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Buffalo County Historical Society to Break Ground on Family History Center

Building at Trails & Rails Museum to house archives, display opera house curtain

Kearney, Neb —It is a groundbreaking that will not only make history, but it will also make a place to preserve history.

On Thursday, October 6 at 9 a.m., Buffalo County Historical Society will break ground on phase one of a Family History Center. The 6,000-square-foot structure will provide space for archives, offices, a conference room and museum displays. The society has raised \$1.25 million to commence the first phase, with a goal to raise a total of \$1.75 million that will allow it to complete phase two and add additional display space to the building.

Lance Hehner, president of the Buffalo County Historical Society board of directors, said the groundbreaking celebrates the future and the past of Buffalo County.

“It is an historic moment for all of Buffalo County as we take an important step forward in enhancing the preservation of Buffalo County's rich and unique history,” Hehner said.

The Family History Center is an extension of the society's Trails & Rails Museum and will be located on the museum's campus at 710 W. 11th Street. Its centerpiece display will feature the last curtain from the Kearney Opera House, which is hand painted with advertisements from Kearney's local businesses in the early 1900s. The upper third of this artifact had been on display in the depot at Trails and Rails Museum but was too tall to exhibit in its entirety. Several years ago, the curtain ceased to be accessible for public viewing altogether due to space constraints.

When the Family History Center opens next spring, the opera house curtain will be on public display in its full glory, possibly for the first time since the Kearney Opera House held its final performance in 1932.

The Family History Center, designed by BD Construction of Kearney, will have space for a few smaller museum displays and will house the historical society's ever-expanding archive collection. The building will also include an office for staff and a conference room. In addition to the design, BD Construction will build the Family History Center.

Hehner said the enhancements of a modern building will complement the society's abilities to preserve, interpret and educate future generations.

"This building will better serve people researching their family histories, and that's becoming a more and more popular endeavor. It will also provide a space for exhibits and events that help us understand our heritage. Museum guests will be more comfortable with better parking and the accessible bathrooms. Thanks to the Family History Center, Trails and Rails Museum will be able to better preserve Buffalo County's vast history," Hehner said.

Jennifer Murrish, executive director of the Buffalo County Historical Society, is optimistic that the project will also bring forth donors to assist with the remaining \$500,000 needed to complete phase two.

"I'm hopeful this provides the momentum for donors to step forward to help us complete Phase Two. The pioneers who made Buffalo County what it is today entrusted today's generations with a rich legacy that we seek to preserve," Murrish said.

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About Trails & Rails Museum

The Trails & Rails Museum has six historic buildings to tour through, as well as a livery barn, the new JC Marlatt blacksmith shop, and a Union Pacific steam engine and caboose. The archive building houses the Buffalo County records and is used by researchers world-wide. Join us for several special events through-out the year! The Trails & Rails Museum is located on the original Mormon Trail route (current 11th St.). The Museum is owned and operated by the Buffalo County Historical Society, which is a not-for-profit, 501c-3 organization. Please check out www.bchs.us for additional details and special events.

About BD Construction

As construction management and design-build specialists, BD Construction is one of the Midwest's leading construction companies with a lengthy history of large-scale building projects of every description — from hangars to hospitals to hotels. Founded in 1960, BD Construction is capable of handling all aspects of a building project, starting with the initial concept and floor plans, and continuing through site selection, design consultancy, project finance coordination, permitting, construction and evaluation of the finished project. BD Construction is eligible to participate in LEED-qualifying projects, where the focus is on sustainable design, construction and operations while utilizing green building techniques. Connect with BD Construction on LinkedIn, Facebook or visit www.bdconstruction.com for more information.