

Biloxi to see new library and civic center



The City of Biloxi will begin construction this summer on a \$24 million downtown library and civic center that will have indoor areas that would cover two football fields, offer a wealth of functional space and the latest technology for a diverse group of patrons.

The 72,000-square-foot building, being funded with Community Development Block Grant funds, FEMA funds and insurance proceeds will be located on Howard Avenue at the former site of the old Biloxi High School and Dukate Elementary School.

The new library will serve as a welcome replacement for the storm-ravaged downtown library constructed in 1977. The new civic center will incorporate many of the functions from facilities that were destroyed by Katrina such as the Point Cadet Hangar, Point Cadet Boxing Club, and the O'Hanlon Recreation Center. The existing Biloxi Community Center located across Howard Avenue south of the project site is being considered as a base for seniors programs.

"For years, the larger Mardi Gras balls in Biloxi have been moving to the Coast Coliseum because they'd outgrown the Biloxi Community Center," Mayor A.J. Holloway says, "but this will mean a number of them can come back."

Architect Leigh Jaunsen, AIA with Dale and Associates Architects of Biloxi related that the project design including the arcade, courtyard, arched windows, stucco exterior, chandeliers and wood ceilings was influenced by some of Biloxi's most beloved buildings, the Tivoli, Buena Vista and White House hotels.

The new library and civic center will occupy the southern portion of the Howard Avenue site facing Howard Avenue and will include an outdoor courtyard surrounded by an arcade that will connect the Howard Avenue pedestrian entrance and the on-site parking area to the north. The courtyard serves as the main entry points for both the library and the civic center.

The seating capacity of the new civic center will be nearly double that of the old community center seating 720 on the main floor in a Mardi Gras Ball configuration, plus an additional 350 guests in the

Perhaps no place in any community is so totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest.

~Lady Bird Johnson

ballroom balcony.

It will accommodate 1,350 people on the main floor for a banquet-style function and operable partitions are designed to divide the ballroom for smaller meetings. By contrast, the Biloxi Community Center seats about 400 patrons for a carnival ball. The civic center will include a permanent performance stage, four dressing rooms, a green room, a catering pantry, a professional theatrical lighting and sound system along with two pre-function areas.

And the new library, according to Biloxi librarian Charline Longino, will offer more than 21,000 square feet, but "it will seem bigger because we can use the space better. Patrons are going to

enjoy a 21st century library that is designed to handle all of the new technology that libraries have to offer and it also reflects the historical character of our city. It looks like it belongs."

The new library will house the same number of volumes as the previous library – 70,000 – "but they'll all be new and shiny," Longino said. "We'll have a nice new collection of audio visuals, including DVDs, videos and audio books."

"The library was designed to provide a flexible layout to accommodate the library's present and future needs as the collection evolves," said Edwin Daniel, AIA also with Dale and Associates Architects. "The interior layout groups activities with similar age groups and noise levels, and places the quieter areas such as the reference collection, non-fiction collection and the local history area away

from the more active and noisier areas such as the browsing area and the children's area. Natural lighting through clerestory windows will also enhance the library interior"

The library also will feature a "library within a library" concept for the local history collection recognizing the unique and important attributes of this part of the library's collection.

Longino said she has been impressed with the architect's dedication.

"They've been very responsive to the library's needs," she said. "They even brought in a nationally recognized consultant to help plan the spaces inside. It's not just a pretty building; it's a functional building."

Visitors Center breaks ground this summer

When Biloxi's new Visitors Center begins construction this summer north of the Biloxi Lighthouse, the structure taking shape will give passersby a view from the past.

That's because the proposed new Visitors Center – a \$13 million undertaking financed primarily by Community Development Block Grants – will bear a striking resemblance to the Dantzer House, an historic city-owned beachfront structure that was demolished by Hurricane Katrina.

The Visitors Center, in fact, will be situated near the former location of the Dantzer House, but will be elevated to 22 feet above sea level and be built atop concealed piers. Its exterior walls will be concrete masonry with a painted brick veneer. Its construction

also will feature steel columns and beams.

The two-story structure will offer nearly 25,000 square feet.

The first floor plans include a reception, information and exhibit space along with offices. A grand staircase will take visitors to the second floor, where they will find conference rooms, space for exhibits or receptions, and a theater that can also be used for lectures or educational seminars.

The center of the building is a double height space with a balcony that is open to the information area below. "The Visitor's Center," said architect Leigh Grimes



Jaunsen of the firm Dale and Associates, "has been designed to be reminiscent of the beachfront homes that existed before Katrina and provides a green space with an unobstructed view of the lighthouse and the water for the community and Biloxi's visitors."

Expansive porches, much like those on the Dantzer House, will line the front of the first and second floors of the center.