

Museum plans progressing in Calico Rock

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LITTLE ROCK — Calico Rock's original telegraph machine, the uniform of the last ticket agent at the train depot, a 1913 postcard of what is today the Riverview Hotel - these items are a part of Calico Rock's past, but a group of dedicated residents are working to make them a part of its future as well.

They want Calico Rock to have a town museum. The project is still in its infancy stages after getting started last year, because, as the museum's board of trustees Chairman Steven Mitchell said, they want to make sure they do things right.

They've been doing their homework by visiting other museums and meeting with professionals. Mitchell said they've learned that establishing the board and the foundation's formal structure will ensure the museum can move forward with a secure future, rather than the stop-and-start fate of a project with no way to bring in new blood and facilitate a smooth transition between leaders. And a secure future will bring donors, willing to trust their artifacts - and their money - to the museum foundation.

"We want to make sure we put in place policies that will endure for a long time," Mitchell said.

Mitchell said contacts at the Old Independence Regional Museum in Batesville have been especially helpful. The Calico Rock group has also recently joined forces with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Public History Graduate Program for more help.

But just because they're busy doing things right doesn't mean they don't let loose and dream now and then.

"When we're completely done, it will not just be a brick-and-mortar facility," Mitchell said. "It's not just going to be like, 'come to the museum and look through the exhibit,' and that's it. We're also going to be more three-dimensional in that CORE (Calico Rock Organization for Revitalization Efforts) has been developing what is the old industrial part of town into a ghost town walking exhibit.

"We have the only ghost town inside a living town in the United States. Our museum will partner with the ghost town, and also, the Izard County Historical Society is bringing one of the oldest structures in the county, the Trimble House, to a new home within the city limits. So you can come to the museum and see some of that history and then get to go see it in real life, with is pretty unique, actually."

So far the first museum board has been named and a managing structure has been established. The board has also already obtained a few sponsorships. Later they intend to actively pursue more donors and apply for grants. They have a few items, mostly from the town's former train

depot, but haven't really begun their push to expand their collection yet.

When items do start coming in, Mitchell said there will be careful planning to be done there as well.

"The whole goal is to weave all of those things together and tell an interesting story of our town and not just end up with a collection of things," Mitchell said.

They have a facility on historic Main Street. It belongs to the city, and the museum will share it with the Chamber of Commerce, which meets there now.

Mitchell said the museum will go into the back half of the building, which is presently a conference room. He said the project will require some renovation, but nothing too extensive or costly.

Much of that work will fall to Rev. Wayne Wood, secretary of the board, who has building and drafting experience. He has been given the task of designing the museum's display cases and layout.

Wood said he got involved because he loves history, and as a Calico Rock native with a lot of family history in the area, would love to see the town's past preserved.

"The main business in this area is tourism," Wood said. "And a lot of people who come through town ask about whether we have a town museum because they're interested in that history. We hope to be able to educate them a bit too ... as well as have education programs for our area school children, where we could bring them in and let them learn about things with the aid of the museum."

But those goals and others are still a ways off. Wood said he's ready to enjoy the journey.

"The first step is to get a local museum organized, and, hopefully, it'll grow into something larger that will be more than what we could even envision now," Wood said.

Other board members include Velda Dixon as treasurer, Mayor Ronnie Guthrie, Dean Hudson, Gene Lockie and the Rev. Ed Matthews.

More information is available online at www.calicorockmuseum.com.

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