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Visit Beloit's new home begins to take shape

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Visit Beloit Executive Director Celestino Ruffini explains future plans for the first floor space at the 656 Pleasant Catholic Church and the Angel Museum. The space is now the permanent home of Visit Beloit. Reconstruction will start back up again in 2022. The stained glass windows will remain as part of the redevelopment, along with during demolition.

Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News



BELOIT—Visit Beloit’s plan to transform one of Beloit’s most historic riverfront properties is progressing well, with the organization eyeing a big future for area tourism and regional growth in the area.

Construction to transform the former St. Paul’s Catholic Church and Angel Museum building at 656 Pleasant St., started last year. Crews built out office space for Visit Beloit staff in the facility’s basement and are in the process of redeveloping the first floor space that was formerly the church and later the museum.

Prior to occupying the building, Visit Beloit was temporarily located at the Eclipse Center, and Executive Director Celestino Ruffini said the relocation back downtown was a much-welcomed change.

“We’ve had more people stopping in and asking about the project,” Ruffini said.

“We’ve had visitors stop in asking about what we do here. It’s great to be back in the midst of things going on downtown.”

First built in 1912, St. Paul’s Catholic Church was open for 75 years before closing and remains one of the oldest riverfront properties in Beloit. The Angel Museum opened in 1998 and closed in 2018 before a City of Beloit redevelopment push led to Visit Beloit securing the property through a bidding process.

During construction, Ruffini said crews found original hardwood floors under linolium and the decision was made to preserve the flooring. The iconic stained glass windows also will stay as part of the building.

“Redevelopment and reuse of this space is so important to us,” Ruffini said. “It’s vital that we are able to maintain the historic nature of this property while bringing it forward in our own way. This space will be ours to share with the community.”



In the Spring of 2022, Visit Beloit will bid out around \$300,000 in work to build out the main event space on the first floor, paving the way for large events capable of hosting up to 120 people.

A third phase of work is expected in 2023 to build out the entire complex that will include a large welcome area, vestibule, permanent staff offices and a large conference room.

With the steady buildout, so too comes growth for the organization as Ruffini said plans were in the works to possibly add more Visit Beloit staff.

“We’re really excited about what is going on here in Beloit,” Ruffini said. “We’re happy to be part of the growth and redevelopment.”

Austin Montgomery