

A century of marvels

Wharton to be home for hands-on technology museum

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What do experimental airplanes, antique radios and arcade video games have in common?

Not much, other than that they're all examples of technological advancements and are all scheduled to be part of a new museum right here in Wharton.

Called the 20th Century Technology Museum, the exhibit will be permanently housed on the ground floor of the old 1888 jail.

Art Schulze, founder of Wharton's Healthcare Technology

Group, is overseeing the project.

Already, an experimental aircraft known as the "Skeeter Hawk" has been moved inside. Plans are to bring in another plane soon.

But this isn't just about flying. The collection will include old radios, appliances, medical devices, old-style EMS equipment and even original video games.

The arcade games are expected next week.

Schulze said the museum will offer a "hands-on" experience to guests. The arcade machines, for example, will be in working condi-

tion.

"It's to show various pieces of technology and where they are manufactured and something about their historical significance," Schulze said.

Schulze has collected part of the display himself. A room in his Healthcare Technology office, 625 N. Fulton, currently holds old radios and several other antiquated devices.

Other items are being donated from Schulze's former NASA work mates. Like the "Skeeter Hawk," for example.

That same individual also donated a propeller from one of the first airplanes to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Schulze plans to display that, too.

He's also hoping NASA will agree to temporarily display a moon rock at the museum. Those are coveted items, Schulze said, and usually are not released unless there are strict security measures in place.

The 20th Century Technology Museum likely won't have cutting edge security available. But it may qualify for a moon rock just the same.

"The room we're going to put it in is directly across from the Wharton Police Department," Schulze explained.

Plans are to have the museum up and running by May. The grand opening, though, likely won't occur until July.

Schulze hopes to coordinate it with the July 4th Freedom Fest.

Between now and then, there's lots to be done. The interior of the old jail is being refurbished to hold the displays.

David Bucek, owner of the jail, has been doing much of the work himself. This week he was stripping old paint off window frames and re-painting walls.

"A lot of work needs to be done, but we're coming along," Bucek said in between sessions of scrapping.

A portion of the interior walls will be comprised of the original, 1888 brick.

Bucek said the exterior will be re-worked as well, with the original sections brought back to the 1888 era brick and the 1940 additions remaining in stucco.

Schulze is excited about the project.

"It's not something I have a lot of experience in, but I feel compelled to do it," he said.

"I think it could be a very nice tourist attraction."



Art Schulze squeezes past the "Skeeter Hawk" as friends help him fit it into the doors of the "old jail building," back when the plane first arrived in Wharton. Among them is David Bucek (second from left), who owns the building. Soon Schulze hopes to open the 20th Century Technology Museum in the building on South Fulton Street.

Staff photo by Larry Jackson



Staff Photo by Benjamin Sharp
David Bucek scrapes paint from a window frame in the old 1888 jail, which he owns. A technology museum will open this spring in the first floor of the structure.