

Fundraising continues as renovation of Little Hall nears completion

By John Underwood independent@gulfcoastnewspapers.com | Posted: Friday, August 29, 2014 8:00 am

SILVERHILL, Ala. – It's been more than three years since the Little Bohemian Hall in Silverhill was damaged when a tornado ripped through the area and those who have been working over



Little Hall as it looks today.

the last several months to restore the more than 90-year-old structure are finally seeing a light at the end of the tunnel.

“It’s coming along,” said Frankie Kucera, chairman of the Save the Little Hall Committee.

Work to right and repair the structure began about two years 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.

Steve Pumphrey drew the plans for 16 by 25 foot addition on the back of the structure, which includes stage, which was salvaged from the original structure, kitchen area and bathrooms.

Kucera’s brother, George “Benny” Kucera, a master carpenter, is the leader of the project, with the majority of the construction work being done by volunteers, including the two brothers, Jack George, James Bailey, James Heidelberg and Stanley Gillen, along with Jennifer Fiddler, Patty Heidleberg, Sylvia Bailey and Joan Henderson. Mike York has also worked on the structure.

Additional work has been done using contractors, Kucera said.

The roof work was completed by contractor Gary Peterson with Coastal Insulation also performing installation.

The vinyl on the outside of the building has been completely redone by Roger Booth, Kucera said, and window repair was performed by Central Glass. Local contractor Phillip Giles is also working to finish up replacing sheet rock in the building.

“Once that’s done, we’ll start cleaning the building out and painting,” Kucera said.

Plumbing work was also contracted to Arthur Parker and D & D Heating and Air of Summerdale will install the air conditioning system. Krob Landscaping will also be doing landscaping around the outside of the building, 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.

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.

Approximately \$15,000 insurance money with a total of about \$40,000 raised to renovate the structure, Kucera said, along with countless hours of volunteer labor and materials.

The group recently received a \$4,000 donation for the structure and it will take at least an additional \$3,000 to complete the facility.

“That donation will keep us going for a while and we’re hoping to get the rest of the money in the near future,” Kucera said.

Plans are to have the structure ready for the town’s Heritage Day on Saturday, Sept. 20. The committee will also be holding a bake sale and possibly a silent auction during the festival to raise additional funds, Kucera said.

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.

“This building means a lot to the community, especially to the Czech community,” Kucera said. “We want to bring this back to have something that everyone in the community can use. We want people to use it the way it was originally used, for dances, for wedding receptions and as a meeting place.”