Project work ahead of schedule

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LAFAYETTE — Construction of the Vermilionville project is ahead of schedule, and two historic homes have been moved to the 22-acre site.

The recreated heritage center was scheduled to be completed by May 1, but that's been pushed up to Feb. 23, according Fabian Patin, a member of the Bayou Vermilion Commission.

Work has begun on constructing new buildings, as well as renovation of two old homes which recently were moved to the site, formerly known as Beaver Park, between Surrey Street and the Evangeline Thruway.

A large two-story home, built in 1790, has been relocated from Mintmere plantation in New Iberia. The structure was donated by Dr. Roy Boucvalt.

The renovation will attempt to restore the building to its original appearance, Patin said.

“We're changing it very, very little,” he said.

A building to house the home’s kitchen is under construction.

A small cottage from Grand Coteau also is being renovated, and it's to be used as a parsonage next to the village church, now under construction.

Work is under way on a 250-seat performance center, a visitors center, restaurant and kitchens, Patin said.

Construction of a total of 22 buildings should peak within the next 45 days, he said.

Despite heavy rains last month, work crews have been able to keep ahead of the schedule, Patin said, adding that contracts for the job don't allow for time extensions because of weather.

A pumping station is expected to be completed by mid-fall, providing quick drainage of runoff water that accumulates rapidly after rainfall.

“its capacity is seven times what the present pump is,” Patin said.

Before construction on the village could begin, several feet of fill dirt had to be used to bring the low-lying land above flood level.

While work on the construction project continues, Tolson Services Inc. has been planning the marketing strategy. Tour bus packages already have been sold, said marketing director Abigail Kerne.

“We actually started last year,” she said.

It's anticipated that visitors to the village will stay for two or three hours, and that probably will mean tourists will be in Lafayette long enough to eat in an area restaurant or stay overnight, Kerne said.

“That is the essential planning behind the whole thing,” Patin said. “So there is enough duration to spin off into other benefits.”

Admission to the attraction is tentatively set at $8 for adults, $6.50 for citizens over 65, $5 for students between the ages of 6 and 18, and no charge for children under 6.

Kerne said a plan also is available to local residents allowing year-round access for a family of five for $48.

Vermilionville soon will have a toll-free number, 1-800-99-BAYOU, she said, for more information on the attraction.