

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Seton Castle: An academy rises from the ruins

Educational complex near Seton Castle to open next year

[Tom Sharpe The New Mexican](#)

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Tom Sharpe Early next year, modern, energy-efficient buildings should be ready for occupancy just down the hill from the ruins of the Ernest Thompson Seton "castle" south of Santa Fe.

"This could not have been better planned," David Witt, of the nonprofit developing the educational complex, told 50 people attending a Saturday open house. "But it's all coincidence."

Seton, a wildlife illustrator, writer and founder of several youth groups, including the Woodcraft Indians, was born in England in 1860, grew up in Ontario, Canada, and began his transformation into a naturalist when he came to northeastern New Mexico in the 1890s to hunt wolves.

"He killed five of them, but when he got to wolf number six, he couldn't bring himself to kill it," said Witt, guest curator of the exhibit on Seton now on display at the state History Museum in downtown Santa Fe.

"He had come on behalf of ranchers to kill wolves that had been eating their cattle, and after three months in New Mexico, he changed teams. ... He would go on to become one of the founders of wildlife conservation, including being probably the very first person in the country who became an advocate for predators."

By 1929, Seton had made enough money as a writer and illustrator in New York City that he was able to purchase 2,500 acres seven miles south of Santa Fe. He began building several structures, including his eclectic, three-story castle atop a hill. He sold off part of the land for several housing developments, including Timberwick and Seton Village.

After Seton's death in 1946 at age 86, his adopted daughter, Dee Barber, and her family lived in the castle until 2003, when she sold the remaining 86 acres to the Academy for the Love of Learning. Barber died in Tennessee a few years ago.

The education-oriented nonprofit began renovating the old structure, but on Nov. 15, 2005, a fire swept through, leaving little but the first floor of the rock and pen-tile walls.

Academy officials decided to leave the castle ruins as a "contemplative garden," while launching the construction of more than 23,000 square feet of new buildings — designed by Beverley Spears Architects in a blend of modern and Pueblo Revival styles.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED-certified, project has geothermal wells for heating and cooling, solar panels for hot water, photovoltaic panels for electricity, rainwater harvesting, and gray- and black-water recycling systems for irrigation of the "learning landscape."

The building won't be occupied until next March to allow for a "flush-out period" during which odors and chemicals from the construction process are allowed to dissipate — a requirement of LEED certification. After that, the academy will begin to hold classes in the main building. Smaller buildings include a ceramics studio, a caretaker residence and housing for visiting teachers.

The academy, funded by the McCune Foundation of Santa Fe, among others, focuses on leadership training and "teacher renewal" — to stem the high burnout rate among educators.

More tours of the site are planned Nov. 17 and Dec. 8. For more information, call the academy office at 995-1860 or visit the website www.aloveoflearning.org.

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