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GENEVIEVE POSTLETHWAIT | The Sun

Greg Steward (from left to right), Mary Aldrich and Tom Jordan of the Atlanta-based International Fine Art Conservation Studios are well into their work restoring and sealing the beautiful but hazardous Lady Liberty fire curtain in Paducah's Columbia Theatre. Once their restoration is complete and the curtain deemed safe, the grant-funded environmental cleanup of the 1927 theater can continue.

Columbia Theatre's cleanup gives glimpse of former glory

BY GENEVIEVE POSTLETHWAIT

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In the hands of three restoration artists toiling away in late summer's heat, the beautiful centerpiece of Paducah's Columbia Theatre — the Lady Liberty fire curtain — has once again been made whole.

The curtain, painted with a scene of the Statue of Liberty rising from the New York Harbor, once protected audiences from the threat of backstage fires. Even once the threat of fire was gone as the safety of lighting and electronics improved, Lady Liberty remained.

By the time members of current-day Paducah's Columbia Theatre Task Force found her, however, she was covered in decades of dirt, dust and grime, nearly unrecognizable, tattered and torn.

Made from woven asbestos fabric, she was also dangerous. Before any more progress could be made in the cleanup of the

"It's extreme, it's extravagant, it's way over the top. But it's fabulous, really."

Geoffrey Steward
International Fine Arts Conservation Studios CEO

long-shuttered Columbia, the curtain had to be restored and secured. Once the Atlanta-based International Fine Art Conservation Studios (IFACS) team completes its work in about two weeks, the restoration of the Columbia can begin in earnest.

The task force recently secured a \$50,000 Kentucky Brownfields grant that will make the cleanup possible.

"Once we've done this and it's safe again, it will also give a focal point for people to come in and see that there's progress being made, which is important," said Geoffrey Steward, CEO of IFACS. "At the moment it is what it

is. It's a derelict space. But hopefully the work we're doing will help people see its potential."

Geoffrey and the IFACS restoration artists currently in Paducah working on the Columbia curtain — Mary Aldrich, Tom Jordan and son Greg Steward — have restored many historic churches, homes and landmarks, as well as their fair share of theaters, including the Virginia Theater of Roger Ebert fame. But for all they've taken on in their decade-plus of work, the Columbia is something special.

"There aren't many theaters like this left in the country, and I think it's just very wild," Geoffrey said. "It's sort of rococo-plus, post-war Hollywood. It's extreme, it's extravagant, it's way over the top. But it's fabulous, really. I'm using that word in the strict sense of it, it's fabulous. I certainly haven't seen one like this before, and I've been in many, many theaters. You've got

Please see COLUMBIA | 11A

Crowd rallies in support of defiant clerk

BY CLAIRE GALOFARO

Associated Press

GRAYSON — They stood chanting outside the jail house, "Thank you, Kim; Thank you, Kim," and prayed that the defiant county clerk locked inside could hear them.

As Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis began her third day as an inmate at the Carter County Detention Center on Saturday, having chosen indefinite imprisonment over licensing gay marriage, around 300 people gathered on the lawn outside.

"She won't bow, I promise you," Davis' husband, Joe, told the crowd. "She sends her love to each and every one of you all. And this is what she said, 'All is well. Tell them to hold their head high because I am.'"

Part revival, part political rally, a series of speakers denounced the government and the judiciary, and hailed Davis a Christian hero in a war against the godless. They waved signs that read "Kim Davis for President," "no to sodomite perversion" and "God gives his hardest battles to his strongest soldiers."

Some traveled from states away to support of the embattled clerk, held in contempt of court by U.S. District Judge David Bunning on Thursday and sent

Please see DAVIS | 11A

Migrants finish trek to Germany

BY SHAWN POGATCHNIK AND FRANK JORDANS

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — For weeks while they traveled a punitive road, Europe cast a cold and callous eye on their unwelcome progress. On Saturday, for the first time since fleeing their troubled homelands, they could set foot in their promised land — and it came with a German face so friendly that it brought some newcomers to tears of joy.

More than 7,000 Arab and Asian asylum seekers surged across Hungary's western border into Austria and Germany following the latest in a string of erratic policy U-turns by Hungary's immigrant-loathing government. Within hours, travelers predominantly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan who had been told for days they could not leave Hungary were scooped from roadsides and Budapest's central train station

Please see MIGRANTS | 11A

Delegation will press local priorities in D.C.

BY DAVID ZOELLER

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Local leaders will take their concerns about continued funding of the U.S. Department of Energy's cleanup of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant site to the halls of Congress this week.

A contingent of 30 Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce members and local officials will

be in Washington on Wednesday and Thursday as part of the chamber's 2015 D.C. "Fly-In." This is the 13th consecutive year for the annual trip to the nation's capital, according to Sandra Wilson, chamber president.

"We do have a lot of concerns," Wilson said. "Of course the cleanup

Please see FLY-IN | 11A

Browsing the booths



CARRIE DILLARD | The Sun

Sisters-in-law Marsha Waggoner (left) and Marsha Lewis (center), both of Paducah, walk and talk as they browse along the craft booths at the 40th annual Arts and Crafts festival in Grand Rivers Saturday.

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A woman holds her baby as she arrives at the Hauptbahnhof station in Salzburg, Austria, on Saturday on their way with other migrants from Hungary via Vienna to Germany.

MIGRANTS

CONTINUED FROM 1A

and placed on overnight buses, driven to the frontier with Austria and allowed to walk across as a new morning dawned.

They were met with wholly unexpected hospitality featuring free high-speed trains, seemingly bottomless boxes of supplies, and gauntlets of well-wishers offering trays of candy for everyone and cuddly toys for the tots in mothers' arms. Even adults absorbed the scenes of sudden welcome with a look of childlike wonderment as Germans and Austrians made clear that they had reached a land that just might become a home.

"I'm very glad to be in Germany. I hope that I find here a much better life. I want to work," said Homam Shehade, a 37-year-old Syrian shopkeeper who spent 25 days on the road.

As the migrants departed Hungary, leaders took a few final swipes at their departing guests and those considered foolish enough to host them.

A central Budapest rally by Hungary's third-largest party, the neo-fascist Jobbik, underscored why many of those seeking sanctuary in Europe wanted to get through the country as quickly as possible.

Jobbik leader Gabor Vona told the crowd of 300 waving

Hungarian and party flags "that Hungary belongs to the Hungarians.

"We like everybody, we respect everybody — but we don't want anybody coming here."

The contrast could not have been greater in Vienna's central train station. When around 400 asylum seekers arrived on the morning's first border train, charity workers offered supplies displayed in labeled shopping carts containing food, water and packages of hygiene products for men and women.

Austrian onlookers cheered the migrants' arrival, with many shouting "Welcome!" in both German and Arabic.

FLY-IN

CONTINUED FROM 1A

is one of our priorities and has been for the last three trips. We don't want to see any interruptions in funding."

The group plans to make its concerns about establishing contracts longer than the present three-year one known in meetings with the Kentucky federal delegation and DOE officials.

Longer-term contracts will benefit the community and employees working at the site, Wilson said.

Community priorities the chamber has identified and intends to make recommendations on during the trip include:

- Approving the Senate-recommended site cleanup funding level of \$270 million to FY 2016.

- Encouraging the EPA to simplify the regulatory process to support DOE in cleaning up the Paducah site in a safe and timely manner.

- Gaining sufficient funding to complete the Kentucky Lock project.

- Obtaining federal grants for Barkley Airport improvements.

Also on the priority list are continued expansion of Interstate 66 and Interstate 69, funding for the Paducah Local Flood Protection Project, an easement to allow Paducah to be included

the Mississippi Marine Highway (and thus be eligible for federal funding), and swift approval of the pending Foreign Trade Zone designation for the Paducah-McCracken County Riverport.

The chamber delegation includes Paducah Mayor Gayle Kaler, McCracken County Judge-Executive Bob Leeper, and community leaders in economic development, education, business and industry.

The two-day itinerary includes meetings with Kentucky U.S. Sens. Rand Paul and Mitch McConnell, U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield and several other members of Congress.

As important as it is to spend time with elected officials, time spent with their staff in Washington is also useful, Wilson said.

"These are people who are working on details about issues relating to our community, so it's very beneficial to have those relationships," Wilson said.

The group also will meet with officials on topics including aviation, the arts, energy and the environment. In addition to a congressional reception Wednesday night, a special ceremony is planned Thursday morning to unveil the

community's wall display at DOE headquarters highlighting the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

"We're only the fourth DOE site community to do that," Wilson said. "This is a great opportunity to keep our name in front of DOE officials in D.C."

"We're very excited about that."

That ceremony will include remarks from the Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, McConnell and Whitfield. Clyde Elrod, who was the charter president of the Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization and involved with the construction of the plant, will be recognized.

The chamber and the community are fortunate to have the number of people willing to take time from their jobs and pay for their travel to Washington, Wilson said, and to have 20 sponsors to help offset some of the other expenses.

"We couldn't do this without our sponsors," Wilson said. "This is a huge undertaking for the chamber."

But it's worth the effort, she said. "We know it makes a difference."

Contact David Zoeller, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8676.



Elizabeth Johnston (hand raised) preaches and sings with her children Anna, 15, and James, 13, on Saturday during a prayer vigil for Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis in Grayson.

DAVIS

CONTINUED FROM 1A

to jail until she agrees to follow the court's order. She has pledged she never will.

News of her imprisonment rocketed around the world, igniting a furious debate over religious freedom and the place of God in government.

As the temperature topped 90 degrees in Grayson, Kentucky, Davis' supporters sweated and shouted for more than an hour.

"More fear man, they don't fear God," Matthew Trewhella, a pastor from Wisconsin, preached from the stage. "She said that she was doing this

under God's authority. She is 1,000 percent correct. She is echoing what western man has said for over 1,500 years now. And that is that divine law trumps human laws."

Davis refused to issue marriage licenses for two months since the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage across the nation. Despite a series of court orders, she continued turning couples away.

Bunning told Davis Thursday that she'd left him no choice.

The judge, appointed to the court by President George W. Bush, became a target of the crowd's rage. A man carried a sign as big as

a bathtub: "Judge Bunning is an abomination," it read and pointed to a Bible passage that says, "Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent -- the Lord detests them both."

Local evangelist Randy Smith called on the judge to "get saved and repent from his sin." He bashed the governor, the attorney general and local officials — all for declining to help Davis' crusade.

He asked Christians across the globe to spend Thursday fasting and praying for Davis, to mark "one week of unlawful tyranny." He asked them to be ready for war against religious oppression.

COLUMBIA

CONTINUED FROM 1A

to save it."

Photographs and videos don't quite do the Columbia justice, they all agree. If you stand between the front row and the stage, the view looking up at the over-sized, gold- and silver-leaved plasterwork reaching heights of nearly 70 feet is breathtaking.

"It's sort of like somebody took the decorative elements from a much bigger theater and put them in here," Greg Steward said. "It's so strange and interesting."

Though the dream is to restore the Columbia to its former "wild" glory, it's striking in its current state. The main theater is still marked with torn curtains, peeling paint and glittering bits of stained glass fallen from the ceiling into the aisles. But one patch of wall offers a glimpse into what was and could be again.

The IFACS team analyzed paint samples from the walls under high magnification to discover the evolutions of color the theater's seen since opening April 18, 1927. They've cre-



Restoration artists have analyzed the peeling paint on the walls of the old Columbia Theatre in downtown Paducah to determine the original color palette used in the 1920s construction as well as the palate used in the 1950s remodel. They've created a mock-up of each on either side of a column near the theater's back rows, the 1950s on the left, and the 1920s on the right.

ated a mock-up of their findings, a patch of the bronze and gold scheme created in the 1950s post-war remodel, and a patch of the darker, flatter mauve and gold of the 1920s vaudeville era.

The team also has begun to uncover the original stained glass ceiling in the main theater that was painted over some time in the '70s.

The day after the Co-

lumbia opened, a writer for the Paducah Evening Sun described it as "a good half acre of stained glass ... that seems to be red and then green and then purple and yellow before you can decide which," that shimmered in the light from the then-state-of-the-art dimmer system that made the theater glow. Much of the glass seems intact, they said, and

what's been lost can be replaced.

Geoffrey said the restoration will most likely follow the 1950s scheme, simply because it's the most complete. Returning to the 1920s scheme would require taking away some of the plasterwork from the '50s and recreating the original. The 1950s scheme just makes more sense, he said, and will restore

the Columbia to the glory most remember — a beautiful, golden theatre fit for film and stage performances that would have been spectacular for a city many times the size of Paducah.

"This is coming up on being 100 years old, so let's give it another lease of life and keep it going for another 100 years," Geoffrey said.

"The project is achievable. There's nothing really that can't be done here. It just takes some time and some effort and unfortunately a lot of money. But it's worth saving. With a town like this, that still retains much of its originality, its character, the more of these sorts of places you can keep, the more you can keep that original community spirit."

All told, restoring the Columbia is expected to cost roughly \$6 million, but it's worth it, and Paducah's worth it, said Darlene Mazzone, task force chairwoman.

After the Lady Liberty curtain rose for the first time in 1927 to cue a prelude performance by "Miss Columbia," City National Bank President James Utterback gave a

rousing dedicatory address.

He urged the 2,000 people in the Columbia's first audience to appreciate and support the theater, because "It took courage and vision of a rare quality," the Paducah News Democrat reported.

"Leo Keiler had to have in his heart a keen affection for Paducah and its people to build so magnificent a structure to minister to their pleasure. He did not have to build a theater so richly embellished as this one, so convenient in every way, equipped with so many modern and costly appliances of entertainment. ... But he loved this home city of his enough to build a theater in which every citizen could feel a just pride."

For more information or to contribute to the Columbia Theatre restoration project, contact darlene@paducahlife.com.

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