



Architectural rendering

## Guelph Civic Museum Grand Opening Soon

Article Courtesy of Joanne Shuttleworth, Mercury staff  
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The official opening of the new Guelph Civic Museum isn't until the end of February, but museum staff is preparing for a soft launch next week. Students at Central Public School will be the first to see the new space as museum staff offer a few pilot tours to the neighboring school next week.

Staff is also hoping a few key construction jobs are completed so they can open the doors to the public for a few hours on Jan. 21 or 22. "All the exhibits will not be done until the end of February, but we need to put people in the building to see about traffic flow and other details," said Katherine McCracken, director of Guelph Museums.

"I'm still anxious. We still have a few key trades on the site." McCracken said they are expecting delivery of some equipment and furnishings. If they arrive on time, tradespeople will be able to complete their work on time. If they arrive late, however, it would throw off the schedule, she said.

The old museum on Dublin Street was cramped with only a couple of exhibit spaces and very little storage. The new museum, beside the Church of Our Lady at 52 Norfolk, is more



Museum preview. Guelph Museums director Katherine McCracken says new Guelph Museum could be ready for a soft opening later this month. T Saxon/Guelph Mercury Source: Guelph Mercury



than double the space and will allow the museum to offer tours, meeting space and research space all at the same time. There's also more room to store artifacts, which in turn will allow more creative and interesting exhibits. "It will have the new-factor going for it for a while, but with a more prominent location and higher profile, we expect attendance will increase," McCracken said.

Ward 3 Councillor June Hofland has sat on the museum board for four years and has already had a sneak peek, "and it's quite remarkable," she said. "More beautiful than I imagined." The glass wall that was so controversial affords beautiful views of the city, she said. There's a nice mix of old and new building materials and a big, inviting foyer. The formal opening of the museum is scheduled for Feb. 24, 25 and 26. Details will become public closer to the date.



*Joanne Shuttleworth, Mercury staff January 11, 2012 - 2 of 2*

**GUELPH** — It's got that new museum smell and from its vantage point halfway up Catholic Hill, the new Guelph Civic Museum has some of the most impressive views of downtown Guelph. On a clear day you can see the red roof of the Turfgrass Institute way over on Victoria Road. The steeples of Guelph's stone churches poke above the rest of the roof line.

And when landscaping outside the museum is complete, it will be one of the few green spaces in the city's core as well. "I'm particularly pleased with the feel of it," said museum director Katherine McCracken as she offered Coun. Todd Dennis and the Mercury a tour inside.

"I worried about having too many modern materials inside this historic old building. But glass and stone go together, the architects always say. I think it turned out really well." The building was once the Loretto Convent where nuns lived, studied and trained and one of the permanent exhibits will highlight the history of the nuns and show what a typical bedroom would have looked like. "It was a plain building and it had been renovated many times before we got it," McCracken said. So there aren't many historical features inside that could be preserved.

The original staircase from the first to the second floor remains. There's an exposed stone wall in the children's area. And while the windows have all been replaced, the stained glass windows in the old chapel area have been restored and features prominently in the kid zone too.

"The concept of the children's gallery is to tell the stories of children through different eras," she said. "It will be interactive but we didn't want to get too high tech." The new museum has two temporary gallery spaces and several permanent exhibits.

There's a gift shop, a classroom for school trips, a meeting room that can be rented for community groups, and a lounge area for volunteers and staff. And now there's ample storage space for artifacts as well at least double what the old museum on Dublin Street afforded. The archive and research room was named the Hugh Guthrie Archives.

Guthrie was the honorary chair of the museum's capital campaign. When he died in 2010, he left \$200,000 to the museum project, McCracken said. "Then a number of other people donated to the museum because of Hugh and that's how we raised the money so quickly. We think he'd be happy to have his name attached to the research area. He appreciated history, particularly Guelph's history," she said.



Cork Street View

For all the cost, \$12.7 million from three levels of government and fundraising and the controversial decision to go ahead with the project, even in the face of a recession, Dennis was impressed with museum. “I think people can finally see the value in it now,” he said. “Sometimes people don’t see the forest for the trees but this is a huge asset to the city. I congratulate the people who had the vision to proceed.” “This was going to be demolished,” McCracken said.

“The Church of Our Lady couldn’t use the building itself but would not consider any other use because of the proximity to the church. But they thought a museum would be a compatible use. “And so do we,” she went on. “The Church of Our Lady is the number one tourist attraction in the city. I don’t think it will hurt us at all to be next to that.” McCracken said Guelph

museums have anywhere from 24,000 and 30,000 visits a year. She expects those numbers will go up when the new museum opens, despite the fact that Cork Street is slated for reconstruction this summer and will likely make it difficult to get to the building. The museum may be ready enough for a soft launch Jan. 21st or 22nd, but the official opening is slated for Feb. 24.

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Cork Street Entrance