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Firm to create event center at working farm

By **Brian Pedersen**, April 14, 2016 at 11:51 AM



PHOTO/CONTRIBUTED/ The interior of the barn at Bell Gate Farm in Lower Milford Township provides for the context of the intended interior design of the facility that SAGE Design-Build will create. The adaptive reuse of the space will include a commercial kitchen and restroom facilities housed in a small addition, an exterior deck for outdoor gatherings and infrastructure systems improvements, including energy-savings features.

A local construction firm will transform a 268-acre working farm into a new reception venue for the Lehigh Valley.

SAGE Design-Inc. of Upper Macungie Township is the construction manager hired by Stephanie Stevens, owner of Bell Gate Farm in Lower Milford Township. Stevens said the barn will open its newly renovated space for events in the fall; its first wedding is booked for Oct. 15.

The firm will renovate the barn into an event center for hosting a variety of activities, including weddings, proms and holiday work parties at a site that dates to the 1780s.

The project is in the permitting stage with the township and in code review, said Joe Landrigan, president of SAGE Design-Build. He said construction should start May 1 and be finished by Sept. 1.

The bulk of the work focuses on renovating the barn into an event space, while keeping the farm active. Architect for the project is David Hornung Architect Planner Inc. of Allentown.

SAGE will create a small addition to the barn while maintaining the character of the structure, Landrigan said.

“It’s really a beautiful space ...,” Landrigan said, particularly for those looking for a country theme for their event on a working farm. “We are putting in a full commercial kitchen and complete infrastructure upgrade, utility services, adding energy efficiencies.”

The firm will install an exterior deck and add new finishes to support the look of the barn, Landrigan said.

“The renovation will be authentic to the original character of the barn and maintain the rich wood finishes inside,” he said.

Once the renovations are complete, the barn can comfortably accommodate about 200 seated guests, Stevens said. The firm will create a downstairs room called the “prohibition room,” a 1920s-style speakeasy, she said.

The firm’s work on an adaptive reuse project that transformed a church into fresh office space for Werner & Co. in Lower Macungie Township helped it acquire this project.

Stevens, who lives at the Great House at Bell Gate Farm, said she inherited the property two years ago from her parents and always remembered it as a space where people gathered.

Having grown up on the property, she decided to maintain the authenticity of the working farm and embark on a mission to create an opportunity for the community to enjoy the property, with potential offerings such as outdoor movie nights and classes for yoga and cooking.

Bob Gehman, a farmer who operates a dairy farm, still uses the site, she said.

“My hope is to save this house and save a farmer’s livelihood and the spaces around it,” Stevens said. “There is a huge philanthropic mission to what I want to do, in addition to generating enough income to operate this property.”

She recently moved back to her childhood home from New York City and is allying with a catering company to create an event and catering business. Stevens previously worked as a producer of marketing plans for companies that include American Express, Virgin Mobile and Johnson & Johnson.

“When I looked at what I have here, I thought it just makes sense organically to turn Bell Gate into a place people can enjoy,” Stevens said. “I’m philanthropic, but at the end of the day we need to make money to be philanthropic. It’s incredibly important to the future of this land.”

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