



January 15, 2006

by Henry L. Davis And Michael Beebe

Deal reached on using Psychiatric Center funds

Most of the \$100 million would be spent on the landmark Richardson complex

One of Buffalo's most striking and architecturally important landmarks, the imposing sandstone towers rising from the grounds of the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, got the commitment Saturday that its backers were seeking from Gov. George E. Pataki.

The governor announced that agreement has been reached on how to divide \$100 million, approved two years ago by Pataki and the Legislature, for the complex designed by Henry Hobson Richardson, one of the 19th century's greatest architects. Pataki said the lion's share of the money, \$76.5 million, will be spent on the Richardson complex, ending the uncertainty backers recently expressed about a lack of agreement on how to spend the money.

"The Richardson Complex is a extremely important part of Buffalo's architectural heritage," Pataki said in announcing the funding agreement. "This historic package of support will allow us to restore the footprint of the Richardson complex and build a new visitor's center there, renovate the Darwin Martin House and construct a new Burchfield-Penney museum. "Most importantly," the governor added, "we will ensure that these landmarks and cultural resources remain critical economic, cultural and academic resources for the entire Buffalo region."

Key elements of the plan include:

\$76.5 million for restoration of the "footprint" - primarily the towers - of which \$20 million will go toward a visitors center and architectural museum for tourists interested in Buffalo's architectural history.

\$16.5 million for relocation of the Burchfield-Penney Art Center from the adjacent Buffalo State College campus to the psychiatric center grounds.

\$7 million to help complete the visitors center at Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin D. Martin complex on Jewett Parkway.

There is another \$7 million available for Richardson work - not part of the \$100 million and most of it unspent - that was set aside by the state in 2003 to make emergency stabilization repairs. "This is good news," said State Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, D-Bufferlo. "We've worked hard and for a long time. The governor deserves credit. He will leave a lasting legacy." State Sen. Dale M. Volker, R-Depew, said the agreement was essential if the project was going to keep the funding. "Either we were going to get this money authorized or we were going to risk losing it,"

Volker said. "Now, we've got enough to stabilize the buildings and move forward."

The restoration means that Buffalo has or will be restoring works by arguably the three greatest architects in American history: Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin Martin House, Louis Sullivan's Guaranty Building, and now Richardson's complex at Forest and Elmwood avenues.

The complex designed by Richardson, whose style came to be known as Richardsonian Romanesque, opened in 1880 as the Buffalo State Asylum of the Insane. It was completed in 1895, nine years after Richardson's death. The Gothic towers and sprawling brick buildings off Forest Avenue have been designated as a National Historic Landmark. But the structures were allowed to deteriorate after being vacated by the psychiatric center more than 30 years ago. Preservationists, who filed a lawsuit to force the state to keep up the buildings, were thrilled by Pataki's announcement, but expressed concern about the adjoining stone and brick buildings that extend the wings of the complex.

Cynthia Van Ness, president of the Preservation Coalition of Erie County, one of the groups that filed the lawsuit, said the entire Richardson complex should be saved. "The coalition is ecstatic to hear that the money will probably be spent on the complex," she said, "and we hope it includes the entire complex, not just the masonry buildings. The brick ones definitely need attention right away." Mayor Byron W. Brown, who lobbied for the funding when he was a state senator representing Buffalo, said the restoration will add to Buffalo's architectural attractions. "This type of project is precisely what my administration is committed to, bringing important projects to successful completion," Brown said. "And there will be many more of this type of project to come." The new Burchfield center and Richardson restoration, he said, "will help attract people to our city as tourists who will spend money on restaurants and in stores, which will contribute toward creating jobs for residents of our community."

Muriel Howard, Buffalo State College's president, said the new home for the Burchfield-Penney Center will be built at Rockwell Drive and Elmwood Avenue, directly across Elmwood from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. "I'm just so excited we're going to have a facility that's worthy of Burchfield's collection, and that will also display other regional artists," Howard said.

Hoyt said the next challenge is to quickly form a panel of interested parties to decide how to spend the Richardson portion of the funds and how to use whatever sections of the complex to be saved. Among the ideas is providing much-needed expansion space for Buffalo State College. The funds allocated for Richardson are not enough to restore the eight remaining 19th century buildings - 350,000 square feet of space - designed by the architect, according to officials. "The towers are still the focal point. The other buildings? Well, they would take a lot of money, and it couldn't all be public," said Assembly Majority Leader Paul Tokasz, D-Cheektowaga. Volker noted it was controversial enough among state lawmakers to have \$100 million allocated for a project in Buffalo without a plan on how to spend it. Moreover, he said, there remains disagreement among civic and business leaders here over whether the money would be better spent on other projects or problems. "This thing was not an easy lift," Volker said.