

dada ... daDum - Old pipe organ will bellow out from City Museum's inner sanctum

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) - April 16, 2007

- Author/Byline: Doug Moore St. Louis Post-Dispatch
- Edition: Third Edition
- Section: Everyday
- Page: B1

The St. Louis Theatre Organ Society had been shopping around a beauty of an instrument for the better part of two decades but was having trouble finding it a home.

The Wurlitzer pipe organ, built in 1925 and originally housed in the Rivoli Theater in New York, is a doozy. With 1,100 pipes, it takes a large space to accommodate its size and sound.

The original plan was to put the organ in the Granada Theater on Gravois Avenue in south St. Louis. But a storm badly damaged the building, which came down more than a decade ago.

Other offerings were met with "No, thank you." Then a society member met Bob Cassilly, the king of reuse.

Cassilly has plenty of space in his 600,000-square-foot City Museum. What fun it would be to have the organ rebuilt in his sprawling playground, he thought.

So for the past year, the society has been doing just that on the third floor of the museum. The idea is to shoot the sound down into the Enchanted Caves, a climbing and sliding paradise for the brave, located in the belly of the downtown museum.

"Bob rescued us, finally," said society member Alan Haker, who was working last week to rebuild the long-mothballed organ.

The organ will be set to play automatically, featuring songs of various genres. It might get some manual play for special occasions.

"It is going to be great for Halloween," museum manager Rick Irwin said.

An observation area will allow visitors to peek in as the pipes, ranging in size from 8 inches to 16 feet, belch nine octaves' worth of music into the museum. The organ also will have percussion instruments, a xylophone and a glockenspiel to increase its sound effects and viewing pleasure. The music should be playing by May.

"It's adding to the experience you can't get anywhere else," Irwin said.

As Cassilly continues to grow and change his museum at 701 North 15th Street, he has called it quits on creating a water park on the roof, much to the relief of city building inspectors and upper-floor tenants of the 10-story building. A school bus, praying mantis sculpture and old water towers will remain.

Cassilly has turned his outdoor attention to a long-in-the-works concrete jungle off Riverview Drive north of downtown, where he imagines lakes and water slides. The working title is Cement Land.

That project keeps Cassilly out of the hair of City Museum workers who can catch up on all the changes the museum boss has left in his wake.

Irwin smiles.

"If Bob is here, it means another wall is coming down."

- Caption: PHOTOPHOTO - City Museum workers Elvedin Osmanovich (left) and Andy Wamser reinstall pipes that had been removed to fix a water leak. Stephanie S. Cordle | Post-Dispatch
- Memo: DOWNTOWN DIARY

- Index terms: *St. Louis Theatre Organ Society; COLUMN*
- Record: 1001016084
- Copyright: Copyright (c) 2007 St. Louis Post-Dispatch