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Courtyard expansion will transform exhibition space

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Kylie Espinoza, 4, sports a hard hat while sitting with her grandmother Friday during groundbreaking ceremonies held for the courtyard expansion at the Roswell Museum and Art Center. ([Daily Record/Mark Wilson](#))

An idea that was born about six years ago is finally on its way to fruition. The Roswell Museum and Art Center broke ground on Friday for a project that will expand its courtyard and tie the museum's outdoor exhibit space to Main Street.

Architect Baker Morrow remembers standing in the existing courtyard with John Bassett, president of the RMAC foundation, looking at the chipped concrete when the dream started to form. The two began to discuss the prospect of renovating the area, and the idea quickly grew into something bigger.

"We thought, if we opened up the wall right there, we could go east," Morrow recalled.

The fledgling idea turned into a full-scale transformation of the space, including a new sculpture, new display areas, and a transformation of the Robert Goddard rocket tower. The new courtyard will spill out toward Main Street, enhance the area's "walkability" and make features like the Goddard tower more visible.

"This is definitely the diamond in the rough for Roswell, New Mexico, and I have forever felt like it was too hidden," said Mayor Sam LaGrone at the groundbreaking ceremony. "Now our visitors to the city will recognize the outstanding art museum we have."

Morrow said he tried to design a landscape that would enhance the public's experience viewing the art without distracting from it. The area encompasses trees that were planted as part of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, and Morrow envisions seating in the shade where people can contemplate sculptures on newly-constructed display pads. One long bench will be capped with a Foteria depicting a space scene.

Morrow also pictures flora that will offer color to the courtyard throughout the four seasons, including flowering trees, shrubs and perennial plants. The pavement of the new courtyard will feature a pattern based on a part of one of Goddard's original rocket sketches, mimicking the pinwheel shape of a turbine.

"It'll be visually so compelling," said RMAC Executive Director Laurie Rufe. "It'll be amazing."

Another embellishment will be a bronze sculpture of Goddard, leaning in a doorway with a telescope pointed toward the rocket tower.

"He will be right at the corner of Main and 11th Street ready to launch that rocket," said Rufe.

The RMAC Foundation raised most of the money through its Reaching New Heights campaign, and through a matching donation from Donald Anderson, a local artist, oil-man and philanthropist. More than \$417,000 for the \$650,000 project came from the foundation. The remainder came in the form of grants from the Spring River Corridor Foundation and New Mexico MainStreet. Rufe said that landscapers should start moving earth by April 13 or 14. The project is scheduled to be finished next year.