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Burchfield-Penney's new home celebrated

But weather foils lifting of last beam

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Wind and rain foiled Monday's ceremonial hoisting of the last steel beam for the new Burchfield-Penney Art Center.

But the nasty weather failed to dampen the "topping off" celebration in Rockwell Hall, across from the construction site, where project supporters signed a banner that will be glued to the beam before it is finally lifted into place Wednesday.

Before long, the signatures will be plastered over, "never to be seen again," said Stanley Kardonsky, vice president for finance and management at Buffalo State College, the Burchfield's home since its founding 40 years ago.

Those who have left more than symbolic imprints on the new museum, including William J. Magavern II, took the joke in stride.

A Buffalo lawyer whose \$1 million gift got the plan off the ground in 1998, Magavern said the structure at Elmwood Avenue and Rockwell Road fulfills his 20-year-old dream of a freestanding home for the Burchfield, which now occupies the third floor of Rockwell Hall.

The 75,000-square-foot facility named for the renowned watercolorist Charles E. Burchfield will not only be a beacon for Western New York artists and Buffalo State students but "one of the most significant additions to Buffalo's famed architecture in almost a century," Magavern said.

Although \$3 million still must be raised to complete the \$33 million center, it will open on schedule in mid-2008, promised Burchfield-Penney Executive Director Ted Pietrzak. Finding money "is still a challenge, but the building will go up and we will open it," he said.

Seeing the steel framework completed was "wonderful," added Catherine Parker, Charles Burchfield's daughter and a well-known artist in her own right. Joining Parker were her brother, Charles A. "Art" Burchfield, and his wife, Violet.

It was disclosed last May that the family's Burchfield Foundation will give the new museum a trove of drawings, sketches, texts and other Burchfield materials worth millions of dollars, as well as the senior Burchfield's pensive 1942 painting "The Studio."

At the same time, the foundation contributed \$250,000 toward construction, matching an earlier donation. Over time, it has donated 112 works, including paintings, drawings, commercial designs and wallpapers created by the artist, who died in 1967.

The two-story center designed by architects Gwathmey Siegel and Associates will double current gallery exhibition space and provide more than six times as much space for education and public programs.

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Charles Lewis/Buffalo News
William J. Magavern II signs a steel beam that will top off the new Burchfield-Penney Art Center, as Cindy Abbott Letro, chairwoman of the Burchfield-Penney board, watches.