

# Children's museum has plans to beautify unsightly underpasses

By Bill Zlatos

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Visitors from Downtown to the North Side must now pass through a dark maze of cold, concrete underpasses. But the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh will soon inject it with a bit of brightness.

The museum is working with Norfolk & Southern Railroad and other groups to convert the railroad's underpass on Federal Street near the post office into an outdoor art gallery. Work will start this fall and be finished in about a year.

"The underpasses have long been a blighted barrier between the neighborhoods of the North Side and the amenities of the North Shore," said Mark Fatla, executive director of the Northside Leadership Conference.

The conference is working with the Urban Redevelopment Authority on another project to improve underpasses on Anderson and Sandusky streets. That involves new sidewalks, curbs and crosswalks.

The gallery project involves cleaning and painting the Federal Street underpass, and installing lights and a metal mesh where works of art can be hung. The new color of the bridge and its columns has not been determined.

"These railroad bridges and underpasses kind of contribute to that sense of inaccessibility and remoteness," said Christopher Seifert, deputy director of the Children's Museum. "The idea is to celebrate that entry, celebrate the bridges. We'll use art to enhance the neighborhood spirit."

The underpass gallery is part of the Charm Bracelet Project, which has encouraged two dozen North Side groups to work together. Among the Charm's activities is free kayaking lessons on Lake Elizabeth with Venture Outdoors.

The cost of the gallery is estimated at \$300,000. The main contributors are The Heinz Endowments, NRG Energy Co., the Grable Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"We imagine an individual artist with a regional or national reputation could do a one-person show," Seifert said. "We could have a curated show from a half dozen artists or art from kids."

Representatives from North Side groups will curate and coordinate the gallery project.

Fatla said some North Side residents hope that the underpass projects will draw visitors to their neighborhoods.

"I don't think it will bring tons of customers to the near-North Shore neighborhoods," he said. Rather, he continued, "If you buy a house here, you have a lovely pleasant walk to the ballpark, the riverfront trail or Downtown. It improves the value of living here."