

Salem Convention & Visitors Association moving downtown

RON COWAN Statesman Journal

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Salem Convention & Visitors Association is making its biggest move in its 25-year history — bringing something new to downtown and to the area travel scene.

SCVA, which has had offices and a visitor information center at Mission Mill Museum, is opening what it calls an all-purpose Travel Cafe in the Grand building at 181 High St. NE.

The site will include event ticket sales, wi-fi access, iPod downloads, readerboards with scrolling events, an art gallery, a spirits room for wine tasting, exhibits, plasma screens for travel videos and travel brochures and maps.

“It’s going to have more bells and whistles there to engage the consumer,” SCVA chief executive officer Angie Morris said.

She said the center will immediately immerse visitors in the art, wine, scenic attractions and tour possibilities and give them the tools to explore the area.

“I call it a destination visitors center,” said Irene Bernards, tourism and marketing director of SCVA.

Garmin will provide GPS units available for rental for walking and driving tours. Garmin is one of many local organizations partnering with SCVA.

Two new satellite locations also will be established near Interstate 5, at the Red Lion Hotel and the Best Western Mill Creek Inn.

The site will triple the floor space available to SCVA and could be instrumental in building on travel spending, which already had an economic impact of \$512 million in Marion and Polk counties in 2007.

SCVA also plans to rename itself Travel Salem — the same name as its printed travel guide.

Todd Davidson, executive director of the Oregon Tourism Commission, called the holistic approach of the Travel Cafe “a brilliant move.”



CB2

SALEM CONVENTION & VISITORS ASSOCIATION



CB2 Architects-Construction

This is an architectural rendering of Travel Cafe, to be located in the Grand building.

Travel Cafe

What: An all-purpose visitors center featuring wine tasting, GPS units for rent, exhibits, art for sale, iPod downloads, Wi-fi access, travel brochures, maps and plasma screens

Operator: Salem Convention & Visitors Association, to be renamed Travel Salem

Where: 181 High St. NE, Salem

Cost: \$236,000 construction cost; cash, in-kind donations and a marketing partners being sought

Opening: Soft opening by mid-December

Information: (503) 581-4325

Carole Smith, who will be landlord of the Travel Cafe, along with husband Eric Kittleson, said SCVA is taking a 10-year lease, with an option of two five-year extensions.

"We're thrilled with SCVA coming downtown," Smith said.

Garth Brandaw of CB2 Architects/Construction, who is designing and handling construction of the Travel Cafe, said he will use the setting to tell the story of this area, with a central information pavilion as "an exciting signature piece."

Remodeling the space, formerly the home of two different stores, will cost \$236,000, of which \$80,000 has been raised from partners such as Salem Conference Center, PGE, Salem Sign Co., Garmin and CB2.

"We're seeking cash and in-kind partners to make the project possible, and we're also looking for marketing partners," Morris said.

Morris is optimistic there could be a soft opening by the Dec. 13 Festival of Lights Holiday Parade; interior demolition on the site begins this week.

"I think she's really within striking distance," said SCVA board member Chuck Bennett of the fundraising. "I think the amount of money involved is manageable."

Bennett is a member of the Salem City Council.

"There just couldn't be a better space," he said. "If there's any drawback I could find, it's the parking."

"You really put them in the middle of what are the attractions."