

## CANADIAN MUSEUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

# Museum in its final planning stages

By WILL CHABUN  
Leader-Post

It was back in the spring of 2000, with another group of Canadian students back home after a trip to Washington under the sponsorship of the Asper Foundation — to see things like the Declaration of Independence and memorials to civil rights, the Holocaust, labour rights and human freedoms — that a question was raised.

Could a comparable student trip be done to Ottawa?

An inventory of historical resources in Canada's capital was done and found lacking — and that's what got Winnipeg businessman Izzy Asper, who'd created the foundation and had asked that question, to start thinking about this matter.

"Dad said, 'We really should create a Canadian trip,'" recalled Izzy's daughter, Gail Asper.

"It never, never occurred to me that one can change that. But he said, 'We're going to hold this here; we've going to do this.'"

Izzy quickly set to work, among other things chatting up the federal government — and soon there appeared the concept of a Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Fast forward to Wednesday: Izzy has died, but the museum has been designed, land found for it in the historic area of Winnipeg called The Forks and donations lined up from the Winnipeg, Manitoba and federal governments (which also agreed in 2007 to operate and fund the museum once it's built).

Construction work started last

“Most of all, we want them to be transformed to take action on human rights.”

— Gail Asper,  
Museum for  
Human Rights

autumn, fundraising is in its final stages, and there's even a tentative opening date: 2012, said Gail, who was in Regina Wednesday to meet with prospective donors so as to provide a financial "cushion" for unanticipated costs and to finance future student trips.

She also wants to "talk up" two new things: the start (next week in Saskatoon) of community consultations on what should be in the museum — and how it might become part of an integrated tourism strategy for Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

And as for the museum herself, Gail and the museum's new CEO, Moose Jaw-raised Patrick O'Reilly, gave a peek at what the experience will be like: an initial walk along its ramps into a kind of darkness, then a



DON HEALY/Leader-Post

Gail Asper, president of the Asper Foundation, was in Regina on Wednesday to seek contributions for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg.

gradual ascent amid glass walls and windows, displays and artifacts, toward a shaft of light, symbolizing mankind's hope for a better, more humane future.

From there, visitors will be able to take an elevator down to what's tentatively called "the garden of contemplation," a comfortable gather-

ing space with rocks, water and benches, where they're able to think about what they've seen and, hopefully, learned.

"Most of all, we want them to be transformed, to take action on human rights, no matter how small," said Gail.

There are the big human rights

issues, of course, but also small-scale things like treating neighbours friends and co-workers with dignity and decency.

"The idea," she said, "is to kind of inspire some action."

The website of the museum is <http://www.canadianmuseumforhumanrights.com/>