Strickland museum set for ribbon cutting this month

BY ERIC SPROTT
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SENECA — A lengthy construction and restoration process wrapped up during the summer, but there's still plenty of work to do to get the Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum up and running.

However, the museum has at least reached the point where it's ready to open its doors to the public for a peek inside.

At Seneca city council's monthly work session Wednesday, city administrator Greg Dietterick announced a ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held at the site from 11:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. on Nov. 19, though it won't be the official opening for the museum.

That will come Feb. 12, house manager Shelby Henderson said, as next month's event will feature only a preview exhibit, which she said has her working at a fervent pace to get ready.

"I won't say I'm not excited, but it's a lot of work," Henderson said with a laugh. "I'll probably get excited once it's done."

The museum will celebrate local African-American history — as well as Strickland's connection to the esteemed Lunney family of Seneca as a maid, caregiver and confidant for nearly 50 years — with rotating displays of its collections three times per year.

Council approved funding for construction at the two-home museum — located at 208 W. S. 2nd St. adjacent to the Lunney House Museum — last year.

Officials priced the project at $519,000, which was taken out of the city's peak power generation savings account and will be paid back with Hospitality and Accommodations Tax money over the next four to five years.

And while the grand opening is still a few months away, Henderson said she's thrilled to build the excitement for the museum around the holiday season.

"We're doing it to not only build up the hype in the community, but it also gets us prepared for what we're hoping is going to be a nationally acclaimed museum," she said. "This is just a jumpstart before the holidays, and it gives people a chance to come in and get a taste of what's going to be going on in the museum."

At Wednesday's meeting, Dietterick also announced an additional three ribbon cuttings, which will all take place beginning at 11:30 a.m. on Dec. 1. Seneca will celebrate new facilities at Norton-Thompson Park, Seneca Light and Water's warehouse and the city's water plant.

Also Wednesday, Seneca planning and development director Ed Halbig said plans are in the works to transfer the city's three diesel buses, the first busses in the city's fleet when they were put into service in 2006, to the city of Clemson.

He said the SCOT is working to provide the appropriate language for a resolution to complete the transfer of the busses, which remain on Seneca's books as assets despite being out of service.

Halbig — who said Seneca's active fleet consists of six electric busses — said there were initial concerns about not being able to provide bus transportation for potential emergency situations in the city, but added "that sort of stuff has all been worked out" with Clemson Area Transit.

Seneca was not spending any money on gas for the diesel buses, as they have not been in service recently. No timetable for the transfer of the buses, or cost savings after the transfer, was announced at Wednesday's work session.

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