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Added parking greets visitors

By **Tim Carpenter**

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Politicians won't be the only people making noise during the 2005 legislative session.

Hard-hat crews working on the nine-year, \$135 million renovation of the Kansas Statehouse will continue pounding away at this ambitious project while the House, Senate and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius tangle over issues as tough as the building's limestone foundation.

"In many states, legislators move out into their own buildings," said Barry Greis, the state architect overseeing the renovation. "Well, Kansas said we won't leave ours. This is where we will reside and conduct our business. This is the permanent home."

A welcome addition for the 2005 session -- it opens Monday -- is a new underground parking garage on the north side of the Statehouse. It provides 551 spaces for people working and visiting the Capitol. Most spots will be reserved, but 128 will be open to visitors, including 14 stalls for motorists with disabilities.

Overall, the garage provides nearly four times as much visitor parking as existed previously around the building's circular drive.

Note of caution: There is a two-hour maximum on visitor parking in the garage.

Another blessing is the ongoing replacement of the building's heating, air-conditioning, plumbing, electrical and fire-protection systems. Eventually, a visitor's center will be on the north side of the Statehouse.

The loudest sounds in the next few months will result from construction on the southwest corner of the site, where underground utility systems are being installed and office spaces created.

Some of the excavation work beneath the Statehouse provides unprecedented insight into original construction techniques. Detailed drawings don't exist for the entire structure.

"We're in discovery mode all the time," Greis said. "Everyone asks: 'Have we found the bodies yet?' The answer is, 'No.' "

More noise will emerge from inside the east wing, where offices are being restored to former glory. That includes new windows, radiators, paint and fixtures. It should be ready for occupancy in December.

Some staff members, but no legislators, had to relocate to nearby



Ann Williamson/The Capital-Journal

The south side of the Statehouse is cordoned off with chain-link fence as workers renovate the space underground into mechanical vaults and offices.

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office buildings during this phase of the project.

Greis said the state set a completion deadline of Nov. 10, 2010. Until then, he said, folks will have to deal with inconveniences.

"There will be some noise," Greis said. "Construction will be going on 12 months out of the year. But the result will be worth it. It was long overdue to give attention to a monumental building."

He said this renovation could meet the state's needs for a century.

"Fifty years, minimum," he said. "I hope it will last 50 to 100 years."

Tim Carpenter can be reached at (785) 295-1158 or tim.carpenter@cjonline.com.