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## **Grant will help save landmark**

By KIP DOYLE , Olean Times Herald

CUBA — A \$500,000-plus boost is in store for the Palmer Opera House in Cuba.

The Cuba Friends of Architecture (CFA) found out Friday that their bid for a grant from Gov. Pataki's Restore New York program was successful in attaining \$523,683 in funding.

The funds will be used to restore both floors of the Palmer building which holds the opera house upstairs and the three store bays downstairs.

The Palmer Opera House, which was built in 1867, was a popular community center and concert hall through the late 1930s. Events such as dances, concerts, and theater were held at the downtown venue.

Because of the grant, those types of community functions could return to downtown Cuba where they were once held over 100 years ago.

"I have always wanted the Opera House to have theater again in Cuba," said Carol Donovan, the secretary of the CFA. "I always thought it was possible and I believe in it."

Mrs. Donovan and her husband, Don, started the CFA in hopes of restoring the downtown storefronts to their historic facades.

Allegany County Legislator Bill Dibble, R-Little Genesee, owned the Palmer building before turning it over to the CFA. Mr. Dibble tried to keep the historic location in good condition despite a leaky roof.

Mr. Dibble arranged tarps to divert rain water from ruining the interior of the building, said Dick Kline, director for the CFA.

"Unfortunately, over time water got under the tarps and began to deteriorate the upstairs floor," Mr. Kline said. The downstairs floor also sustained damage due to rain.

The roof of the Palmer building collapsed in 2001, leaving the interior open to the weather for close to four years. Repairs were completed in December of 2005 through the donations of over 100 people and also corporate funding. The roof

was filled in and the building was reinforced with new steel beams by the Kinley Corp. of Allegany.

“The building needed major work immediately or it was going to come down either through demolition or collapse,” said Michael Doyle, the project’s grant writer.

Mr. Doyle added that either of those two scenarios would have disrupted business traffic and general livability in downtown Cuba.

The storefront design has a unique historical décor with cast-iron pilasters, lion’s head adornments, and multi-paned windows. The grant calls for the maintenance of this classic style as construction moves forward.

According to Mr. Kline, the Restore New York grant money will be used to install new heating, plumbing, and wiring systems throughout the building along with three bathrooms for each downstairs bay. Handicapped access will be added, as well as another set of stairs to the second floor.

Recently, Olean received a \$700,000 grant to help renovate the former Manufacturer’s Hanover Bank building from the Restore New York grant program.

Restore New York approved 75 projects around the state for \$50 million in funding on Friday.

The CFA has received other smaller grants to fund its project, including a grant from Sen. Catharine Young, R-Olean, which Mr. Kline said will be used for the entryway of the Palmer building.

“One of our major goals is to get three doorways and entryways renovated so people can stick their heads in and become believers that it is a usable building,” Mr. Kline said.

Each CFA committee member agreed that the Palmer Opera House restoration project was a labor of the community, and that CFA members Mansel Wells and Katherine Bradley deserved credit for their hard work.

Actual construction will not start until a contractor is selected, but architectural drawings for the interior of the building are nearing completion, said Mr. Kline. The CFA is still searching for funding to put the final touches on both floors.