

Phase 2 of Hall of Fame Village taking shape in Canton

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By: Bob Jones

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CANTON, Ohio — The national spotlight is once again shining on the city of Canton for the Pro Football Hall of Fame Festival and visitors are also taking note of the progress being made on the Hall of Fame Village powered by Johnson Controls.

Fans converged on Stark County Thursday for the Hall of Fame game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys. Others will come to the HOF for weekend enshrinement ceremonies or the Concert for Legends on Monday featuring Brad Paisley and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic canceled all events surrounding the annual event.

This week, fans are excited to be back even if things aren't completely normal.

The Hall of Fame is recommending masks for indoor events, but hasn't made recommendations for outdoors.

"You think about. I just came back. I went to the national convention in Chicago for autographs and that was indoors. I wore a mask there, but I didn't feel like I needed it here," said Steve Liedtke, of Cleveland.

Fans are also excited about the construction happening around the Hall of Fame, which is phase two of the Hall of Fame Village. The cost of the second phase is about \$300 million. The entire project is worth about \$1 billion.

"This is the best hall of fame museum, I think, in all of sports that I've been to and it'll make it a broader experience for everybody," said Dave Gore, a fan visiting from Maryland.

Crews have finished a spectator plaza and a scoreboard at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium and work is continuing at the Constellation Center for Excellence.

"It is a 75,000-square-foot multi-use office building for research and development," said Anne Gaffice, the executive vice president of the Hall of Fame Resort and Entertainment Company.

A Center for Performance, which will host indoor tournaments and conventions, is also in the works for phase two, along with a hotel, a restaurant, retail and an 85-thousand-square-foot football-themed water park.

The water park should open within two years and plans for phase 3 are already under discussion.

"Think more entertainment, more opportunities to engage, and maybe a live component. We definitely are looking into the health component," Gaffice said.

Canton Mayor Tom Bernabei said what's happening at the village is a big deal, especially since the massive project faced several financial and construction delays in recent years.

"It's pride in the community," Bernabei said. "But it also means jobs. It means revenue. It means economic development because from that growth will come additional growth and so forth," Bernabei said.

The mayor believes the expansion will score big with fans and keep them coming back for football and fun for decades to come.

"What we want is people that are coming to visit the Hall of Fame, we want them to stay for one, or two, or three days and have a lot of other good things to do," he said.