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## A work in progress

### Todd developers target spring opening

Mary Freda, Reporter

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DUNKIRK — Residents might have access to a newly renovated Todd Opera House earlier than anticipated.

In May, the city awarded \$75,000 to Todd Opera Building Group to help repurpose the downtown Dunkirk building. The agreement called for two restaurants to occupy the space by July 2020.

Now co-developer Ray Willey said he expects the first to be open by the spring and both to be complete by 2019. He sees the restaurants as a key step toward downtown redevelopment for the city.



"I will say that from our experience and this is our 36th year of doing it, bringing eateries to a historic district or a historic downtown of a community is usually the very best element that can help revitalize downtown," Willey said.

Work is progressing in the interior of the Todd Opera House building in Dunkirk. Todd Building Group co-developers Ray Willey and Bill Brown plan to locate two restaurants in the building, with the first to be open by the spring. (The Commercial Review/Mary Freda)

The first restaurant, Firehouse BBQ, is slated to finish in the spring. The second, a Mexican restaurant, should be ready to go within a the following year, though no restaurant or franchise has been contracted for that space as of yet.

Both restaurants will be 2,550 square feet.

Additionally, Willey and Todd Building Group managing member Bill Brown would like to initiate funding for Phase 2 of the project while still working on the Mexican restaurant.

Phase 2, Willey said, would fulfill the need for an entertainment in Dunkirk.

"It would be a nonprofit, like a community performing arts center/entertainment venue and open it up to groups for musicals and dance and band and plays and entertainment as well and let the community use it in that sense," Willey said. "And that would fulfill the need for some entertainment and kinda marry the entertainment with the restaurants."

However, before Phase 2 begins, Willey said there will be a need for capital fundraising.

Plans for the building call for keeping the brick and rafters exposed and, tentatively, to have a new mural painted to cover the Speedcat Café mural currently in the opera house. He would also like to preserve and display the glass bottles that were found while workers were putting a new floor in the building.

The restaurants, Dunkirk Mayor Gene Ritter said, will help the city grow, maintain and retain businesses in the city.

"Usually, growth breeds growth, it's kind of like a domino effect — you gotta start somewhere," Ritter

said. "This kinda fell in our lap and I thought it was a real good idea to take advantage of something that will help spur the growth."

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