

# CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

## The Henry Ford plans 'digestible' exhibits

By Sherri Begin

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**The Henry Ford** is in the early stages of planning a \$25 million second phase of renovations to its museum.

The plan calls for redeveloping the museum's 75,000-square-foot transportation and design areas into smaller areas and new walkways to more easily navigate the automobile, train, bicycle, and horse and carriage exhibits.

"We're going to divide it up into much more digestible chunks," said President Patricia Mooradian.

"Part of moving forward is keeping up with learning styles."

Like the **Detroit Institute of Arts**, The Henry Ford used audience research to gauge visitor feedback to its exhibits. It clearly showed visitors valued smaller exhibit areas, Mooradian said.

The museum expects the project design to take 18 months. It plans to do the renovations in phases as it raises money to fund them, she said. A portion of the estimated \$25 million for the renovations is built into The Henry Ford's current \$155 million campaign, Mooradian said. The nonprofit has raised about \$145 million to date.

By changing the museum's footprint and the transportation exhibits, the museum hopes more visitors will come, Mooradian said.

"We have two main objectives: sustainability and being a unique global resource for discovering how American innovation shaped our past, influences our present and shapes the future," Mooradian said.

"In order to inspire people, we have to change our products so people aren't just saying, 'Yeah, I was there in the fourth grade.' "

The museum's seasonal attractions — such as Halloween in Greenfield Village; its Christmas celebration, Holiday Nights; and new exhibits, like last summer's "Rock Stars' Cars and Guitars" — are attracting more visitors.

And it's restructuring ticket packages to encourage visitors to attend both the village and the museum and to take the historic rides.

"This not only improves the visitor experience, but helps with sustainable revenue," Mooradian said.

"What we're trying to do is create the kinds of events and activities that people want to come to see repeated times."

The museum believes it's on the right path.

Its membership has doubled to 40,000 over the past four years. Attendance at Greenfield Village has

increased about 8 percent this year and museum attendance is up about 5 percent, Mooradian said.

Still, earned revenue is down slightly due to more visitors taking advantage of discounts and more members attending on their flat yearly fee rather than a per-visit fee, Mooradian said.

"Given the struggling regional economy, we believe that we have had a solid year and expect to reach our budgeted surplus" of about 1 percent of operating revenue, which was \$56 million, she said.

Earned revenue accounts for about 65 percent of the museum's operating revenue. Total revenue was \$88.5 million in 2006, Mooradian said.

Aside from increasing memberships and ticket sales, the museum is looking to other earned revenue sources as well.

This year it began selling its Hobo Bread, cherry chicken sausage and a line of condiments at food outlets around the area, including **R. Hirt Jr. Co.** in Detroit's Eastern Market and **Westborn Market Stores** in Dearborn.

The Henry Ford also recently signed a deal with New York-based licensing agency **MODA International Marketing** to make licensed products for distribution at other retail sites.

The **Detroit Zoological Society** also is reporting increased attendance and memberships. Zoo attendance was up 9.5 percent to 1.01 million visitors, just seven months into its fiscal 2008.

The zoo credits the increase to the balmy summer and fall weather, its recent marketing campaigns and holding the line on membership, said Patricia Mills Janeway, communication manager.

Another factor perhaps influencing local visitor rates is the gas prices, she said. "People are staying closer to home."