

News

## Historical society working to save Rochester barn

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A historical icon in the heart of Rochester is in need of preservation.

The large barn at the corner of University and Water streets, known as The Rochester Elevator, will be the center of a community effort organized by the Rochester Avon Historical Society.

The community is invited to "Make the Elevator Shine" in an organized community painting event beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 6, with a scheduled rain date of Saturday, June 13.

"Just show up that day and sign a waiver," said Rod Wilson of the historical society. "We will have a registration tent just west of the elevator."

The Griggs Elevator was built in 1880 at what is now University and Water streets, according to records at the Rochester Hills Museum. In 1872, the Newberry Elevator was built, and in 1909, it was moved and added to the Griggs Elevator. Local farmers took their grain to the elevator, where it was stored in a loft and then dumped into train cars to be carried to Detroit markets.

Through the years, subdivisions replaced farmlands and the freight trains stopped running. After the Michigan Central rail line ceased operation in the 1970s, the building was converted to an agricultural supply store.

CertaPro Painters of Auburn Hills, owned by Merlin Bush, is overseeing the painting project.

"They have worked with us to keep the price down," Wilson said. "They have cleaned the building and are putting an undercoat on it, a coat of paint over the whole thing and a second coat above 10 feet.

"They will also be redoing the awning. It is rusty. They will coat and seal it and then paint it with an aluminized paint."

Volunteers will paint the lower 10 feet and around the doors and windows.

Articulate Signs of Utica will redo the checkerboard signage on the side of the barn.

"When it is done, it will be something the community can be proud of," Wilson said.

There will be free hot dogs, chips and soda pop for the workers, as well as portable toilets.

"The Lions Club will have their trailer there, providing popcorn, condiments and pop for the workers," Wilson said. "Gordon Food Service is donating the food and water, and the Fire Department is bringing their grill. We are still working on entertainment.

The elevator is currently for sale.

"Lawrence Smith owns the elevator, but we (the community) own the heritage," Wilson said.

In recent years, a buyer wanted to build condos on the site, which prompted fundraising by the historical society to move the elevator to another site.

Wilson said the society invested the money and now is using a portion to preserve the elevator.

"There has been discussion of the city buying the elevator and putting in a park," to be used as a museum and welcome center, he added. "There is property with it that could be sold to help pay for it."

According to the society, "Whether the elevator is moved to a new location or restored it at its current location, the historical society will work to preserve the elevator as a historical resource for our community. The goal for the elevator project has always been to have the grain elevator adaptively re-used instead of torn down."

In conjunction with the elevator painting project, the Paint Creek Trailways Commission has scheduled the unveiling of six art/history displays at the historic depot building across from the elevator at 9:30 a.m.

The displays are on the sidewalk that runs along the library and creek known as the Rochester River Walk. They are based on old photographs of the area, said David Becker, the commission vice chairman and a city councilman.

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