

# The Buffalo News : City & Region

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## Burchfield-Penney Art Center taking shape on Elmwood

**\$30 million project scheduled to open in late 2008**

**By Mark Sommer - News Staff Reporter**

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Charles Lewis/Buffalo News  
Muriel Howard, Buffalo State College president, left, and Paula Joy Reinhold, chairwoman of the Capital Campaign, tour the construction site of the Burchfield-Penny Art Center adjacent to the campus.

The \$30 million Burchfield-Penney Art Center is only at the halfway point toward a planned fall 2008 opening.

But through the steel-framed walls and roughed-out areas, the interior outline of a spacious, state-of-the-art 21st century museum is taking shape. It will feature a grand, curved main gallery, movable ceilings, a high-tech auditorium and “green” technologies.

“Walking through the museum is really special. It’s a terribly exciting space,” said Harold Cohen, dean emeritus of the University at Buffalo’s School of Architecture and Planning, who has toured the space. “It’s really going to be a beautiful gallery.”

The new museum’s partially completed exterior will feature zinc cladding that ages to a distinctive patina, limestone, manganese-glazed brick and glass. It will double the amount of gallery space from its current home in Buffalo State College’s Rockwell Hall to 18,000 square feet.

The 84,000-square-foot museum is located on nearly five acres on the corner of Elmwood Avenue and Rockwell Road, adjacent to the college and across the street from Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

The architect is Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects of New York City, which designed the 1992 addition to Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in Manhattan and the University at Buffalo's Center for the Arts.

Visitors entering the Burchfield- Penney will walk into a two-story, 120-foot concourse — the kind of vista, says Ted Pietrzak, the museum's director, represented by the restored pergola in Wright's Darwin Martin House. A cafe, visitors center and museum store will be on the left, a cascading stairway to the right.

The concourse leads past three rooms to be used for public and scholarly educational purposes into the curved, 147-foot-long East Gallery, the space for featured exhibitions that could become the single most stunning exhibition room in Western New York.

The 28-foot-high ceiling will be above a maple floor, with full windows on the north and south to allow natural light. A 12-foot-high, glassed-in cantilevered deck allows views from the second floor.

Pietrzak said the building's openness is an important part of the desired experience.

"We've got magnificent vistas that go between 130 to 150 feet, unique spaces that are engaging and different and a changing scale of heights that give you that sense of expansion and contraction," Pietrzak said.

"We wanted a place where art is paramount, and can be shown in the finest way possible without distraction. We wanted a place for people, where human comfort and convenience is taken into account. And we wanted the 'awe' experience, and that's what we have."

Off the main gallery is a contemporary art space with a ceiling that can be moved by remote control for installation and projection art. Across the way is a historical art space that will have a yellow pine floor.

The first floor will also include an acoustically sophisticated auditorium with a stage and seating for 156, intentionally designed to be half as large as the Albright-Knox's. The high-tech, cube-sized room will include film projection, video and Web-based and distance- learning capabilities.

While 75 percent of the gallery space will be on the first floor, two galleries are intended upstairs for craft media and sculpture. A community gallery envisioned for people with special needs also will be upstairs.

There also will be a cone-shaped reception area and outdoor terrace for community events such as museum openings and celebrations.

Buffalo State College President Muriel Howard said the three educational spaces clustered near the entrance are meant to underscore the facility's commitment to education with the public and its relationship with the college.

One of the school's largest programs is art education, while a smaller, elite art conservation program graduates about a dozen per year.

Howard said about 11 academic programs will use the museum's facilities to support instruction, even music students who can give recitals in the new auditorium.

The educational spaces will offer hands-on experiences developed by students and faculty for children and families to experience art, as well as opportunities for scholarly pursuits.

Students working on restorations in the art conservation laboratory can be observed through windows on the second floor.

Another important aspect is the use of "green" technology — something more common as concerns about the environment increase.

Art storage areas will be equipped with sensitive, climate-controlled equipment and gaseous, rather than water-based, fire-suppression systems to offer additional protections for the fragile artwork.

The building is being made with recyclable materials obtained within a 500-mile radius of the site when possible. It will use waterless urinals, energy-efficient double-flush toilets and motion-detector light switches.

Paula Joy Reinhold, chairwoman of Burchfield-Penney's capital campaign, said the museum will be a fitting tribute to Western New York artists, past and present.

"Very few cities have a museum dedicated to regional artwork. Ours is not just Charles Burchfield. It's the artwork of the people who live here," Reinhold said.

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