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Station rekindles historic flame

Ongoing renovation to give old building a new life as central fire station

By Donna Fielder
Staff Writer

The "new" building at Hickory Street and Bell Avenue will look much like the "old" building at Hickory and Bell when it was new half a century ago.

That is according to plan. With a sharp eye toward preservation and history, Denton officials decided that the new central fire suppression and administrative facility would be the old Denton power plant reborn, a state-of-the-art fire station in an historic building.

And work is well under way.

Last Tuesday, officials turned over shovels full of earth in a ceremonial ground-breaking. But much work already has taken place, and plans are on schedule for a March 2003 opening.

The architectural firm of James Kirkpatrick drew the plans, keeping the building as near as possible to its original form. But there will be a new wing on the south to house the fire engines, which will exit the station onto Bell Avenue.

The plans use one-story additions on the west side for battalion chief's quarters and a study, Mr. Kirkpatrick said. The one-story addition on the east side will be a community room and will serve as a disaster command post, he said.

The old clock face will remain, enhanced with new clock works and new hands that will be made to look like the originals.

Other old concrete slabs on the property are being removed to make room for landscaping.

Visitors will enter from Hickory Street and they will walk into a lobby that recalls the past.



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Artist's rendering

Top, a renovation is turning the old Denton power plant at Bell Avenue and Hickory Street into the new central fire station. Above, an artist's rendering shows how the building is expected to look when it's finished, with a southern addition allowing fire engines to enter from Mulberry Street and exit onto Bell. The project is scheduled to be completed in March 2003.



Denton Record-Chronicle/Stacey Cooper

Construction on the new fire station at Hickory Street and Bell Avenue is scheduled to be complete in March 2003.

"It will have the exposed beams and windows of the past, and hopefully, it will have a historic display of the fire service," Mr. Kirkpatrick said.

Rod Reeves, an intern with the architectural firm, is helping with the project.

"We have weekly project meetings with the builder," he said. "And our engineer is down there. Everything is on time at this point. There has been a little holdup because of rain, but it is on schedule."

Denton Fire Department Battalion Chief Mike Sessions said administrators are excited because they soon will be picking out new furniture for the second-floor offices.

"We're getting new desks," he said. "This is the first time in a long time."

When it opens, the station will house eight firefighters, with room for 14. Four will ride the big ladder truck; three will ride an engine, and the shift boss — the battalion chief — will also live and work there.

Denton has a few female firefighters. One of them served on a design committee that helped plan the station so that privacy issues were addressed. Since firefighters work 24-hour shifts, they sleep at their stations at night when they're not on a call. The new building has a full kitchen, and the sleeping room has seven-foot divider walls between cubicles.

The main part of the building will have a 1,900-square-foot training room, with a small kitchen.

The bays' design allows the fire engines to drive through. They will enter the building on the Mulberry Street side, and will exit onto Bell Avenue when the station gets a call.

There already is a traffic light at the intersection of Hickory and Bell. Another traffic light will be

placed at the intersection of Bell and Mulberry. When firefighters leave the station on a call, they will use a remote-control device that will stop traffic in all directions to allow safe passage.

Denton builder Tim Beatty said he is excited to have won the contract for the work.

"The job is moving really well," he said. "We feel like we're on schedule. We're drilling piers now. Most of the demolition has been done. We're putting on a new commercial roof."

The original Mississippi wire glass windows have been removed and are being cleaned and repaired while work is being done to restore the window frames.

The brickwork will be left original and the workers have saved enough bricks from the demolished walls to repair the existing brick.

"Pretty well, what you see is what it will look like when the job is done," Mr. Beatty said.

Currently, workers are drilling the piers for the additional building that will be the bays. Because of Denton's soil and the rains, the pier work has been something of an ordeal, he said.

"But we intend to have the foundation poured and expansion to the south for the truck bays started in May."

Later, they will add a mid-floor to accommodate the second-floor offices. And they will install a new foundation in the existing building area.

"We're excited about doing this job," Mr. Beatty said. "We're excited that the city decided to restore the old power plant. We have a vested interest ourselves and consider it an honor to be able to build it for the city."

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