

# Chrysler Museum renovation 'is a big one'

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By Jared Council

[jared.council@insidebiz.com](mailto:jared.council@insidebiz.com)

As Richmond-based KBS overhauls the Chrysler Museum of Art, contractors have been finding a few surprises in a structure that has components dating back to the 1930s.

The museum, which sits on Olney Road near The Hague in Norfolk, was six separate buildings until a late-1980s project unified them. After knocking down walls recently to create corridor space, construction workers found a steel beam that helped maintain the two-story structure.



"Our contractors joke all the time," Chrysler Executive Director Bill Hennessey said. "They say: 'You know, it really would have been a lot easier to build a new building....'"

Surprises and all, Hennessey said, construction is on schedule and within budget, and he looks forward to the museum's opening next April. When it's complete, the nearly 200,000-square-foot building will see an additional 10,700 square feet from new frontal expansions.

Hennessey said the renovations will include more energy-efficient cooling and lighting systems and a complete redesign of internal walkways and components. He said artwork will be laid out in a "fresh, new way."

"This is a big one," said Hennessey, who's been at the museum for 17 years.

KBS won the \$24 million contract last year and began work last July. Work by the firm should be wrapped up by the end of this year. The museum will spend the following three months moving its artwork back in.

Robbie Roberts is the senior project manager at KBS. He said his firm has worked on similar projects - including the Galanti Education Center at Richmond's Virginia War Memorial - but nothing like quite like the Chrysler.

In many projects, Roberts said, there's a level of repetitiveness and continuity. He gave the example of building an apartment complex, where the layout throughout the building is essentially the same.

"Here, we basically coordinate a detail, go build it," said Roberts, "go to the next area and start all over again."

KBS has 40 subcontractors, a majority of whom are based in Hampton Roads, Roberts said. Portsmouth-based D.E. Kirby Inc., which is handling mechanical work, has the biggest individual share of the work at about 20 percent, Roberts said. Since work started, an average of more than 50 construction workers daily has been there.

KBS is performing a major upgrade of the museum's roughly 30-year-old HVAC system, replacing piping, vents and other components. They're tasked with doing this while keeping the museum cool, as people and artwork are still there.

"What's so special about this project is the extensive coordination with the museum staff directly," Roberts said.

Hennessey said the museum employs 105, including about 65 full-time employees. Even though the building is closed, staff are still being used at the glass museum across the street, historic houses in Norfolk and other Chrysler operations across the area. The museum has about 30,000 pieces of artwork, and some employees have been involved with moving between 6,000 and 8,000 of those.

"One of the things we're proud of is that we've found it possible to keep the staff intact," Hennessey said, adding that approximately five jobs were cut.

The \$45 million capital campaign, part of which is funding the museum overhaul, has been running for about three years, Hennessey said.

Museum officials began realizing the need for renovation about a decade ago, Hennessey said. The museum has a café, but doesn't have a full kitchen that can be used for catering weddings and other events held there. Then there was an ill-placed elevator, Hennessey said, which inconvenienced traffic flow. Also, the museum had other potential accessibility issues.

Hennessey said the museum was running out of space, and the renovations will help with one of its main objectives.

"We have a little bit of money that can be used to buy art, but mostly it comes because we can convince private collectors to give it to us," he said.  
"Unless we've got space to show it, we can't make that case."nib

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