

**VISIT JOLIET
STAY FOR TEN TO TWENTY....**
the Old
**Joliet
PRISON**
Just Five Miles North of Here ... Get Locked Up!

**JOLIET ONCE SHUNNED
THE TAG 'PRISON TOWN'
BUT NEW TOURISM
PLANS SHOW TIMES
HAVE CHANGED**

**City embraces
its prison past**

By Bob Okon
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JOLIET — Travelers and locals will learn more about the history of the Joliet Prison when a tourist stop opens this summer. But they won't necessarily learn about the famous inmates.

"We're embracing history. We're embracing architecture. We're embracing the movie aspect. We're not embracing crime," said Rebecca Lantka, marketing director for the Joliet Visitors Bureau.

The bureau is walking a line in creating a tourist attraction that will tell the story of the now closed Joliet Prison on Collins Street without celebrating infamous criminals who spent time there.

They have not taken a stuffed-shirt approach, however.

"Visit Joliet. Stay for 10 to 20." That line is slated for one of the signs to go just outside the tourist stop being carved out of a parking lot next to the prison. Some construction started last week, and the project is scheduled to be done in July.

Another larger entry sign will be decorated with barbed wire and grab attention so as to "give everybody a heads-up that this is a tourist attraction. They should come and check it out," Lantka said.

The tourist stop will include: kiosks telling the story of the prison, including its role in films and TV; benches for people to stay for a while; and a landscaped setting where visitors might want to get their picture taken with the high, limestone walls in the background.

Inside

■ Will you visit the new attraction? Page A8 or vote online at www.heraldnews.com.

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PRISON

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The idea behind the spot being carved out of a parking lot next to the prison is that travelers have an interest in the place. But right now there's really no spot to stop and check out the prison without worrying that someone will chase you away.

The visitors bureau is aiming at a date sometime in July for an "incarceration celebration" that will to some extent take pleasure in Joliet's past as a "prison town" — a label that local civic leaders once shunned as they worked to reshape Joliet's image.

Maybe the image has been reshaped — or at least broadened enough that the city doesn't feel compelled to hide its prison past.

"It's amazing how famous our prison is," Lantka said, noting the phone calls she gets from travelers who want to see it. "It's time that we start claiming it as our prison."

The prison itself still is owned by the state and closed to the public.

But the city of Joliet has a partnership agreement with a private developer who has a plan to buy the prison and convert it to a mixed use of museum, stores and condos.

"We see a lot of potential in the prison," Lantka said.

So does the Illinois Bureau of Tourism, which is co-funding the prison stop.

The Joliet Prison "is very unique," said Jan Kostner, direc-

Limestone directory to feature old prison

By Bob Okon

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JOLIET — The old Joliet Prison is one of 55 structures to appear in a future directory to limestone architecture in the city.

The city is just beginning a process of listing 55 limestone structures, including even the Illinois & Michigan Canal wall, as a thematic district for the National Register of Historic Places.

Only one of the structures individually will be placed on the National Register, said Barb Newberg, a city planner who also serves as the city liaison to the Joliet Historic Preservation Commission. But establishing the thematic district will allow owners of other buildings to more easily place them in the National Register if they choose, she said.

Meanwhile, the survey also will lead to what may be the first thorough listing of limestone structures in Joliet.

"We need to develop an inventory of our significant lime-

stone structures for future posterity," Newberg said. "We want people to see these online, know what the buildings are made of and learn about the architects."

Many other buildings

A printed copy of the survey should be completed by the end of the year and be available at the Joliet Public Library, Newberg said. But the city also hopes to develop a Web version of the survey.

Limestone buildings such as the Joliet Prison and Joliet Central High School are well recognized in the city. But Newberg said there are many other buildings, like the Wagner House built in 1850 on North Hickory Street, that will be noted in the survey.

Joliet is conducting the survey after being selected by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for a 2009 Certified Local Government Grant of \$2,800 to fund 70 percent of the cost of the survey.

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tor of the state tourism bureau. Movies and the TV series "Prison Break" that have been filmed there have created interest in the place, Kostner said.

Plus, "it's hard to say, but it is

a beautiful structure," she said. "It's formidable. They don't build prisons like that anymore."

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