

Museum to host ribbon cutting Aug. 16

As crews continue renovations on Phase 2 of the Illinois Rural Heritage Museum, Charlie and Mary Greer are scrambling to put the finishing touches on the Red Horse Barn, the complex's signature building.

Their goal is to have the building finished and some unique horse-related exhibits in place for this year's American Thresherman Show, August 17-21. A ribbon cutting will be held at 6 p.m. on Aug. 16. The museum will be open from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. during the Thresherman's to give the public with a small sample of what the museum will provide in the future. The official grand opening is planned for January 2012.

"The ribbon cutting event will provide the public with a taste of the exhibits the museum will house," said Charlie Greer, who along with his wife Mary, is overseeing the museum's development. "Since we are new to the museum world, we should also spot a few areas that we will improve in the future."

In late July the Greers had hauled in the first pieces of equipment including a turn-of-the 20th century John Deere buggy and other horse-drawn items borrowed from Riechmann Brothers Equipment at Okawville, IL. Jane Templeton Minton donated her father and her grandfather's furniture including a roll-top desk, chair and patient chair from their medical office. Peg Doughty is providing a horse drawn wagon that Doerr Funeral Home use to take the casket from the paved road to the cemetery.

When completed, the museum will encompass 22,000 square feet in two buildings. The horse barn is a new structure donated by Morton Buildings (see sidebar) covering more than 2,430 square feet. The gift shop, a multi-media theater and administrative office will be housed there, in addition to the equine-related artifacts.

The adjacent second building will be home to themed displays such as circa 1900s homestead, school house and general store. It will also feature steam- and gas-powered agricultural implements and tractors.

"The museum will tell the story of the progression of life in rural America," said Greer. "We will look at the history of agriculture, education, business, transportation and other aspects. Every exhibit will tell a story



Charlie Greer prepares to unload the first artifact for the museum; a circa 1890s John Deere buggy.

Public invited; open during Thresherman's

about the hard work and values that made rural life appealing."

Greer is excited about the involvement of Case IH and Monsanto, companies that made major contributions to the evolution of agriculture. They helping the museum focus on both the past and future of agriculture.

"Along with the past, we need to show where we are going in the ag world," he said. "We have invited ag educators to be on an advisory committee to help provide advice to make the exhibits relevant and interesting to kids of all ages."

Rodney Miller is a member the museum's board of directors and currently the assistant dean of agriculture at the University of Georgia in Athens. The Benton native said museums such as this are important to preserve history of the country.

"Agriculture is the key fiber and most important industry in America," the former CEO of McCormick International said. "Places such as this celebrate life in rural America. It goes beyond agriculture to a way of life most American's believe in such as hard work, family and tradition."

Miller said that, while there are other agriculture-related museums,

this one is unique because it focuses on the people lived more than one hundred years ago.

"It celebrates rural life from the days before mechanization to the early days of mechanization," he said. "It is more about lives and the homestead than simply tractors."

The startup money for the museum came from private donations and a state grant that is being shared with the Illinois High School Basketball Hall of Fame. The Foundation for Pinckneyville bought the site and is leasing it to the museum. Generous contributions were also provided by companies and individuals listed on the back page.

Greer admits that more dollars are needed. He has big ideas for exhibits. When Phase 2 is completed at the end of the year, he would like to finish more of the space on the site to showcase other aspects of the rural lifestyle.

"While 22,000 square feet sounds like a lot of space, it can easily be filled with great exhibits," said Greer. "Our goal is to make the Illinois Rural Heritage Museum a place that must be visited many times."

If you would like to make a donation us, send it to the Illinois Rural Heritage Museum, 187 Fairgrounds Rd., P.O. Box 58, Pinckneyville, IL 62274.

Morton donation helps jump-start project

The signature red barn of the museum was made possible by a generous donation by Morton Buildings, as well as the Engelhardt Family Foundation. The 2,430 square foot structure will be home to horse-related agricultural items, the gift shop and a multimedia center.

Martin Vance, manager of the Chester, Ill. office of Morton Buildings, said involvement in the project was a perfect fit for the 108-year-old company.

"This isn't something we typically do, but our company is Illinois based and we felt it would be a good fit for us," Vance said. "The timing was right budget-wise and the company decided to donate a significant amount of money that was used to put up the building."

Vance said that, while the museum board contracted with its own designer, Morton personnel also played a hands-on role in it.

"We suggested a higher ceiling rather than a flat truss. We also recommended the use of acoustical steel," he said. "When it came to finishing the interior, they asked Morton



Martin Vance of Morton Buildings said the company's involvement in the project was a "perfect fit."

Buildings to coordinate the subcontracting."

Vance said many people invested a lot of hours "behind the scenes" in

the project including the company President, Jeff Niehouser; Midwest Regional Sales Manager Kennel Neff; Project Manager Greg Ruchotzke and Aaron Stone at Allied Design, a design firm Morton uses.

Vance said the company expects to have a lasting relationship with members of the museum board and Charlie and Mary Greer.

"They are now part of the Morton family. Charlie and Mary are more than customers, they are my friends." he said.

Morton Buildings was established in 1903 in Morton, Ill. and is one of the largest builders of pole barns in the country. The company is known for its quality, service and warranty work.

In the post-frame industry we are the tried and true company," Vance said. "We take pride in our quality. We roll form our own steel and make our own trusses which are certified."

Morton started building maintenance free white fences and began erecting buildings in the 1960s. It now builds farm sheds, churches, horse stables, living quarters and more.

Museum selling birdhouses



Raising money for the museum is for the birds – literally! Charlie Greer has taken the end pieces of the cedar boards used to line the interior walls of the red barn to make 51 bird houses. The museum is selling them for \$35 unpainted and \$40 painted. The houses are sized for wrens and bluebirds and come with a certificate of authenticity.

Union Pacific gives grant



The museum was one of 29 Illinois non-profit organizations to receive a Union Pacific Railroad Foundation grant in 2011. Under its Principal's Partnership program, Union Pacific donates millions of dollars annually to schools and non-profits nationwide. Mary Greer accepted the grant in front of the railroad's historic number 844 steam locomotive that was on a whistle-stop tour of Illinois to disseminate the money.

Thank you sponsors

The museum's progress was made possible by the support of the following sponsors, as well as donations from other individuals:

Arch Coal Foundation
Beelman Ready Mix
Bigham Farms

Bunge North America
Consolidated Grain and Barge
Diedrich Implements
Engelhardt Family Foundation
Illinois Farm Bureau
John Deere South Central Branch
McCormick International USA

Riechmann Bros, LLC
The Williams Companies
Titan International, Inc.
Union Pacific Foundation
Wm Nobbe and Co.
White Walnut Farms

