative.”

Crews are also working to ensure the foundation is sealed and tight, he said.

While many building projects involving old structures uncover myriad issues along the way, that hasn’t been the case with the museum, Chrusciel said.

“We’re holding our breath and knocking on wood,” he said. “So far, we’ve not run into any major surprises. It looks like the building has good bones. We’re very fortunate.”

The first phase of construction — buttoning down the building — is expected to be completed by the end of February or early March, Chrusciel said.

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The second phase of the project, which is projected to take about a month, will then start.

“That’s when you’re going to start to see some major changes to the building,” Chrusciel said.

Steel supports will be installed as crews create a soaring atrium on the Franklin Street side of the building, he said. A staircase will be built to the second floor, a portion of which will be cut away to create the two-story entry.

“It’s going to be really neat to see that happen,” Chrusciel said.

The third phase of construction will be finish work, such as reconstructing walls to give the appearance of a finished building, he said, while the fourth and final phase will turn the empty building into a museum.

The museum is on track to open this fall, Moren said.

Work on the building began around Thanksgiving, when the Society announced its ambitious plans for the museum.

The three-story museum will feature a lower level with an interactive, nautical-themed children’s museum designed to look like the deck of a three-masted schooner, complete with the captain’s wheel and crow’s nest. A variety of interactive displays and exhibits will be used to teach children about the history and ecology of Lake Michigan and nautical life in Port Washington.

The upper floors will be home to revolving, interactive exhibits that will tell the story of the community.

The first traveling exhibit will be “The Man Behind the Camera: The Life and Work of Vernon Biever,” the story of the Port Washington businessman who was the Green Bay Packers’ first official photographer.

There will be spaces that can be rented for private parties, including a second-story deck shaped like the bow of a ship that will overlook the marina.

Moren said the Historical Society has been talking to the Port Washington-Saukville School District about how to incorporate the museum and its exhibits into the curriculum.

Work has also been going on to garner support for the project, Moren said, noting that he has been giving presentations on the museum.

A presentation to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is looking into the possibility of creating a shipwreck sanctuary encompassing 875 square miles of Lake Michigan between Port and Two Rivers, was met with enthusiasm, Moren said.

Ellen Brody, NOAA’s Great Lakes regional coordinator, sent an e-mail afterward expressing

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excitement in the project, he said.

“There is no doubt we’ll be partners in some capacity” if the sanctuary is approved, she wrote.

The ambitious museum project is an expensive one, and Moren said organizers expect to kick off their \$1.3 million fundraising campaign in the next couple weeks.

That amount includes enough money to create the museum, staff it and keep it going until it begins to generate revenue, he said.

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Image Information: THE INTERIOR OF the Port Washington Historical Society’s building at 118 N. Franklin St. in downtown Port Washington has been gutted, creating a framework for a museum the group is developing. Wayne Chrusciel (at right), one of three men overseeing the construction, and architect Mike Ehrlich walked through the upper level of the building.  
Photos by Sam Arendt