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Contact:
Lisa Winslow
Executive Director
Pasquotank Arts Council
Phone: 252-338-6997
Email: lisaw@pasquotankarts.org



PASQUOTANK ARTS COUNCIL SIGNS CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT

(Elizabeth City, NC Nov. 5, 2007) - The former "Bee Hive" Department store will soon be a center of activity again as the long-awaited renovation of the building for an arts center is about to get underway.

The Pasquotank Arts Council announces that it has signed a construction contract with A.R. Chesson Construction Co., Inc. The total cost of the renovation project of the historic downtown building is a little more than \$3 million.

"We've waited a long time for the project to begin, and now it's really happening," PAC Executive Director Lisa Winslow said. "When this project is finished, it will be a cornerstone of activity for everyone in the community."

A pre-construction meeting was recently held at the former department store, and once work begins it is expected to take about a year to be completed. A combination of local donations, tax credits and grants have made the project possible.

PAC bought the Lowry-Chesson building at 514 Main Street in 2002 from Preservation North Carolina. Prior to that, the Elizabeth City Historic Neighborhood Association took control of the building after the roof collapsed in 2000 while PNC held it in trust.

The Lowry-Chesson building was built in 1897 as a commercial rental investment property by Dr. Freshwater D. Lowry. It displays Tuscan-inspired Italianate details in its two-story brick arches with grouped windows. The upper stories contained rental offices and the "Academy of Music," the city's first opera house.

Once the renovation concludes, the first floor of the building will house the arts council's gallery and offices. The second-floor theater will be restored for a variety of performances, including Encore Theatre Company shows, and other events such as meetings, weddings and reunions. The former office spaces will be used for the Pasquotank School of the Arts programs and other rental opportunities.

"We envision this facility to be multi-functional with something going on all the time," Winslow said.

For more information about the Pasquotank Arts Council and its programs call (252) 338-6455.

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