

[back to article](#)



Printed on page B1

[FSC'S FLETCHER THEATRE]

Another Frank Lloyd Wright Creation Being Renovated

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Next up on the restoration of Frank Lloyd Wright structures at Florida Southern College: the only theater-in-the-round the famed architect ever built.

The school announced last week it has received a \$50,000 grant from the Bureau of Historic Preservation in the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources. The money will be used to repair and restore the Fletcher Theatre, a circular amphitheater in the Lucius Pond Ordway Building.

There is a catch. The grant will have to be matched by other contributions before the school can receive the funds. But Lee Mayhall, vice president for college relations at FSC, said the school is proceeding with plans to begin the restoration work and expects it to be completed by June 30.

The grant was part of the Bureau of Historic Preservation's Small Matching Grants program, Mayhall said, and she expressed confidence the school would find a match for the funds, which would bring the total available for the project to \$100,000.

"We are committed to raising the money," she said.

The Fletcher Theatre was completed in 1952, and Mayhall said it is apparently the only theater-in-the-round Wright designed that was actually built. Originally used for performances and lectures, it has more recently been used for theater classes, student-directed performances and student organization events.

The project will address several problems in the theater, Mayhall said. Among them:

The roof will be repaired.

Paint peeling because of moisture will be sanded away, leaving the original concrete "textile" block.

Carpet will be removed and the floor will be returned to its original "Cherokee red," the signature color Wright used in his design of several buildings at the school.

In addition, Mayhall said, high clerestory windows that encircle the room will be replaced. Originally clear to allow natural light into the theater, they were replaced in the late 1980s with opaque material to help with energy efficiency. Improvements in technology will allow clear windows to be used while maintaining energy efficiency, she said.

In a statement, FSC President Anne B. Kerr said, "We are excited to begin the restoration of this wonderful and unique theater, which Mr. Wright identified as one of his favorites at Florida Southern."

The project is part of the school's ongoing attempts to preserve its collection of 12 Wright buildings. It will be overseen by architect Jeff Baker of Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects of Albany, N.Y., who specializes in historic restoration and has directed several projects at Florida Southern already, including the Water Dome fountain.

According to information provided by the school, the Bureau of Historic Preservation has awarded more than \$2.1 million to FSC for restoration projects, including \$300,000 in 2005 for the Annie Pfeiffer Chapel and \$350,000 in 2006 for the Water Dome.

In December, the school received a \$350,000 grant from the federal Save America's Treasures program, also designated for work on the chapel. It was the only grant given in the state of Florida for 2008 and one of just 40 nationwide.

The FSC collection will also be included in a major exhibition devoted to Wright's work at the Guggenheim Museum in New York beginning in May.

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The Ledger/Pierre DuCharme
Augustine Campos, with Henkelman Construction, Inc., sands off old paint from a window frame in the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Fletcher Theatre on the campus of Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida February 16, 2009.

Panorama, can be read at religion.theledger.com.]

This story appeared in print on page B1
