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Renovation Update: Detroit's Cobo Center

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By Matt Alderton
May 22, 2012

Although home plate is still several years away, the Cobo Conference & Exhibition Center in downtown Detroit is rounding third base in its \$299 million transformation, it announced last week in a special construction update.

Currently, construction crews are "well into" stage one of Phase III in the five-year construction project, according to the Cobo Center, which said work has finally begun on the convention center's new "signature space" — a three-story glass atrium that links the main floor of the venue with a new entrance facing the Detroit River, scheduled for completion in time for the North American International Auto Show (NAIAS) in January 2013.

"Today's the day when the caterpillar officially enters its cocoon and begins its transformation into a butterfly," Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority (DRCFA) Board Chair Larry Alexander said of the new atrium. "When complete, this area will be the most visually dramatic and breathtaking manifestation of physical change to the facility."

Renovation of the Cobo Center began in 2009 and is scheduled for completion by 2015. Completed in fall 2009, phase one of the renovations included a set of urgently needed upgrades that focused on electrical improvements and leak reduction. Phase two began in February 2010 and was completed earlier this year. It entailed the enclosure of the loading dock, further electrical and lighting improvements, the creation of more than 400 new parking spaces, a partial re-roofing of the building and the addition of 25,000 gross square feet of exhibition space.

Currently underway, the third and final phase of renovations — to be completed in three stages — will turn the existing Cobo Arena into a 40,000-square-foot ballroom with an open-air terrace, opening in May 2013; create the aforementioned atrium and entrance; renovate the building's primary façade, turning it into a high-tech "media mesh" that will function as a giant digital signboard; and reconfigure most of the building's meeting and breakout space along the facility's south side, where new meeting rooms will showcase views of the Detroit River.

Thus far, construction has not affected Cobo Center operations. "All three stages of Phase III of the Cobo Center renovation will be completed for [the] ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition in the summer of 2015," said Cobo Center General Manager Thom Connors. "In the meantime, we have all exhibit space available and full use of meeting rooms up to current capacity."

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