

---

# OLEAN TIMES HERALD

---

12/19/2005

## **Work begins at former Keller Opera House**

By LOUIS DiPIETRO , The Times Herald

CUBA — After several dormant years, work has begun at the former Keller Opera House.

Carol Donovan, secretary of the Cuba Friends of Architecture, said scaffolding on both sides of the West Main Street building has been put up, and, if weather permits, improvements will continue between Christmas and New Year's Day. During that time, the Kinley Corp. of Allegany will install five steel beams, which will replace the wooden ones that broke when the roof collapsed in 2001. Part of West Main Street will be closed for a half-day so the steel beams can be installed.

The main goal of the non-profit citizens group is to renovate the former Keller Opera House into a community/senior center with a section for an arts, crafts and antique shop or restore the opera house section to accommodate a dance school.

In September, Peter Grace of Siracuse Engineering LLP deemed the opera house's masonry wall, which faces Main Street, to be structurally safe for repair workers.

"We're working with the architect to get things going as fast as we can. We are thrilled," Mrs. Donovan said.

In November, the title to the old Keller Opera House was transferred over from Arts Gallery West, a non-profit group. Along with the deed came \$44,000 worth of grant funding.

Mrs. Donovan said she is confident that Cuba Friends of Architecture will be eligible for state funding that deals primarily with historic district restoration.

She said community donations are also needed to achieve the group's goal.

"People have said they would donate as soon as the title would transfer over, and

they'd see activity going on," she said. "We do have full control, and there is work being done."

In the meantime, Mrs. Donovan said fundraising for the opera house restoration will continue. A "teddy bear tea" for kids will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, at the Our Lady of Angels Church, South Street. Tickets, which are \$5 or \$3 for children ages 7 and under, are available at Eckerds Drugs and Movies & More Videos.

A DVD highlighting Cuba called "Before and After" is in the works and should be available at the beginning of the year. Profits from sales of the DVD will help fund the opera house project.

Around Memorial Day of next year, Cuba Friends of Architecture hopes to organize a quilt show and a cemetery tour in order to raise more money, Mrs. Donovan said.

Don Donovan, president of the group, said in August that rebuilding the structure's roof was the group's first concern, and the repairs would cost around \$100,000, which doubles last year's initial estimate.