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May. 24, 2008

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## JANE ANN MORRISON: So it's neon and the mob, it's still Las Vegas culture, as are other projects



JANE ANN MORRISON  
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In the wake of the demise of the two Guggenheim museums at The Venetian, it would be easy to fear that culture has no chance of survival in Las Vegas and to sink into the doldrums.

But wait. Four cultural projects are forging ahead in Las Vegas. One is designed as a classical building for the ages. Two are niche museums celebrating neon and the mob. And one is a renovation of a school that will bring creative and artistic people together downtown. Three of the four also preserve historic buildings.

Despite a dreary economy, backers who have worked on each of the four projects remain enthusiastic and optimistic as they look past the fundraising, past the construction and toward four openings in the next four years.

The first to open this summer is the renovated Fifth Street School. Next will be the Neon Museum, opening fully in 2009 after preserving the lobby of the La Concha Motel. The mob museum should open in 2010 and preserve Las Vegas' first federal courthouse.

Finally, the Smith Center for the Performing Arts, carrying a \$475 million price tag, should open before the fall season begins in 2011.

Who says Las Vegas is culturally deprived?

The only negative in all this cultural cheer is that the Lied Children's Discovery Museum is considering leaving the city's cultural corridor on Las Vegas Boulevard north of downtown.

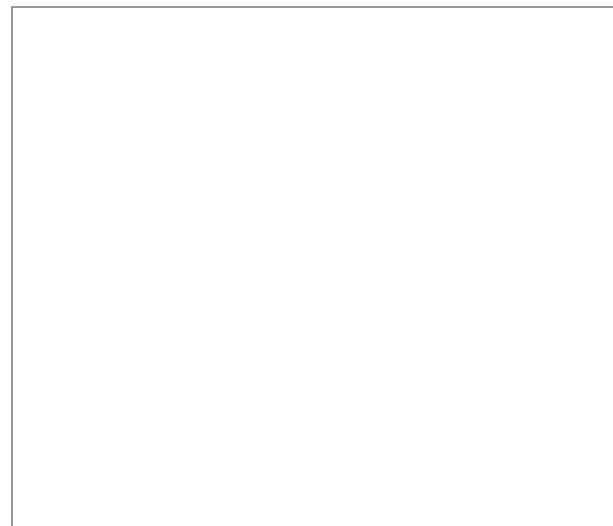
Some of the children's museum's 100,000 visitors a year are uncomfortable because the cultural corridor is also the homeless corridor and the Las Vegas Library adjacent to the museum is a homeless hangout.

The Las Vegas Library is a public library. You can't ban someone because they are wearing Eau de Stink. However, when I dropped by Thursday, it didn't carry that ripe fragrance. About 20 homeless men were watching television outside in a shaded courtyard, and the inside didn't have the fragrance that drove many to other libraries.

But while the library's smell has improved since my last visit, parents with children still complain about the museum's location, a museum official said.

Nancy Deaner, manager of the city of Las Vegas Cultural Affairs Division, says her office will move into the Fifth Street School at 400 Las Vegas Blvd. in August. The single-story Mission-style school dates to 1936 and also will house offices for the UNLV Fine Arts Program, the Downtown Design Center for the School of Architecture, the Nevada School of the Arts and the American Institute of Architects -- a couth group.

The Neon Museum is already open by



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appointment.

The mob museum carries a ponderous title: the Las Vegas Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement. (Please, rethink that name.)

The building on Stewart Avenue was the city's first federal courthouse, and the courtroom where the Kefauver hearings into the mob were held in the 1950s will be a highlight. The public/private partnership now looks closer to costing \$40 million than \$30 million, Deaner said.

Deaner said the design development for exhibits should be finished in September, and though she didn't want to give too much away, the entrance will include booking and fingerprinting.

The Smith Center will be at Union Park, and retired banker Don Snyder is working on raising the last \$75 million for the \$475 million project. He said that when he visited Congresswoman Shelley Berkley in April, she compared the last \$75 million to the last five pounds of a diet -- the hardest to lose, or in this case, the hardest to raise.

"Fundraising is always tough, but mixing in our economic environment like we have now makes it tougher," Snyder said.

He believes that when construction begins in January, there should be another burst of energy to help finish the fundraising, which relies on \$150 million in grants from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

The center will house a 2,050-seat performance hall and three smaller theaters. It's named after the foundation chairman and his wife, Fred and Mary Smith.

Mocking Las Vegas' culture of gamblers and strippers is a national sport. But thanks to people like Deaner and Snyder and countless others who work and plan for years, Las Vegas is heading in the right direction on the cultural front, even recognizing that part of our culture is neon and the mob.

Jane Ann Morrison's column appears Monday, Thursday and Saturday. E-mail her at [Jane@reviewjournal.com](mailto:Jane@reviewjournal.com) or call (702) 383-0275.

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**(word count limit is 300)**

Current Word Count:

**ghetto** wrote on *May 24, 2008 12:27 PM*:

We could save a lot of taxpayer money if we just doze stuff down and move on.

What do we do with Oscar...stuff him and put him somewhere for all to see?

Give us a break its all dung.

**2zero** wrote on *May 24, 2008 10:55 AM*:

Oh Rasputin.....you are right they are "parts" of the history and existence of sin city. Not that we need to honor the abusive compulsive consumptive illegal history of Vegas.

Ironic we have the "Preserve" as a monument to what was!..."the meadows". Now the "springs preserve" is a testimony of excesses and most ironic is that the SNWA/LVVWD is the warden of the preserve.

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**William D. Tomany** wrote on *May 24, 2008 10:32 AM*:

I hate it that the old Federal building is going to be the Mob Museum Not much class at all by the City and the City Clowns

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**Rasputin** wrote on *May 24, 2008 09:26 AM*:

Like it or not, 2zero, both neon and The Mob are integral parts of this city's history. Get off your high horse and realize that at least someone is \*trying\* to bring history and culture back to the middle of the desert, instead of just sitting back and crying 'foul' at others' attempts.

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**GOD** wrote on *May 24, 2008 09:24 AM*:

CULTURE IN VEGAS IS AN OXYMORON.

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**Ladywolf** wrote on *May 24, 2008 09:11 AM*:

So Neon & The Mob is considered culture? I doubt that can be on even a remote level compared to the Guggenheim.

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**2zero** wrote on *May 24, 2008 07:56 AM*:

"So it's neon and the mob"...please. Next it will be the historic preservation of the "Crazy Horse" and a monument to the degradation of teen age girls.

Better yet we could memorialize corrupt political leaders with a wax museum of Nevada's finest!

---

**GEORGE** wrote on *May 24, 2008 03:37 AM*:

Spending \$475 million on the Smith Center for the Arts while thousands of Las Vegans are homeless and starving is obscene. The elites and media who patronize these status symbols should get their priorities straight. All the art centers in the world are not worth the tears of one starving child.

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