

BLUES HALL OF FAME Opens Doors in 2015

The Blues Hall of Fame is the former site of The Blues Foundation headquarters in the South Main Historic Arts District Photo by Lance Murphey/ Memphis Daily News

By Tim Parsons

Memphis had a baby in 2015 and it's called the Blues Hall of Fame.

While the institution honoring blues greats has been in place for several years, a brick-and-mortar building was finally set to open May 8, 2015 in the city's South Main Historic Arts District.

Established music sites include the Memphis Rock 'N' Soul Museum, Stax Museum of American Soul, Sun Studio and Graceland. Now there is a place to visit exclusively for blues lovers.

"Memphis is the Orlando of music destinations," said The Blues Foundation's retiring president and CEO, Jay Sieleman. "Yes, [the Blues Hall of Fame] is one more, and the more the merrier."

Located near famed Beale Street, the Blues Hall of Fame is open daily. Admission is \$10.

The site previously was offices and open space. Now there is a multi-level building with exhibit halls, stores, offices and a reception area. Construction began in June 2014 and, at the *Blues Festival Guide's* press time, Sieleman was confident the building would be open by early May for a grand opening to coincide with the Blues Music Awards.

"It's always on schedule until it's not," he laughed.

Surviving inductees, their families, band members and collectors have donated and loaned memorabilia, artifacts and artwork for the displays. The concept is in line with the organization's Keeping the Blues Alive mantra and mission.

"It really serves a two-fold purpose," Sieleman said. "It gives these artists the respect they deserve, but perhaps even more important than that, it's a vehicle to educate tens of thousands of people a year for the foreseeable future about what blues music is."

Each inductee or a representative was invited to the grand opening. The 2015 inductees are Tommy Brown, Eric Clapton and Little Richard.

Blues songs often are about some kind of conflict and the same is true for the Blues Hall of Fame.

"There has been some criticism about this endeavor as a building of bricks and mortar being about dead people, and I think that really misses the point," Sieleman said. "Everyone else does this. It's not like we came up with the idea for this. Every endeavor has a hall of fame." What surely must be The Blues Foundation's greatest achievement in Sieleman's tenure as president is the result of people's love of the music.

"Fans all across the country have made this all possible," Sieleman said. "That's why we have blues societies. It's fans banding together to make things happen." 🎵



Renovations to a building which will house the Blues Hall of Fame began in June 2014. Photo by Lance Murphey/ Memphis Daily News