

D.C.'s old courthouse set for makeover

District's highest court will be in one of city's oldest buildings

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Lush green grass and a row of immense columns make for a grand entrance at one of Washington's oldest judicial buildings.

From a distance the scene is breathtaking, but years of neglect have caused the city's old courthouse to crack and crumble.

But that soon will change as renovations begin today to transform the dilapidated structure into a new home for the city's highest court — Washington's Court of Appeals.

"To see the highest court of this jurisdiction return to this magnificent edifice gives a sense of the enduring quality and permanence of our system of justice and government in America," said Chief Judge Annice M. Wagner, who oversees the Appeals Court.

The weathered building is the centerpiece of Judiciary Square, which was designated a public

space by Pierre L'Enfant, who designed the layout of the city in 1791.

In 1820 construction began on the old courthouse, which initially served as Washington's city hall. The building eventually began functioning solely as a courthouse in the mid-1800s.

A rich history unfolded inside the old courthouse, where famous early Americans such as Francis Scott Key and Daniel Webster practiced law. Noteworthy cases argued in the historic courtrooms included the trial of John Surratt, accused conspirator in the assassination of President Lincoln, and the trial of Charles Guiteau, who was convicted of killing President James Garfield. The statue of Lincoln outside the courthouse was the first public monument to the late president.

"One of the unique things about this building is that it was built and evolved through quite a long period of time, starting from 1820 to 1919," said Hany Hassan, architect with the firm Beyer Blinder and Belle, which designed the renovations. When it's finished, Hassan said, the historic building will be reoriented as the heart of Judiciary Square.

The project is slated for completion in December 2007 at an estimated cost of \$85 million.

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Washington's old courthouse, located in Judiciary Square, is slated for an \$85 million renovation project, which is scheduled to be completed in December of 2007.



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A SPRING BREAK: Kent Fescenmeyer, left, a retired U.S. Air Force employee, soaks up some sun and reads in the afternoon heat on Monday at Gravelly Point Park in Arlington.

Commuter report

In Howard County, the new section of Route 216 between I-95 and Route 29 should open this week. This section is another link in the network which connects the parallel arteries: Route 29, I-95 and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway/MD 295 in order to provide alternate routes for drivers between Washington and Baltimore.

Route 216 will be a divided highway but it will also have intersections at Crest Road and Leishear Road.

Bay Bridge

Even with the barrier walls removed from the westbound span work is likely to continue Monday through Thursday closing a single lane from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and overnight closing multiple lanes beginning at 8 p.m. or the entire span after 10 p.m.

Night work

On the Beltway at the Maryland end of the Wilson Bridge between Route 210 and I-295, expect two lanes to close for overhead bridge work from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On I-395 northbound between Glebe Road and the 14th Street Bridge, milling and paving will



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close the two left lanes from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. Look for uneven pavement in different places as the work progresses.

On the Beltway in Virginia, between Braddock Road and Tysons Corner, overhead sign inspection will close two lanes from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On I-95 northbound in Spotsylvania County, north of Exit 126 milling and paving will close one lane at 8 p.m. and two lanes from 10 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. through Thursday.

On I-95 northbound in Stafford County south of Exit 148 one lane will be closed tonight from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m.

Midday

On I-95 northbound before Newington/Fort Belvoir, expect the right lane to be closed from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

On I-95 southbound near Newington/Fort Belvoir, expect the right lane to be closed at mile marker 165 from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

In the HOV lanes on I-95 between Lorton and Dumfries, one lane will be closed at several locations for pavement work through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.