

For Immediate Release

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Jacksonville, Fla.

Work Commences on Florida Theatre Façade Restoration Project

Six Month Project Will Repair and Restore the Historic Theatre's Exterior



Starting this week, the stone façade of the historic Florida Theatre in downtown Jacksonville will undergo a six month restoration project to repair the terracotta finishes of the building's exterior.

The project, which is expected to be completed by March, has been over 6 years in the making. The work will be performed by McDaniel Contractors of Jacksonville, under the supervision of the Engineering Division of the City of Jacksonville's Public Works Department, and VRL Architects, also of Jacksonville.

During the six month long project, the building's exterior will be scaffolded, the building will be pressure washed, and then the terracotta finishes of the exterior ornamental stone will be repaired and replaced, terracotta joints will be caulked, cast stone sills will be replaced, and other sills will be caulked and grouted.

Mitchell McDaniel, President of McDaniel Contractors, who have nearly 40 years of historic restoration experience, said, "Being selected to participate in the historic restoration of such an iconic landmark as the Florida Theater is truly a privilege and an honor."

Terracotta is a clay-based ceramic often used in construction, typically roofing tiles, bricks and decorative surface elements. It is porous, and because the Florida Theatre opened in 1927, architect Steve Lazar of VRL Architects is not surprised that the beautiful exterior elements of the historic building now require maintenance. "Terra Cotta was utilized extensively around the country during the late 19th and early 20th century due to its relative light weight and fire resistant characteristics, but labor costs and changing architectural styles eventually reduced its popularity. Today only a handful of terracotta fabricators operate in the country, mostly for repair of existing material."



The historic theatre will remain open for business for the duration of the project, and in fact, over 50 shows are scheduled during this time period. Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Florida Theatre is one of the Top 50 most attended concert venues in the country. Its President, Numa Saisselin, says, “Any time you perform this kind of work on a historic theatre, two things are paramount. One is doing the work in a way that preserves the historic integrity of the building, and the other is figuring out how to do the work while staying open, because time is money.”

The total project will cost \$334,000. It is funded by a \$150,000 matching grant from the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Historical Resources; by a \$75,000 matching from the City of Jacksonville; and by additional funding of \$50,000 from the Downtown Historic Preservation and Revitalization Trust Fund, and up to \$75,000 from the Downtown Economic Development Fund.

The project has been a long time in the making. An initial analysis of the exterior was conducted in 2010, which is when the application for the Division of Historical Resources grant was submitted. The State did not award the grants until 2014, and it took until 2015 to identify a source of matching funds within the City.

Says Saisselin, “The Florida Theatre Performing Arts Center, Inc. is the nonprofit corporation that manages the building in a public/private partnership with the City, which owns the building. As a nonprofit we were able to secure funds of over 65% of the original estimate. That’s the beauty of a public/private partnership. We are able to enhance the City’s own financial ability to do work like this.”

But by the time proposals were solicited, it had been over five years since the original estimates were prepared. “A lot can happen in five years,” said Saisselin. “Certainly, more weather related wear and tear happens, and prices go up.” The original estimate of \$225,000 was now over \$300,000. Saisselin praises the work of several theatre supporters and downtown advocates to find the additional sources of support, including Aundre Wallace and Guy Parola of the Downtown Investment Authority, who were instrumental in securing the additional funding to close the gap.

“If we had funded just part of this project, we would have been coming back almost immediately, because there would still be continuing damage. Everyone who came together to figure this out made it possible to do all the work we need to do, and do it once, and get it right the first time.”

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“Last year the Florida Theatre’s economic impact on Jacksonville was almost \$12 million. Getting this job done right the first time and supporting the theatre’s stability is an excellent investment in downtown, too.”

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