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Downtown arts center gets \$200G boost

By Special to The Herald Press

NEW BRITAIN — Trinity-On-Main announced last week that it has received a \$200,000 grant from the American Savings Foundation for renovation of the performance center's historic building at Main and Chestnut streets in New Britain, and expects an additional \$300,000 from the state.

The grant will help launch Phase I of the building's renovation, which begins March 3 and includes restoration of the tower and surrounding roof.

The 108-foot tower, rising from a large arched entrance to a pyramidal roof and four small turrets, dominates the building's façade and is one of downtown New Britain's most recognizable features.

The contract for performing the restoration work has been awarded to G.L. Capasso Restoration Inc., of New Haven.

"American Savings Foundation's support has been instrumental in helping us keep this project moving forward," said Anne Pilla, executive director of Trinity-On-Main. "Because of the foundation's grant, we were able to demonstrate that there is significant local support for this project, and the State Bond Commission will now release \$300,000 in funding. We've been able to move forward with scheduling the work, and we are going to see the scaffolding going up in March."

The American Savings Foundation has shown repeated support for the Trinity-On-Main project turning a church into a performing arts center. In 2002, the foundation contributed \$15,000 toward a feasibility study, and later \$50,000 toward buying the building. The foundation has also provided funding to update the interior and exterior lighting, as well as for administrative support.

The Trinity-On-Main building was originally built in 1891 as Trinity United Methodist Church. Rising costs forced the church trustees to consider demolishing the building and selling off the stone, woodwork and stained glass windows. The New Britain Area Conference of Churches, city government, local business and the arts community joined forces to save the beautiful and historic Romanesque-style building.

Studies were conducted to determine its structural integrity and the feasibility for "adaptive reuse" of the property. The studies indicated the need for significant repairs, but also that the building was indeed worth saving. The building's exceptional acoustics, stage and large seating area make it ideally suited for a new life as a first-class regional cultural and performance venue. It has been operating as a performance center since 2003.

"Investing in the structural renovation will not only help save the building," said David Davison, president and chief executive of the foundation. "It is also an investment in the vibrant arts community that is growing here in New Britain."