

## Gilding arts museum to shine in Pontiac



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PONTIAC — There'll be gold in them thar exhibits in Pontiac this spring.

Some silver, too.

The occasion: The planned May opening of the newly expanded Museum of the Gilding Arts at 217 N. Mill St. on the downtown square.

The storefront museum will serve as the premier showcase for the Society of Gilders, an international organization dedicated to the fine craft of gold and silver leafing, based in Rochester,

Minn., and boasting 200 members around the world.

The museum already had its foot in the door in the Mill Street space: a standing display by the Society of Gilders, located within the existing International Walldog Mural & Sign Art Museum.

It was unveiled in June 2012 with a ceremony that included Society members gilding a ribbon ornament on the city's Desert Storm monument across the street at the Livingston County Courthouse.

With the Walldog Museum pulling up stakes and moving to the Old City Shoppes at 321 N. Main St., the Gilders are expanding the standing display into the group's permanent showcase, comprised of three distinct areas.

Everything is hoped to be completed in time for the annual Red Carpet Corridor Festival the first weekend of May, followed by a formal dedication June 6.

"When we set up the museum (in 2012) we knew it was temporary," said Naomi Lipsky, Society of Gilders president. "But Pontiac has always been very enthusiastic about us and wanted to give us more space."

The development costs will be shared between the city, using tax increment financing funds, and the Society of Gilders, said Rebecca Black of Pontiac City Tourism.

The centerpiece of the space, said Lipsky, will be a recreation of the historic Swift Gold Beating Factory of Hartford, Conn., the contents of which came into the possession of the Society of Gilders in 2007.

"Swift was the last hand gold-beating factory in America before machines took over," said Lipsky of the process that involved using 15-pound mallets to beat molten gold and silver into

transparently thin leaf.

The factory closed but was left intact until the factory's contents were donated by Robert Swift to the Society of Gilders, Lipsky said.

The re-creation of the factory will occupy half of the expanded space, she said, and feature four original gold beating desks, distressed wood, lighting and other authentic fixtures.

"Even the view from the windows will be the same," said Lipsky, referring to murals being created that replicate the Hartford vistas visible from the original factory portals.

The museum's front area will include a space devoted to displays from the Swift collection on topics like "What Is Gilding?," "How Gold Is Made" and "How to Gild."

Another gallery will feature contemporary gilded works by members and other artists, Lipsky said. And there will be a gift shop, too.

Entry will be free, with donations suggested, Lipsky said.

"Pontiac has been extremely supportive and enthusiastic about having us here," she added.

"It's going to be gorgeous," said Black.