

Little Hall renovation progressing

By John Underwood independent@gulfcoastnewspapers.com | Posted: Friday, April 5, 2013 5:05 pm

SILVERHILL, Alabama —It's been two years since the Little Bohemian Hall in Silverhill was damaged when a tornado ripped through the area and work to restore the more than 90-year-old structure is progressing.

"It's coming along pretty well," said Frankie Kucera, chairman of the Save the Little Hall Committee.

Work to right and repair the structure began about a year ago, when the structure was moved and set on its new foundation, approximately 200 feet from where it sat for the better part of three decades.

Kucera's brother, George "Benny" Kucera, a master carpenter, has taken over the project. All the windows in the structure have been repaired and reset and the structure has been rewired.

The next phase of the project will be finishing the front porch of the structure, using materials donated by James and Sylvia Bailey, who own and operate the sawmill located east of Robertsdale where the original timber for the structure was cut.

Volunteers are also working to put a 16 x 25 foot addition on the back of the structure, which will include a stage, kitchen area and bathrooms.

Work is also progressing to fix leaks found in the roof area of the structure, Frankie Kucera said.

"We're working with Eric Denk Metal Works and I was in here after the last rain and didn't see any leaks or water on the floor," Kucera said.

The journey to save Little Hall began in March of 2011, when the building sustained extensive damage during a tornado. Two months later the Silverhill Town Council voted to proceed with plans to demolish the structure and build a new Community Center.

The grand opening was held in November of last year for the new 3,000 square foot structure, which includes a 1,600 square foot meeting room, plus storage space, a fully-equipped kitchen, restrooms and a covered back deck area where the town plans to build picnic tables.

Following the vote, several concerned residents came forward asking to save the structure, and another three months of discussions later, in August of 2011, plans proceeded to save the Little Hall and move it to a new location.

Another six months of discussions followed, trying to decide what to do with the structure, where it could be moved and how to move it. Then, on Feb. 13, 2012 a proposal was presented to the Council at a specially called meeting to move the structure closer to the corner of Third Avenue and Fourth Street near the town's water tower.

After receiving no objection from the Havel family, who donated the land for the park and approved the usage of the land when the structure was moved in the 1970s, and confirming with the town's insurance company that, as long as they give the building a new address, it can stay at the park, the Town Council voted at its regular meeting March 5 to move the structure to its new home at the corner of Third Avenue and Fourth Street, mere feet from where the structure has been for more than 30 years.

Three weeks later, after receiving approval from the town's Planning Commission and following the proper procedures to facilitate the move, employees with the Town of Silverhill and Fauver's Movers out of Semmes worked together to right, turn and move the structure from facing east toward Second Street to facing north toward Fourth Avenue.

Members of the Little Hall Committee recently met with members of the Silverhill Town Council and set a goal of February 2014 to have the structure completed, Kucera said.

"We're working hard to meet that deadline," he said, "but if we don't get it done then, we will get it done eventually. We're a group of mostly older volunteers. We want to take our time and make sure things are done right."

Once completed, the building will serve as more than just a meeting place, Kucera said. It will also serve as a museum of sorts, showing the history of the town and specifically its Czech and other heritage which has so long been a part of the identity of the town.

Plans are to have photos lining the walls from the early days of the town. There will also be shadow boxes constructed which will house artifacts and examples of traditional dress from the Czech and other cultures.

"We want this to be something everybody in Silverhill can be proud of," Kucera said in an earlier interview. "This building was a gift to this town and that's exactly what it's going to be when we give it back to the town."

Fundraising has been ongoing since the beginning, Kucera said, and so far the group has raised more than \$30,000 to renovate the structure, Kucera said, along with countless hours of volunteer labor and materials.

The Gear Jammers Car Club will host the Eddie "Papa" Denk Memorial Car & Truck Show on Saturday, May 25 in Silverhill, and the event will once again serve in part as a fundraiser for Save The Little Hall.

This year, the show will also benefit Catholic Social Services, Project C.A.R.E. Food Pantry and Silverhill Boy Scout Troop 42.

Last year's event raised over \$8,000 that went toward repairs for the structure, Kucera said in an interview in June of last year.

Registration will be held from 8 a.m. to noon. Judging will start at 11 a.m. for the show, which will be held in downtown Silverhill in the town park squares at Highway 104 and County Road 55 in Silverhill.

Door prizes and goody bags will be available. Dash plaques will be given to the first 100 entries. Food and drinks will be served, including early morning coffee and doughnuts. There will also be a 50/50 jackpot drawing.

Pre-registration by May 17 costs \$20. Registration after May 17 will cost \$25 per vehicle. Second and third vehicle registration will cost \$15 per vehicle.

For more information on the Car & Truck Show or how you can donate to the Save the Little Hall Committee, contact Kucera at 251-945-5506.