

Museum and student center taking *shape*

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NEWS-SUN

The construction phases at New Mexico Junior College are continuing as the institution gets closer to offering one-stop shopping for students and cultural awareness for the community.

As the \$6.9 million renovation project to the Ben Alexander Student Center begins to take its final shape, the construction phase to the rest of the building and The Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame continues.

Although neither project had a ground-breaking ceremony, both, according to NMJC President Steve McCleery, are scheduled to receive an open house. The public will be invited to view the changes and new facilities.

"If we stay on track, we should be ready to host an open house in October," McCleery said. "We are very pleased with the timeline of both projects."

The student center is scheduled to be completed by the end of July, but already the renovations have transformed the previous space into a place for students to make themselves at home.

"I want this place to be rocking," said NMJC director of student life Lance Caviness in an earlier interview. "I know they play games and stuff in their dorm rooms, but just let them come over here. This is their space."

The student center remodeling has called for a design to incorporate play, study and even the movies.

There is now a larger game room that calls for more pool tables, a foosball table, a ping-pong table, a PlayStation 2 and an Xbox setup, along with an air hockey table and four televisions.

A Starbucks coffee kiosk and computer lab are meant to be in the renovation area so students may have a

place to study and do projects while sipping a hot cup of joe.

The former T-Bird room, which served as a conference room, is being redesigned to function as a movie theater. It will house a 110-inch screen television, a ceiling projector and surround sound.

Once the construction phase of the project is finished, students will be able to register, purchase books, get their IDs and pay for their fees and classes all under one roof.

While the student center will be an attraction for all types of students, across the circle drive The Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame is designed to attract community members from all walks of life.

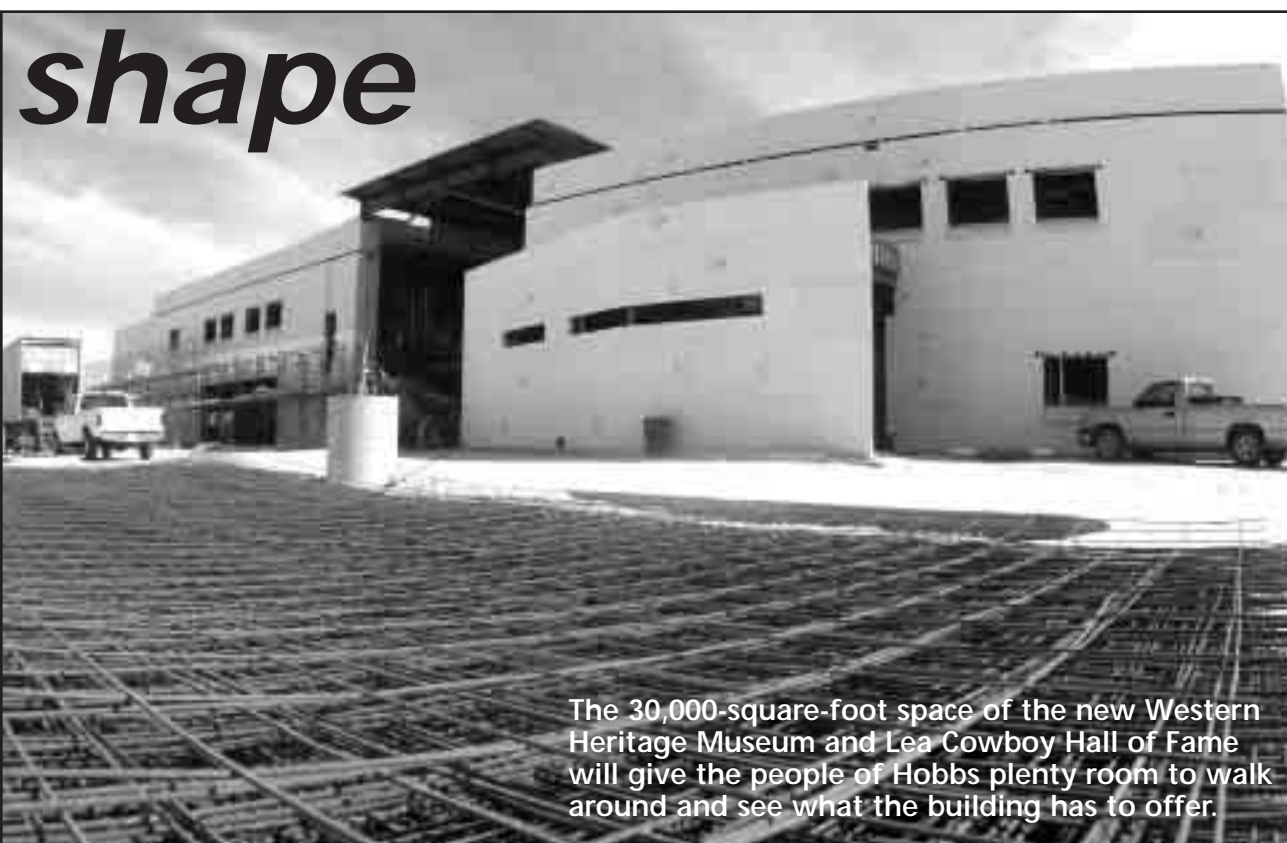
The 30,000-square-foot, \$5.7 million space is designed for five different components, according to The Western Heritage Museum and Cowboy Hall of Fame executive director Karen Wiley, who was recently hired for the job. The areas consist of a lobby, gift shop and information center, a permanent exhibit of Cowboy Hall of Fame inductees, a permanent exhibit of the history of Lea County, a temporary exhibit space that will house various displays, a theater that seats 140 and an outdoor courtyard.

"We have lots of different spaces," Wiley said. "We want to be there as a whole to the community."

Wiley is planning on using community focus groups to assist in choosing the display exhibits and films that will be shown.

The courtyard will also be available for community members to rent, according to Wiley.

"I hope, weather permitting, that people will rent the courtyard area for parties and receptions, or maybe use that space for workshops," Wiley said. "This entire museum focuses on the full culture of this area. We want the community to be involved and feel welcome here."



The 30,000-square-foot space of the new Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame will give the people of Hobbs plenty of room to walk around and see what the building has to offer.



DANIEL HOWELL/NEWS-SUN

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The new Ben Alexander Student Life Center is coming along nicely with expected completion by the end of July.

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