



**Seven
Andrews
generations:
Page 5B**



OBERLIN NEWS-TRIBUNE

THURSDAY, August 18, 2011

OBERLIN, OHIO

The week ahead

• The Oberlin High School Class of 1951 will celebrate their 60th class reunion on Sunday, Aug. 21. The reunion will be at Quick & Delicious, 311 S. Main St., Oberlin, at 7:30 p.m. For reservations, call Mary Ann Novak at 440-324-5167; or Katie Smith at 440-774-7954.

• There will be a free hot meal served at Grace Lutheran Church, 310 W. Lorain St., on Saturday, Aug. 20 at 5 p.m. All are welcome.

• **Back to School Bonanza:** Zion Community Development Corporation and Mt. Zion Baptist Church, together with other cooperating agencies, will present a Back to School Bonanza on Saturday, Aug. 20, from 11 a.m. to 3

City could lose nearly \$1 million URR money

Push on to raise \$58,000 in donations

On the brink of finally seeing something done to preserve the Gasholder building, a change in federal rules could derail the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center unless additional funds are raised quickly.

Assistant city manager and OURC project coordinator Darlene Colaso said construction drawings are completed for the exterior work needed to stabilize the building, and the roof phase is nearly ready to bid. But the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which must approve the project using U.S. Department of



Photo by Kathleen Willbore

George Abram kicks off a fundraising drive for the Underground Railroad Center which is going to be built in the gasholder, or round house, in the back-ground.

Transportation dollars, insists the exterior masonry work must be completed at the same time.

Colaso said the

fundraising subcommittee of the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center Implementation Team has raised about \$70,000, which would be sufficient local matching funds to replace the conical slate roof. But the masonry work will increase the cost for the first phase to \$641,233, with a required local match of \$128,247.

"The URCIT needs \$58,247 in order to proceed with this phase of the project," Colaso said. "We didn't want to kick off the big fundraising campaign before we had the roof up and people could see something was happen

SEE PAGE 2A



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City could lose nearly \$1 million URR funds...

FROM PAGE 1A

ing. But now we need \$58,000, and time is of the essence."

She said if sufficient funds are not available for the local match when the bid is awarded, the finance director will not be able to certify the award. That could jeopardize the \$917,600 federal transportation grant as well as \$200,000 in Congressional earmarks from Rep. Marci Kaptur and then-Rep.

Sherrod Brown, because both are contingent upon completion of the project.

The transportation grant is based on the premise the Underground Railroad Center would also be used as a park-and-ride facility on the Donald J. Pease Memorial Bike Path of the North Coast Inland Bicycle Trail. It was originally granted in 2003, but withdrawn due to inactivity, and re-authorized in 2010.

Colaso said she has explored grant possibilities, and found most foundations do not sponsor construction projects. She said individual and corporate support is needed immediately.

"This is a huge issue for this community," Colaso said. "It's not the way we planned, but the Federal Highway Administration changed the rules on us. In six to eight weeks we should be

awarding a bid, so we need the money now."

She said according to Barb Bickel, executive director of Visit Lorain County, the most-frequently visited pages on the Visit Lorain County web site are the Underground Railroad and the Adventure Cycling National Underground Railroad Route pages. She said the center will make Oberlin even more of a destination for Underground Railroad tourism.

"This is a huge economic development impact item for this region," Colaso said. "Right now, there's no place for the buses to park so the people can get out and explore the history of Oberlin. There's no place for people to go as a reflection center. This will give them that."

For more information on donating, call the city of Oberlin at 775-7217 or go to www.cityofoberlin.com.

Emerald...

FROM PAGE 1A

ed the North Professor Street side of Tappan Square in the 1980s.

"He planted oaks and red maples on closer centers than we do now, trying to achieve a botanical garden setting," Greive said. "Now those trees have 30 years growth, and the canopy is getting crowded. By cutting down those trees, the other trees will benefit because they'll get more sunlight."

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