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State chips in\$90k for OCFAC restoration

DIONNE GLEATON T&D Staff Writer Feb 18, 2016



A center that has been promoting and providing arts education, activities and events since 1984 is looking forward to continuing its renovation plans with the help of \$90,000 in state funding.

An updated lobby and new children's gallery, restrooms and music education room will be included in the restoration project at the Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center.

State Sen. John Matthews presented OCFAC Executive Director Beth Thomas and OCFAC board members with a \$90,000 check on Feb. 12 at the center, where officials are working to expand educational opportunities and improve the overall visitor experience.

"One of the things that we don't have in our city is enough destination points where people are coming to. It affects the quality of life. I think art and the center's location on the river can make a great destination point," Matthews said.

"I've been working on some ideas on what we can do with the river and try to tie it into this center so that we can have a major impact which will help everybody. When you bring people to town for one reason, they'll wind up spending money for other reasons," including

eating and shopping, he said.

Thomas said the center's main lobby will be opened up, with the current music room to be converted into a seating area surrounded by children's art.

"It'll be a children's gallery. The seating area will be in there as opposed to out in the lobby. The lobby will be more of an art display with maybe some movable walls that we can have art on," she said.

Thomas' current office will become the new music room, while a new warming kitchen is included in the plans.

"We're also going to have a reception area, polished concrete flooring and new doors with an awning built out to the road so that people are not standing out in the rain. We will also paint the outside of the building," Thomas said.

"We'll have an improved method to hang the art upstairs, she added. "That's probably all we're doing up there, but it's a lot. It's going to look very different."

The state funding Matthews was able to secure complements the funds the OCFAC has also received from Orangeburg County and the City of Orangeburg.

Orangeburg County Councilman Clyde Livingston has pledged \$100,000 toward the center's renovation from the Community Resources Enhancement Sites Trust. The funding comes from the county's 1 percent capital projects sales tax. The city has given \$65,000 towards the renovation project.

Thomas said the center has registered visitors from 49 states and 17 countries, serving as a hub for attracting individuals to what the city has to offer.

"I think the renovation will draw more people in. We have heavy traffic here. They're stopping in Orangeburg and very often asking, 'Where can I have lunch? Where can I stay overnight? What else is around here for me to see?'" she said.

“We feel like we’re a little bit of a hub here at the center because people do drive through Orangeburg, and we want them to stay,” Thomas said. “The Edisto Memorial Gardens and the Edisto River are a major attraction, and it’s just encouraging that Senator Matthews has that kind of interest in it. I should think it would register with a lot of other people that this is worth caring about.”

Matthews said the renovation plans can help transform the arts center into a true multipurpose facility.

“This can become a great entertainment center for receptions, drop-ins and other community functions, including small weddings and anniversaries,” he said.

As far as construction plans, Thomas said, “We haven’t put anything out to bid yet. We have had a lot of work that has been donated so far. Jimmy Evans did a lot of preliminary drawings for us, and then the Columbia-based firm Architrave did a design rendering.”

She added, “We’re in a position now that we can begin moving ahead and doing things. Of course, when you start building, we’ve got a lot of preliminary work. We have some engineers which have given us estimates on drawings for structural, mechanical and electrical work. ... Once we get the drawings of what we want done, we will get contractors to bid on actually building.”

OCFAC board member Curtis Foskey, who is also a musician, said he would like to see the center used more and hopes the renovation will lead to that.

“We think it’s great and motivational. We’ve been working on this for a while, and we’ll probably be working on it for quite a while after this. It’s a great step for us,” Foskey said.

“There was some skepticism about what we could accomplish when the whole thing started, but we’re on the right track,” he said. “We’re going to get where we need to be, and that’s exciting.”

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