

Renovations to turn Hall into Palace

By WILLARD STRONG
Post-Courier Reporter

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A once-proud lady is getting a facelift. County Hall played host to the biggest names in show business. Now named the King Street Palace, renovation is expected to be completed by late September on a \$1.3 million private development project which investors say will make the historic facility a showpiece and, more importantly, a center for Lowcountry entertainment.

The project is the brainchild of Richard H. Friedberg and Mary T. Feldman of Carolina South Film Corp., a Charleston-based motion picture production company.

Both know a return to the glory days won't be easy. When County Hall finally closed in the mid-1980s, it was a deteriorating structure upstaged by the newer, modern Gaillard Municipal Auditorium.

"Sure, it's a risk to a degree," says Ms. Feldman, walking between busy workmen

at the site earlier this month. "But we're going to make it work. It's a very doable project. You have to create an image."

"Always a Royal Event" is the theme printed on slickly produced promotional material, touting the King Street Palace as "a full-service entertainment complex." On paper, it's got a lot going for it.

Seating capacity is 4,250 (compared to less than 2,800 for Gaillard) at the 1000 King St. address which sits on 3.2 acres of land. It features 20,000 square feet of exhibition space and 2,000 parking spaces within walking distance. Approximately 2,000 people can be accommodated for a sit-down dinner.

Gaillard, of course, is still very much a viable facility. Ms. Feldman says the opening of the King Street Palace is in no way an attempt to undermine the role of the venerable auditorium.

"They want to stick with performing arts like Spoleto and the (Charleston) Symphony," Ms. Feldman says. "They want us

to take up the slack for concerts and other events." While wrestling, basketball, even indoor soccer can be staged at the King Street Palace, she says music, from country to rhythm and blues to rock 'n' roll, should be its strong suit.

"Derrick Williams, the manager of the auditorium, is our operations consultant," say Ms. Feldman. "We've had nothing but cooperation from the city. They think, as do we, that the King Street Palace will be a big boost to this part of town."

"For example, we've entered into a Business/Education Partnership with Rivers Middle School, located next door. Principal Walter Burke has been very supportive, as has Mayor Riley. He's very excited about the project."

Although country singer Ronnie Milsap is booked for an Oct. 6 concert, the facility will officially open Sept. 28 with a festive block party for neighborhood residents.

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"It's like having a baby," says Friedberg, Carolina Film South's chairman of the board. "We now see the finish line in front of us. I think \$1.3 million is going to be enough to do it."

"We've gotten rid of the termites," Ms. Feldman says with a laugh. "The balconies have been rebuilt and we've installed a new heating and air-conditioning system. The walls throughout the building have been stripped to the original brick."

"But the art deco facade will remain because we think it's architecturally significant." Ms. Feldman holds a B.A. in history and County Hall's past, and thus preserving the integrity of the building, was important to her and Friedberg. For example, the original "County Hall," etched in stone out front, is still intact. So is the original dedication plaque. A fountain is planned near the entrance.

The building dates to 1902 as a mill for the Royal Bag and Yarn Manufacturing Co. which went bankrupt in 1911. Williamson Cotton Mill bought the building in June 1923 but in 1931, the mill ended up being purchased at public auction by the South Carolina Security Co.

Charleston County bought it in 1941. During World War II it was

used by the U.S. Army. The greats, including big band leader Tommy Dorsey, singing cowboy Gene Autry and The King, Elvis Presley, have graced its stage. Carolina Film South bought it in 1988.

Besides concerts, the King Street Palace will be available for private parties and special events. Annual memberships at \$100 each are now being solicited.

Membership privileges include the member's or company's name affixed on one of the 1,172 permanent balcony seats. An entrance plaque will list charter members. Members will also get the opportunity for advance ticket sales and pre-event, intermission and post-event access to the Tower Club, a private restaurant and bar under construction in the building's tower. Catering to Charleston, Ms. Feldman says, will be the in-house caterers. Beer and wine will be sold at most events.

Personnel on staff include events coordinator Laurie Harrison and operations manager Lonnie Craft. Patra A. Bucher is the director of marketing and public relations. Ms. Feldman says at least nine security officers will be on duty at each event.

"We hope to make a profit in a year," Ms. Feldman says. "We've done enough research to know we can do it."

King Street Palace

From CharlestonWiki

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The King Street Palace was an auditorium located at 1000 King Street in Downtown Charleston. During the 1990s, the Palace hosted multiple musical concerts (for example, Widespread Panic and Alanis Morissette played there in the mid 90s.). According to wrestling historian Mike Mooneyham, the Palace was also a popular site to host early pre-NWA/WCW pro-wrestling matches. Following Hurricane Hugo, Oprah Winfrey broadcast her show from The King Street Palace, highlighting the devastated families in the area.

Prior to it's reinvention as The Palace, it was known as County Hall, and was a venue for a wide variety of events.

A Charleston Regional Business Journal report indicates that the Palace was to be turned into 75 housing units in 2001.



External Links

Wrestling Historian Mike Mooneyham Article on King Street Palace

(<http://www.mikemooneyham.com/pages/viewfull.cfm?ObjectID=20B379A4-3922-4B14-A1E94FA5676E616D>)

Charleston Regional Business Journal 2001 Report on King Street Palace

(http://www.charlestonbusiness.com/pub/4_17/news/1607-1.html)

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Newton Builders takes the stage at former King Street Palace

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Newton Builders takes the stage at former King Street Palace

Newton Builders Inc. has begun renovating King Street Palace, located at 1000 King St. This \$5.3 million project will convert the historic auditorium into 75 affordable housing units.

Bryan Raines, senior project manager for Columbia-based developer JBM Properties LLC, says the property was awarded affordable tax credits housing in 1999. "We received tremendous support from the Charleston Community Development Department throughout the process," says Raines.

"Given the northern expansion of the city, this location makes it perfect for affordable housing," he adds. "Even the new bridge will be a benefit."

King Street Palace has served many functions in the last century. According to Raines, it was built as a mill around 1900 and renovated into County Hall in the 1930s. It was turned into an auditorium in the 1960s and has hosted an array of events, from Citadel dances to wrestling matches.

"We've found all sorts of interesting stuff on the property, including ticket stubs from when Elvis played the auditorium," says Raines.

JBM Properties hired Newton Builders to convert the property into a three-story structure. "Demolition of the inside has been completed," says Andrews Groves, vice president of Newton Builders.



Newton Builders will erect a three-story steel tower within the shell of the existing structure. Much of the façade and exterior will be preserved. "It's like building a ship in a bottle," notes Groves.

Newton Builders is a Charleston-based firm offering commercial construction and light industrial services. They have renovated several high profile, historic properties, including the former Condon's department store and, in the late 1980s, the Chamber of Commerce.

Billy Boyer, Newton Builders project manager, says the purpose of this project makes it rewarding. "We have done several affordable housing projects and think they offer a real value to Charleston at this time."

The project scope includes demolition work and asbestos removal, steel masonry, installation of electrical, plumbing and HVAC installation.

Renovations began in April 2001 and are expected to be completed late January 2002.

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