

Landscaping Changes Aim To Bring More Visitors To Old State Capitol

By Sean Crawford

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It's been the town square of Springfield since it was built. But the Old State Capitol grounds has taken on a varied look through the years. And an effort is underway to do something different and better. A lawn party is being held this Saturday afternoon from 5 to 7 at the site to raise money for beautifying the grounds.

WUIS' Sean Crawford talks with Justin Blandford about the plans for sprucing up the Old State Capitol grounds. While the location is teeming with history, from its role as the home of state government, to its ties to Lincoln and later, Obama, something is still missing.

"People are naturally drawn to areas that look beautiful," said Justin Blandford, Superintendent of State Historic Sites in Springfield. "If you are a block off the downtown square, looking into the square, it's not very eye catching." Change is needed, he says, to draw more people into the Old State Capitol.

"The nicer we can make the experience look to the eye, which is informing the mind of where it is going to go next, that's going to have an impact on visitation numbers. The number of people who make a decision of, I'm going to stop here or no I am going to keep going and see what's on the next block."

Blandford said the new design, which is still being finalized, will include more color and height. Planters, benches and more are expected to be added. "Right now we are not doing much to encourage that length of stay at the Old State Capitol on the outside of the site. We're doing a lot of great programming inside, but we need to be hooking more people outside and encouraging them to spend more time."

Still, it's not only a state historic site, but also on the National Register of Historic Places. Blandford says making the site look nicer on the outside is in keeping with the past.

"You study the historical information and you'll find out, the citizenry of Springfield, people who were visiting the State Capitol and the people signing off on the vouchers for the purchases for the site were referring to the site as a park," he said. A landscape plan from the 1960's, which the building was reconstructed, is also being reviewed. The goal is to complete the overhaul by the state's 2018 bicentennial.

Tickets are available for Saturday's event at the Old State Capitol Gift Shop, inside the building. Tickets are \$100 each or \$150 for a pair, with additional tickets going for \$50 each. Wine and food, along with music by David Cain, will be part of the festivities. The Springfield Garden Club plans floral designs and 19th century party favors.

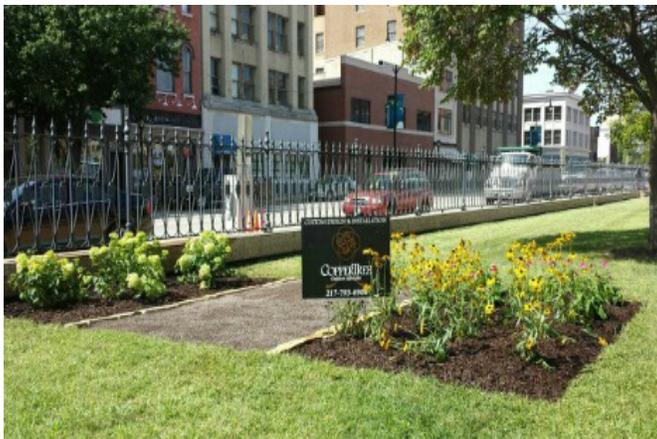


Photo Caption:

CopperTree crews were at the Old State Capitol yesterday installing a proposed design created by Mark McWilliams and Elaine Peoples. The 10 foot area will be debuted at the fundraising event on September 6.