

Old jail building becomes new museum

By BENJAMIN C. SHARP - Antique radios, old computers and an experimental aircraft are in place. Over the next month, dozens of other items will be set up and displayed for the opening of Wharton's 20th Century Technology Museum.



Wharton resident Art Schulze, owner of Healthcare Technology Group Inc. and overseer of the museum, is shooting for a "preview opening" on July 1.

"We've got a whole lot of things moved in over there, but we have a ways to go," Schulze said.

The museum, housed in the former 1888 jail on Fulton Street, has undergone plenty of work over the last few months thanks to Schulze, his wife, Sharon, and David Bucek.

Art Schulze works the knob on a radio that dates back over 50 years. It's one of dozens of items that will be on display in a museum dedicated to technology.

Bucek owns the building and has done much of the work himself. Bucek purchased the building from the county, which had been using it for offices.

Several displays have already been set-up in the 2,100 square-foot building. These include an impressive exhibit of radios from the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

It's eye-opening to see the difference in size, materials and design that have occurred as technology has advanced. Schulze said that's the point of making such a museum.

"The real thing is to point out the significance — to show the progress of technology," he said.

The museum will do that by chronicling technological growth in several fields: entertainment, communication, household devices, computation, instrumentation and aviation.

Inside the three-room facility will be old arcade game machines, telephones, appliances, radios, televisions, computers, medical devices, toys and even an airplane.

A portion of the articles came from Schulze's father, who began in the appliance business

in the 1930s and collected all kinds of devices.

Others come from Schulze himself. An avid collector and inventor, he has obtained dozens of radios, medical devices and other unique attractions over the years.

One unique item to make its way into the museum is an ice-filled table that was used several decades ago as an air-conditioner.

A portable defibrillator that Schulze helped design in the 1970s will also be on display. Wharton EMS used the device on its ambulances.

Other noteworthy items include an oval-faced TV, the first automatic dish washer, the first in-home refrigerator, early arcade games, the first lap-top computer and a propeller from one of the first airplane's to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

Schulze also has plans to display a moon rock temporarily donated to the museum by NASA.

Schulze said the 20th Century Technology Museum will be a newsworthy addition to Wharton. He said there are no museums like it in the entire state.

"I think it's going to be a unique opportunity for this part of Texas," he said. "I think it can be a big tourist attraction for the city."

The museum, located at 221 S. Fulton, is scheduled to open in July, although a grand opening will likely be delayed until around Labor Day.

Hours of operation are expected to be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday through Sunday. Admission is \$3 per adult, \$1 per senior and student and kids are free. Call 282-8810 for more information.
