

---

# OLEAN TIMES HERALD

---

02/17/2006

## **Part of opera house could open by summer**

By DANIEL LEBLANC , The Times Herald

CUBA — Now that the Keller Opera House building has its roof, at least one of the ground-level floors could be available for business by summer.

The Cuba Friends of Architecture, the group responsible for putting up a new roof on the historic building on Main Street in Cuba, has plans to remodel at least one of the three storefronts of the building now controlled by the group. The area that was once known as the Keller Opera House is on the second floor of the building.

The Keller Opera House had been without a new roof since 2001 when the old roof collapsed, leaving a large section of the second floor exposed to the elements.

“We’re moving in the direction where people could use the building again,” said board member Richard Klein.

Board members of the architectural restoration group said Thursday that they would like to see space of the three storefronts leased to a business or organization.

“We would like to see something like a historical enterprise, an antique shop or a general store” go into one of the storefronts, said member Carol Donovan. “We want something that will draw people downtown.”

Mr. Klein estimated that it would cost around \$6,700 to remodel one of the storefronts for business use.

Built in 1872, it was originally called the Palmer Opera House and later renamed the Keller Opera House.

The Cuba Friends of Architecture acquired the building from Arts West Gallery back in October 2005.

“We knew the building needed to be tended to soon or it would totally disintegrate,” said member Mansel Wells.

“It would have been a terrible loss to lose the building,” added Mr. Klein. “It would have been the beginning of the end for that part of Main Street.”

Ms. Donovan also said the group was concerned that Cuba’s Main Street “could lose other businesses” if the building had to be torn down.

Since the architecture group acquired the building, \$90,000 has been raised toward its restoration, most of which was used to replace the roof. Many area businesses and individuals have contributed to the restoration of the building, members said.

Once the storefronts are remodeled, members of the group said they would like to work on the upper portion of the opera house which needs a lot of work.

“There is a historical value of the building that many people don’t know about,” Mr. Wells said.

Member Kathryn Bradley said “at one time the opera house building was one of the most prestigious buildings in Allegany County.”

The group has scheduled several fundraising events to continue restoration of the building. On Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., a rummage sale will be held at 29 E. Main St. Also, a quilt show is in the works for April as well as a cemetery tour on the Memorial Day weekend.

Also for a \$25 donation, a DVD is available with a presentation of more than 500 pictures of the Cuba area. The DVD shows Cuba past and present and has some narration about how Cuba has changed over the years.

The DVDs are available by calling Mansel Wells at (585) 968-0020 or by sending a check to P.O. Box 274, Cuba, NY 14727.

Members of the architecture group have said they are also actively seeking new members. The group next meets at the Cuba Village Hall, 17 E. Main St., on March 16 at 7 p.m.

“It’s amazing what five people putting their heads together can accomplish,” Mr. Wells said. The Cuba Friends of Architecture formed in July 2005 with the intention of educating and helping restore historic buildings in the Cuba area.