

Organizers say recent renovations at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History have one goal: To make people look at the local museum as not only a place to revisit history, but a great shopping destination as well.

Museum Director Matt Edwards said much of the summer was spent renovating the shop with the help of Andrew Pearson Design and Interlam, who worked to provide products and services to renovate the space.

For Edwards, it is about perception. "This renovation is part of a plan to make the museum more welcoming and inviting, and to really make the retail component of the museum a more vital part of the downtown business district," he said. "People sometimes forget that while we're a museum, we also have a store here that's home to a great many products and resources."

Edwards said the renovations also allowed him to expand on the store's offerings. "We wanted to be able to revamp the space and increase both the quality and quantity available through the shop," he said.

In the near future, shoppers will even be able to purchase locally-made artwork. "We've been working with a number of local artisans to bring more local artwork into the space, which not only allows shoppers to pick up one-of-a-kind artwork, but gives the artists another venue to market their work," he said.

In addition, Edwards said the renovations have allowed him to expand the book and music offerings "pretty substantially."

Shoppers can even purchase hard-to-find recordings at the store. "To my knowledge, we're the only outlet in town that's carrying the Old Blue Records label, which offers a wide variety of old-time and bluegrass music, much of it recorded in this area," he said. "We have a pretty expansive catalog here in the store."

With the holidays on the horizon, Edwards said it's time to get the word out. "For us, this is a way, particularly moving into the holidays, for people to support the museum in a little different way," he said. "People may not think about coming to a museum to shop for the holidays, but we want people to recognize that our retail store is a place they can come for unique, quality products they may not be able to get elsewhere in the community."

Visitors to the museum may notice "a change or two," Edwards said with a sly grin. "People will see a completely different space," he said. "If you've been here in the past and look at the new shop, it's been completely renovated. It's much more open compared to the traditional space that was there before."

"The size increased a little bit, but the big change was in dealing with the layout and flow for shoppers," Edwards added. "We may have added 100 square feet, but it feels much, much bigger and it flows much better for the visitor and shopper." Edwards said the retail store now stocks around 600 different items.

"And we're still in the process of expanding those offerings, and will be bringing in more merchandise as we move forward next year," he said.