

Touchstones Nelson – Countdown to the Celebration A Building Transformed

It's hard to walk by 502 Vernon St. – former City Hall, museum and post office – without trying to peer through windows and opened doors. Just to see what the next life for this building looks like.

On October 14th, the new museum, art gallery and archives will open fully for the first time at this location. And everyone is invited, indeed welcomed and encouraged, to come explore Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History.

The name 'Touchstones' was chosen for a variety of reasons. Historically, a touchstone was a hard dark stone used to test the purity of gold or silver according to the colour of the streak it left on the touchstone.

More recently, touchstone has become a word that means an excellent example, a benchmark against which others are compared. Touchstones Nelson aspires to reach this standard of excellence.

The mining connection implied in the name is also true to Nelson's history, and of course the building itself is made of granite and marble – beautiful, solid stones, holding memory and history.

So, what is going on inside as the transformation occurs?

Entering from the main doors on Vernon St., you encounter the reception and lobby area, and the gift shop. The bright, beautiful space is enhanced by locally-crafted woodwork, splashes of colour, black marble tiles as part of the donor wall, and a large video screen.

Moving through the lobby, you enter Gallery A, the large art gallery with 1500 square feet. This gallery is built to high standards, and after a year, when it has proven itself, Touchstones will be able to welcome major travelling art exhibits from places like the National Gallery.

Also on this floor is Gallery B, the smaller gallery with 500 square feet. Both galleries have the technology built in to allow presentation of films and multi-media installations. They can also be divided into a variety of flexible configurations with the use of moving walls.

Up on the second floor the permanent museum exhibition is set in a large, richly coloured room. Adjacent to the main museum room are a small theatre and the Hume Hotel Audio Theatre.

The third floor houses administration offices where the magic of Touchstones becomes reality, through the hard work of staff and volunteers. Finally, way down at the lowest level of the building, are the archives. At last, our precious paper documents have a safe and secure home. There's also a work area where the public can comfortably do research.

Throughout Touchstones are special features and surprises. Restored original windows. An elevator that goes top to bottom. Bright splashes of colour. Glimpses of stone and brick. The curve of a window above a stair. And – the original spiral staircase.

It's an exciting building, one that is modern and state-of-the art, and yet respectful of the past.

Grand opening events are planned for October 14th and 15th. Next week, details on the exhibits and something special for seniors. To learn more about Touchstones Nelson, go to www.touchstonesnelson.ca.