

History lessons to be learned

20th century school to become 21st century legacy interpretation centre

By BILL BOWMAN

The Compass

Anyone who attended the old United Church School in Cupids during the 1950s and '60s won't recognize their old alma mater when they return next summer.

The 56-year old building (built in 1953) is being completely redeveloped and transformed into a new Cupids Legacy Centre in time for the 2010 celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of Canada's first English settlement.

Work is already underway on construction of the \$5 million facility on the site of the former U.C. School on Seaforest Drive in the historic Conception Bay North town.

It will house a new Exhibit Hall, a family history resource centre, Cupids Cove Plantation Archaeology Lab, and a multi-purpose community/arts centre. Designed by the St. John's based architectural firm of Ron Fougere Associates, "the building incorporates an adaptive reuse of the existing structure, as well as elements of environmental sustainability," said a spokesman for Cupids400 Inc.

The contract for construction has been awarded to Redwood Construction of Mount Pearl.

Ontario firm gets contract

Myrrden Enterprises and BaAM Productions of Ontario were awarded the contract for the interpretation and exhibit design.

The building is scheduled to be ready for an official opening early next summer (2010).

Peter Laracy, Capital Works Manager with Cupids400 Inc. told *The Compass* last Friday the corporation purchased the former United Church Hall property, which up until this year had acted as temporary home for a museum and archaeology interpretation centre.

Last fall the museum, archaeology centre and Cupids400 Inc. office were relocated to a building further east on Seaforest Drive, which also serves as headquarters for the Baccalieu Trail Heritage Corporation (BTHC). The building once served as a warehouse for Akerman's Wholesale Ltd.

When asked about the modern look of the new Legacy Centre, with its glass and steel façade, potentially being out of character with the more traditional look of some of the community's older buildings, Laracy acknowledged, "there wasn't any attempt to make it look like a vintage 1953 building."

He said the objective is to make it distinctive and current, reflective of the 21st century.

New extensions are being added to both the front and rear of the building. The Capital Works Manager said the new piece on the front will be used primarily as an exhibition hall, lobby and washrooms. He said the deck on top of the new structure will feature four interpre-

tation nodes with interpretations of what to look for in the environment as one looks out over the community.

Laracy noted about 80 per cent of the demolition of the old building's interior has been completed to make way for the new centre, and excavation work has started in front of the building to accommodate the new addition.

While the focus will be on John Guy, he explained it will also examine "the other 400 years of the evolution of life here since 1610."

Anchor attraction

Meanwhile, Roy Dawe says, "the Cupids Legacy Centre will become an anchor attraction for the region and tell the story of the first English colony in Canada,"

The chair of Cupids400 Inc. says: "It will also highlight and celebrate the evolution of our communities and people and stand as a legacy of our history and culture as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians."

The provincial government, through the department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation is providing \$3.5 million, while the federal government is contributing \$1.5 million through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) to build the Cupids Legacy Centre and develop the Interpretation Plan.

Premier Danny Williams came to Cupids at the beginning of June to announce \$1.8 million for the project, which brings the province's total contribution to the Cupids400 pro-

ject to close to \$4 million.

Almost a year ago (August 2008) Prime Minister Stephen Harper was also in Cupids bearing a \$3.14 million gift to help the town with its celebrations. That was in addition to \$1.5 million announced earlier in the year (February), bringing the total from the feds to close to \$5 million. That would bring the federal/provincial grand total contribution to somewhere between \$8 million and \$9 million.

Although most of the funding is now in place, Peter Laracy said they have also applied for some funding from the ECO Trust Green Fund, and are waiting to hear back from that federally funded, provincially administered agency.

The Legacy Centre will house more than 110,000 artefacts uncovered since the discovery of the original John Guy Plantation site in 1995.

While the celebrations surrounding Cupids' quadricentennial will run for a full year, they are expected to reach a crescendo during the week of Aug. 17-22, 2010.

Formed in 2001, Cupids400 Inc. is the not-for-profit organization set up to plan and execute the 2010 celebrations as well as design and build an interpretation centre to mark the 400th anniversary of John Guy's founding of the first English settlement in Canada at Cupers Cove, now Cupids.