

Vermontville awarded \$25,000 state grant for Opera House restoration

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VERMONTVILLE — The Opera House restoration project got a financial shot in the arm Friday when local legislators announced that a \$25,000 Michigan Equity Program grant had been approved by the Department of Commerce.

In making the joint announcement, Representative Frank Fitzgerald and Senator John Schwarz noted that Grand Ledge was also awarded a \$20,000 grant for its Opera House restoration project.

"Eaton County continues to preserve its history for the enjoyment of future generations. This area has a tremendous tradition, and I'm glad to see it continue," Fitzgerald said.

"Local residents put plenty of hard work into keeping their heritage, and they should be saluted. The grants indicate that these efforts are paying

off," Schwarz added.

Hildred Peabody of the Vermontville Historical Society and Village Clerk Sharon Stewart wrote the grant application and attended meetings with Fitzgerald and Eaton County and DOC officials. Village President Sue Villanueva also attended a meeting and is an ardent supporter of the project.

Peabody said the local group was pleased and noted the money would be used for interior restoration and handicap accessibility to the Opera House, which was designated a Michigan Historical Landmark by the Historical Commission in 1978.

"We expect to use it for basic interior restoration and whatever else we can get out of it," she said.

Although the announcement said the total cost of the project was \$35,000, Peabody said they had applied for

\$43,000.

The 1990 equity grant is a matching-funds grant, and the additional \$10,000 will be generated locally.

"\$5,000 will be paid in-kind, that is, it will come in the form of volunteer labor from people in the community," Peabody said.

"The other \$5,000 will be paid by the Village Council and the Township Board, who will pay \$2,500 each, according to the terms of the grant," she added.

Peabody said that she will meet with the council and the board this week to begin planning the project that will be completed this year.

Tentative plans are to use the Opera House as a Com-

munity Center, where receptions, parties and meetings could be held.

"Hopefully, it will fill a real need in the community as a Community Center," Peabody said. "We want to have it restored nicely, so it could be used as a small reception hall."

Built in 1898, the Opera House has traditionally been used for social activities and events in the village.

Other restoration work has already been completed. The roof of the structure has been replaced, and electrical work has been completed in the building, which still houses the Mildred Allen Memorial Library.

Although the \$43,000

originally sought wouldn't even have been enough to complete the restoration, Peabody and Stewart said they are optimistic that the \$35,000 will go a long way toward restoring the handsome structure to its original splendor.