

Hotel Syracuse Restoration finishing Phase One

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Posted: 06.01.2015 at 9:19 PM

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Owner says he underestimated public passion for the project

This ceiling at Hotel Syracuse has been hidden from public view since at least the 1980s--the 'floor' and the wall will be removed, making the lobby bigger and allowing all the windows to be seen. / Photojournalist Lewis Karpel

The restoration at Hotel Syracuse is on schedule, with re-opening events being scheduled for next Spring.

Hotel owner Ed Riley, who is overseeing the project, says the demolition is almost done: 85% of asbestos abatement is complete, and about 75% of the deconstruction is also done, leaving a clearer vision of the renovation and restoration work ahead.

Crews have been working, 7:30am - 12:30pm daily taking out 'updates' made over the years, and in the process have uncovered some treasures, and mostly good surprises.

In the Persian Terrace, the false ceiling is off, revealing murals painted on the original ceiling (including scenes of nude mermaids). Workers have also uncovered the stage's original Maine marble. Riley says both will be restored.

Off the main lobby, what was most recently Bernardi's Bistro, and the room above it, are both being extensively renovated. The Bistro, once the Cavalier Room, will become the new entrance to the Imperial Ballroom, as the gallery that was an outside addition to the hotel building is demolished. Workers have found oversized painted wooden panels, which originally hung in the

restaurant---they will go back on the renovated walls.

On the other side of the lobby, what was the bar and wall behind it are also coming down. Behind it, an area that has not been seen by the public since the '80s renovation, at least. You'll now be able to see the 'prow' of the building, the point at Onondaga and Warren Street and a view of downtown. The ornate ceiling (see the picture) will also be added to the restoration list. Riley says it, like many, look like wood but are actually painted plaster, and skilled artisans will be brought in to do the work.

Upstairs, work is also getting underway in earnest on the hotel rooms---there will be 261, about double the size of the old ones, with much bigger baths. They're framing the 'model room' now and hope to have it open for inspection by August 1st.

Riley tells us the single biggest thing he underestimated is how much the community wants to be involved, and how much passion there is, for the restoration. There will be another special room: a hotel museum that will display the pieces of memorabilia being donated to both the Hotel and the Onondaga Historical Association, including matchbooks, menus, receipts and bigger items. Riley says they're welcome, and they're also still looking for bigger hotel furnishings, like the statuary that used to be in the Persian Terrace. They think they've located the hotel's two grand pianos, which will also come 'home.'

With renovations about to get underway in earnest, dates are also being set, for the re-opening. They're planning a 'soft' opening of the public rooms for St. Patrick's Day next spring. The first big event, also next spring, will be the Onondaga Historical Association Gale, in 1920s costume, to commemorate the Hotel Syracuse original opening.