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'Falling into place:' Clayton Center for the Arts pulls into homestretch

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With about four months left to go until the Clayton Center for the Arts' completion date, workers and officials are pulling up into the homestretch.

Between 190 and 200 workers are on-site every day, said Andy Derenski, Messer Construction's project executive. Crews from 12 companies are working every day, and a handful of other crews are on-site based upon the day's scope of work, he said.

Officials are keeping their resources assigned to the project's critical path, which is the main theater and lobby area, Derenski said. They hope to remove a crane located in the plaza, which feeds rooftop workers with materials and equipment, by early- to mid-September so they can turn the plaza over to other crews, he said.

Workers are also being directed to finish laying brick in areas with the most site work, Derenski said. They will need to pour concrete sidewalks and start work on both the center's landscaping and the Outdoors Art Plaza, he said.

Workers are about 75 percent complete with the main performance hall and about 80 percent complete with the art and recital hall, Derenski said. The project is tracking on schedule for its December completion date, he said.

Workers have completed 60 percent of the total roof work and between 60 and 70 percent of the total brick masonry, Derenski said. They have completed 60 percent of the piping equipment for the heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) rooftop units, he said. Workers have also started hanging dry wall, Derenski said.

Workers will finish out the ceiling grid, start painting and lay carpet after they complete hanging the dry wall, he said. "The buildings are changing from rough-in towards the finishing phase. It will be changing rapidly in the next four months."

Officials hope to start bringing sections of the HVAC systems online starting in October, Derenski said.

The project executive said he's confident about the homestretch. "Everything is in line. It will be a lot of work, but a plan is in place to make it work. We'll also make it work."**\$6.5 million to go**

The Clayton Center for the Arts is a partnership between Maryville College, the cities of Maryville and Alcoa, and state and federal governments.

Officials have raised about \$40.5 million toward the \$47 million Clayton Center for the Arts. "We've seen a lot of movement in the last four to six weeks. I think it's a sign the economy might be turning around, because a lot of people wanted to give before and didn't have the money," said Holly Jackson-Ludlow, vice president for advancement and community relations at Maryville College.

Kevin Painter, chairman of the Clayton Center Advisory Board's executive committee, has raised more than \$800,000 toward his \$2 million goal since launching a community campaign in January, she said.

The college's grassroots fundraising has kicked into high gear. Officials have organized small donor events including one in Tellico Village, Jackson-Ludlow said. They also have pending grant requests including several in the seven-figure range, she said.

Maryville College is in talks with Kevin Clayton to hold a project fundraiser, Jackson-Ludlow said. "He's spearheaded so much of the fundraising and is continuing to cultivate donors."

Community members have several other donor options. Seats in the main performance hall may be named for anyone the donor chooses. The cost is \$2,000 per seat.

With two lines of text and 14 letters/spaces per line, outdoor pavers may also be named for anyone the donor chooses. Pavers are \$1,000 each, but the discounted price is \$250 each if named for anyone under the age of 18. Children's pavers will be laid in a special section in the plaza.

Spaces in and around the Clayton Center are still available for naming, including the outdoor plaza, the instrumental rehearsal hall and several dressing rooms and practice rooms. Prices tied to named spaces start at \$10,000.

Programming plans

The Clayton Center's two buildings will house a 1,200-seat performance hall, a 250-seat recital hall, a 200-seat flexible theater, a grand lobby with a 250-capacity dining area, three gallery/exhibit spaces and an outdoor arts plaza that can be used for special events.

Officials are currently envisioning a two-day opening event in late March, said Robert Hutchens, the center's executive director. They also plan to offer various activities before the opening event to test the center's technical and logistical capabilities, he said.

Officials plan to organize a mini-season from March until June 2010. Hutchens said he will attend a booking conference next month to learn about potential programming opportunities.

Officials have already booked 10 rental events, which has surpassed the center's goal, Hutchens said. "It's more activity than I was prepared for, but it's really falling into place. Everything is really coming into its place."
