Improvements at the Berkshire Museum Will Protect Collections, Increase Flexibility, and Enhance Visitor Experiences

The new year brings a new round of construction at the community museum

[Pittsfield, MA] – The Berkshire Museum rings in 2021 with a new phase of construction as it continues planned efforts to preserve and protect the building and collections, improve visitor experience, and provide flexible options for future exhibitions. The six-month-long construction project including repairs, gallery enhancements, and new experience spaces will begin this month with the help of local contractor Salco and Bradley Architects. The museum will remain open throughout construction with gallery closures on the second floor.

Refurbishing and Modernizing the Second Floor Galleries

A complete renovation of the 118-year-old institution’s second floor will bring exhibition galleries into alignment with modern standards for presenting and preserving collections items while maintaining the original character of the building. New walls and floors will replace worn out surfaces, improve insulation, prevent damaging condensation, and allow the installation of expanded electrical to accommodate digital interpretation, brightly lit exhibition cases, and increased flexibility within the galleries.

A state-of-the-art LED lighting system from ERCO will replace the existing second-floor gallery fixtures with flexible, interchangeable, track lighting options. LED bulbs designed for longevity and energy savings will allow the museum to meet or exceed all collections
conservation standards for UV and light exposure, protecting its art and artifacts for years to come.

“We have a responsibility to the museum and to our community to ensure that this one-of-a-kind building is well cared for,” said Jeff Rodgers, executive director of the Berkshire Museum. “Doing this invisible work – repairing walls and floors, installing sewer lines, etcetera – lays the foundation for new and exciting experiences throughout the museum.”

Adding Much-Needed Amenities

Two new gender-neutral, family restrooms and a quiet seating area will be constructed at the top of the museum’s front stairwell, reclaiming space that is currently occupied by a seldom-used catering kitchen. The new seating area will be filled with natural light shining through a once-hidden window overlooking South Street. These accessible amenities will provide convenience and comfort for museum patrons of all ages, large school groups, and special guests attending events in the museum’s Crane Room.

Creating Four New Experience Spaces

To increase the Berkshire Museum’s ability to provide educational and hands-on programming to all ages, two new learning spaces totaling approximately 1,100 square feet will be constructed on the second floor. Located to either side of the grand staircase at the front of the building, the two rooms – a science lab and a studio - will be equipped with sinks, modern technology, and furniture that will allow for flexible use, from art lessons and messy science experiments to sophisticated digital presentations and special event catering. The museum’s existing learning spaces, the Hickey Classroom and SABIC Innovation Studio, will be renovated to create new office space that will allow the entire museum staff to work together under one roof when the team returns from pandemic-driven work from home arrangements.
Two updated gallery spaces, each measuring roughly 350 square feet, will be created just outside the studio and laboratory. With crown molding, ornamental baseboards, and a ceiling arc designed to match the existing galleries, these galleries will look and feel like part of the original museum - with the exception of expansive glass display cabinetry along the west wall of each space that will be used to create constantly changing presentations of objects from the museum’s rich collection of fine art, historical artifacts, and natural science specimens. Over time, these galleries will feature work by local artists and small boutique exhibitions or serve as introductions to larger shows in their neighboring galleries.

“Hands-on learning is a key part of the work we do at the Berkshire Museum,” commented Rodgers. “Bringing a lab and a studio to the front of the museum allows for the flow of ideas from the galleries into classes and workshops and right back out again.”

**Evolving and Adapting Every Day**

Flexibility is at the core of all these projects as the Berkshire Museum looks ahead to a wider variety of interdisciplinary installations and interpretation. In August 2021, patrons can expect to find their favorite objects displayed in fresh and ever-evolving configurations that reveal new connections among art, history, and natural science on every visit. The museum’s brand-new freight lift on the south side of the building will allow the museum to move large-scale objects to and from its second-floor galleries like it never has before, opening the door for bigger, better exhibitions.

To help tell this endless series of interdisciplinary stories, the Berkshire Museum will introduce a new Feigenbaum Innovative Experience: a collection of cutting-edge mobile museum units that will combine objects with interpretation for all ages and opportunities to engage in educational activities. With the flexibility to quickly change objects, interpretation, and location, this series of reconfigurable cases will feature prominently within the galleries and around the community as the museum continues to bring engaging stories directly to its
audiences. Production of the Berkshire Museum’s mobile museum units is generously funded by the Feigenbaum Foundation.

“The ability to pivot quickly from one idea to the next, presenting endless combinations of objects and stories, will allow us to keep even our most frequent visitors engaged and challenged intellectually,” Rodgers explained. “Every time you visit the museum there will be a new item or idea for you to explore and consider alongside some of your favorites.”

As renovations ramp up, work will conclude on the museum’s first phase of construction which began in spring 2020. A new sewer line and water barrier have already been completed at the 118-year-old institution, and a new freight lift which will allow safe movement of large-scale objects to and from the museum’s second floor will be completed within the next month. Wally, the museum’s recently restored stegosaurus model, will be reinstalled on the museum’s front lawn in the coming months.

**About the Berkshire Museum**

Located at 39 South Street in downtown Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the Berkshire Museum combines art, science, and history to create thought-provoking experiences for the whole family through interactive programs, interdisciplinary exhibitions, and engaging online series. The museum is currently open by reservation 5 days each week. Plan your visit at berkshiremuseum.org or go to explore.berkshiremuseum.org to enjoy the Berkshire Museum wherever you are.