

# 3 Rivers Historian

Summer 1999

*A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum*

V. 2, No. 3

## Groundbreaking Ceremony Planned

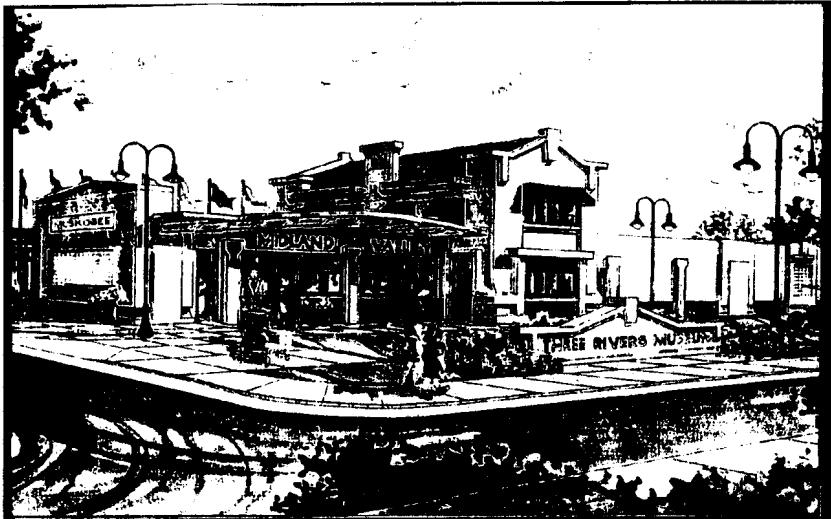
**T**HE THREE RIVERS MUSEUM will hold a groundbreaking ceremony to launch the renovations of the Midland Valley Depot on Monday, September 13 at 11:00 a.m. The ceremony will take place at the depot site at 3rd and Elgin Streets in Muskogee.

Muskogee Mayor Jim Bushnell along with other city officials and local dignitaries will be invited to take part in the groundbreaking which is open to the public. All Three Rivers Museum members are also invited to attend this event. Fifteen years of dedication, determination and hard work have finally brought the museum and its supporters to this momentous occasion.

In addition to launching the renovations to the depot, the ceremony will include the burial of the city of Muskogee's centennial time capsule at the depot site. Dr. Frank Borovetz has overseen this project and will take part in the burial ceremony. When the capsule is unearthed in the future, its contents will become a part of the museum's collection.

The Midland Valley Depot was chosen as a possible museum site in 1987. It was purchased by the city of Muskogee for the purpose of housing the regional museum dedicated to preserving and displaying the history of the Three Rivers area of Oklahoma. Grant monies from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation will be used for the renovation of the depot.

Architect Mike Martin of Spaces, Designs and Architecture was chosen by the city of Muskogee to develop plans for the depot renovation. These plans were submitted to the rigorous requirements of the State



*An architectural rendering of the completed renovations to the Midland Valley Depot*

Historic Preservation Office to ensure that the building remained as historically accurate to its original design and purpose as possible.

Currently the renovation project is completing a bid process as required by the city of Muskogee for any of its improvement projects. The close of bidding will occur on August 19 and the sealed bids will be opened shortly thereafter.

Once the construction contract has been awarded, the work will begin to restore the Midland Valley Depot to its original state. The architect anticipates that the construction phase will take about six to nine months to complete. (See page 7 for details on the floor plans of the museum.)

The museum's exhibit development

*continued on page 4*

### Inside:

**2** Museum hosts Business After Hours

**3** History of the Depot

**4** The Chairman's Letter

**5** Developing the Museum's Exhibits

**7** Museum Floor Plan

**8** Three Rivers People

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Museum  
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Dub West

\*Indicates Current  
Board Member

# Museum to Co-Host Business After Hours



# T

HE THREE RIVERS MUSEUM will co-host a Muskogee Chamber of Commerce "Business After Hours" on Thursday, August 19 from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. The museum will join Bank of Oklahoma and First National Bank in hosting the chamber event in the Severs Building main lobby in downtown Muskogee.

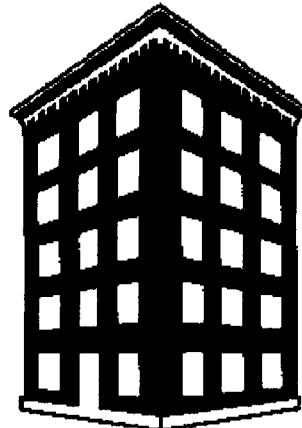
This monthly gathering gives businesses in the area the opportunity to network in a casual "drop in" setting. A chamber member hosts the event each month.

The museum has made arrangements with the Chamber of Commerce to waive the usual \$5 cost for all museum members. If you are a museum member, please join us at the Business After Hours. Door prizes will be given away and refreshments will be served.

The museum will have a table set up in the building lobby to sign up new members. Anyone joining the museum at the Business After Hours event will receive a free museum tee shirt!

Three Rivers Museum chairman, Roger Bell, will present plaques to corporate, sponsor and small business members of the museum. We currently have five small business members and six sponsor members. Bank of Oklahoma plans to become our first corporate member and CEO Mike Leonard will present the Three Rivers Museum with its \$500 check at the Business After Hours.

The museum is actively seeking other corporate members to join us now as we prepare to furnish our museum office, confer-



ence room, kitchenette, gift shop and exhibit halls.

The museum will have the architect's rendering (shown in page 1 of this newsletter) and floor plan design for the renovation of the Midland Valley Depot on display at the Business After Hours.

This will be the first and best opportunity for Muskogee's business community to get acquainted with the Three Rivers Museum and what it will contribute to the quality of life for this region, a factor that is so important in attracting new business and industry. We hope many of these businesses will want to join us in building for our future while preserving our past. □

**Three Rivers Historian**

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P.O. Box 1813

Muskogee, OK 74402

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[www.3riversmuseum.muskogee.ok.us](http://www.3riversmuseum.muskogee.ok.us)

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# Midland Valley Depot Has Rich History of its Own

by Roger A. Bell

**T**ODAY AT 3rd and Elgin Streets in Muskogee stands an almost forgotten building. Once it was alive with activity and voices echoed off its walls. Now it sits silent as a vacant, decaying shell. But soon this tired old structure will be transformed into the Three Rivers Museum to showcase the history of the surrounding region. Before its renovation begins, let's look back at this building's rich history.

The origins of the depot can be traced to 1903 when a group of Philadelphia investors headed by C.E. Ingersoll formed the Midland Valley Railway Company. The railroad's purpose was to haul coal from mines owned by the investors in Western Arkansas and Indian Territory. By April of 1904 the railway reached Muskogee where it connected with the KATY Railroad (M, K & T).

A "Celebration Day" was held in Muskogee on May 18, 1904, to welcome the arrival of the Midland Valley Railroad into the city. Almost all of Muskogee turned out to celebrate the arrival of the rail and the expected economic impact on the community. Muskogee was then designated the official headquarters for the Midland Valley.

Plans were quickly developed for the construction of a depot in Muskogee. Property was purchased between 2nd and 3rd Streets on Elgin from a Wiley Jones for the depot site. Construction on the facility began almost immediately on a two-story wooden structure.

In July of 1904, the first Midland Valley depot in Muskogee was completed. The building was used as a passenger station and as the headquarters building for the railroad.

During this time, the rail line was extended into Tulsa which later proved to be vital for the railroad with the coming oil explosion. Soon the railway began using the slogan



*An early photo of the first Midland Valley Depot shortly after it was built in 1904.*

"Arkansas River Route" because of its general alignment with the course of the Arkansas River. Although the railway was built to be a coal hauler, the discovery of the Glen Pool oil field created a boom in traffic on the Midland Valley as well as substantial growth in passenger travel.

In 1916, the related Midland Valley shops in Muskogee were destroyed by fire. Afterwards, the City of Tulsa began to lobby for moving the shop and offices of the Midland Valley. Muskogee citizens headed by the Muskogee Commercial Club donated approximately \$50,000 to ensure that a new shop facility would be constructed in Muskogee. Soon after this, plans for a new, modern facility in Muskogee were developed.

The wooden depot met its end on July 24, 1916. On this day, a wrecking crew headed H.W. Tennyson began the task of tearing down the depot in preparation for its replacement with a modern brick and stone structure. The wood from the building was purchased by J.C. Welch and

**"Muskogee was designated the official headquarters for the Midland Valley Railroad in 1904."**

*continued on page 5*

# Our Mission

*The Three Rivers Museum has been established to tell the complete story of the founding, settlement and development of the Three Rivers area of Oklahoma. The museum will actively seek to collect, preserve, research, exhibit and interpret a collection of historic artifacts. We will serve the visitors and residents of the area through these efforts as well as through educational programs and special events. The Three Rivers Museum hopes its work will establish a respect for the region's past and will contribute quality and value to its future.*

Dear Friends of Three Rivers Museum,

This is truly an exciting time for our organization. After years of hard work and perseverance, the depot property has been purchased and renovations to the building will begin in the coming months. The challenge of obtaining and renovating the former Midland Valley Depot in Muskogee into the Three Rivers Museum is now in its final phases.

Now the real challenge for our organization is about to begin. We must work diligently to create the museum that will be housed in the renovated depot property. Planning is already underway for our first exhibits. There is much to be done, however, to achieve our ultimate goal of creating a first-class museum in this facility.

Your support is needed to help us in achieving this goal. There are many ways that you can help our efforts. We will need many volunteers in all phases of the museum's development. Many more artifacts relating to the area's history must be obtained. Continuing membership development will be vital to our success. We also are in need of monetary support to provide the equipment and fixtures that will be needed in the museum.

Muskogee and the surrounding area have a unique and exciting history in which we should be proud. As our mission statement says, our goal is to "work to establish a respect for the region's past and to contribute quality and value to its future." With your support, we know we will make this a reality.

Sincerely,



Roger Bell, Chairman

## Groundbreaking Ceremony cont.

committee, headed by collections manager, Linda Moore, is already planning and designing the first exhibits that will occupy the museum at the time of its grand opening which should take place in late fall of 2000.

Though the museum has already amassed quite a collection of artifacts, the museum development committee is actively seeking further donations pertaining to the history of the Three Rivers region of northeastern Oklahoma. The museum wants to represent not

just Muskogee, but also all the cities and towns in this eight-county region. "We want to tell the story of all the different cultures that are a part of the rich history of this area," says museum chairman Roger Bell.

The Three Rivers Museum will be a source of pride for residents of this area and will draw visitors from across the nation. We are breaking ground on a great venture that will remember the past and carry us into the future. □

# Depot History cont.

Sources for Midland Valley Depot History

was used to build bungalows in Muskogee.

Evidence has recently surfaced which indicates that Louis Curtiss of Kansas City was the architect for the present depot building. Curtiss has been credited with the design of the Midland Valley Depot in Tulsa (now destroyed) which was almost identical to the Muskogee Depot. He was also the designer for Joplin's Missouri Union Terminal, which has several of the same keystone design elements.

Louis Curtiss has been described as "Kansas City's most innovative architect." His work included over 200 structures, but only about 35 still stand. These include the Boley Building in Kansas City, the Union Railroad Terminal in Wichita, and the Tarrant County Courthouse in Fort Worth.

On July 27, 1916, the Midland Valley Railway Company contracted with the Manhattan Construction Company of Muskogee to build the new depot facility at a cost of not less than \$25,000. L.H. Rooney of the Manhattan Construction Company oversaw the project. Particular attention was given to the interior of the building which was to be furnished on an elaborate scale.

The building was designed for separate waiting rooms, a ticket office, a private waiting room for ladies, lavatories, and a news depot. The grounds around the depot were to be made into parks with the intention of the area becoming one of the beauty spots of Muskogee.

An office building was later constructed to the west of the depot which housed the offices of the railroad. Several hundred accounting and clerical workers were employed in this facility which still stands on the west side of 3rd and Elgin today.

It is hard for people today to realize the importance of Midland Valley passenger service during the boom days. Passenger traffic to and from Muskogee grew from six trains a day in the early days to eight in January 1913 and to ten in 1926.

The peak of passenger business was in

1920. During that year, eight trains carried 9,000 passengers per day to Tulsa. During 1920, the Midland Valley carried a total of one and a half million passengers. Of this number, it's estimated that about half arrived, departed or passed through Muskogee.

Freight traffic was also heavy on the Midland Valley. Twelve or more trains per day on average arrived or departed from Muskogee between 1908 and 1930.

The use of the automobile and the Depression had a disastrous effect on the Midland Valley Railroad and passenger service was discontinued in October of 1934. This left only the caboose on the freight trains for the few hardy souls who wanted to ride the "Arkansas River Route." Muskogee's depot soon was used solely for freight activity.

Though passenger service was eliminated, the Midland Valley remained an important part of Muskogee's economy. The railroad merged with the Kansas, Oklahoma & Gulf and the Oklahoma City, Ada & Atoka to form what then president Bob Lomax called "the hometown roads" because of its operations being based in Muskogee.

In 1964, the Midland Valley Railroad ceased operations and was sold to the Missouri Pacific Railroad. At this time the Muskogee offices and shops were closed and by 1968 the Midland Valley name ceased to exist.

In recent years the depot has been used mainly for commercial storage until its purchase by the City of Muskogee in 1998. Now it will be renovated to house the Three Rivers Museum. Soon the sound of visitors will once again echo off its walls. □



*At its busiest time in 1920, the passenger depot saw eight arrivals and departures daily*

- ◆ *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, various
- ◆ *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, various
- ◆ *Midland Valley: Rails for Coal, Cattle & Crude*, by Loyd E. Stagner, South Platte Press, David City, NE 1996
- ◆ *Stalking Louis Curtiss*, by Wilda Sandy and Larry Hancks, Ward Parkway Press, Kansas City, MO, 1991\*

## What Exhibits Would You Like to See?

Send us a e-mail or drop us a line by regular mail and let us know what exhibits you would like to see in the Three Rivers Museum. The address is:  
*3riversmuseum@muskogee.ok.us*  
or  
P.O. Box 1813  
Muskogee, OK 74402

# Developing a Museum Is an Exciting Challenge

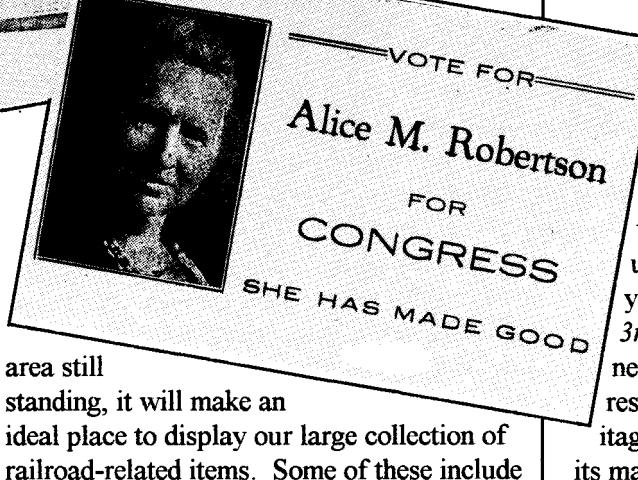
by Linda Moore

**A**T THE PRESENT TIME, over 7,000 artifacts are owned and on inventory by the Three Rivers Museum. Our extensive database lets us access information on any artifact from several different topics. The museum board had the foresight to develop a computerized system that puts the Three Rivers Museum well ahead of many other small museums.

It is the challenging yet exciting task of the Museum Development Committee to sort those artifacts into meaningful and interesting exhibits for the public to enjoy. Planning for this task is under way and the following topics are being developed for our inaugural exhibits when the museum opens next year. These exhibits include the following:

"Rails Across the Three Forks" is to be a history of the many railroad lines that crossed through the Muskogee area to make it a hub of commerce,

both before and after statehood. Because the Midland Valley Depot building, which will house the museum, is the only passenger depot in the



Artifacts such as this campaign card for Alice Robertson and a photo of Muskogee's Crystal Palace are among the many items that have been donated to the museum.

area still standing, it will make an ideal place to display our large collection of railroad-related items. Some of these include

lanterns, gauges, signs, timetables, an engine bell, baggage cart, depot waiting room bench, desk, and ticket stamp. We will also feature a scale model of the former Katy Depot that is being built by Jim Lemley who was featured in a previous issue of the "Three Rivers Historian."

"Builders of our Heritage," is a planned exhibit regarding the people who contributed to the beginnings of the communities in our area. It will focus on the early day pioneers, as well as some more recent ones, who impacted the area through business, professional pursuits and politics. The lives of these people are fascinating stories of accomplishment and may include names like Severs, Fite, Turner, Spaulding, Patterson, Owen, Robertson, and many others.

"Gone But Not Forgotten" is designed to spotlight the many landmarks, buildings, businesses, and items of daily life that no longer remain but are fondly remembered. Items to be displayed in this exhibit may range from photographs of buildings that made up the skyline of Muskogee and other area towns, to a butter churn, washboard, flat iron, transistor radio and platform shoes.

It will also include mementos of businesses that were gathering places for people to pass leisure time, such as drug stores, theaters, restaurants, parks and the Muskogee trolley ride to the amusements at Hyde Park in the early 1900's.

It may include a video of the implosion of the Barnes Building and a soda fountain from an earlier day. Many items could be included in this display that we have yet to acquire.

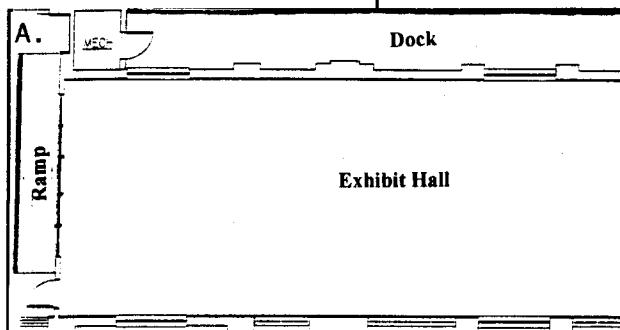
If you have something to contribute to the museum especially to any of these particular displays, please contact us. Our phone number is 686-6624 or you can e-mail us at *3riversmuseum@muskogee.ok.us*. We need more artifacts and input from area residents to fully represent the rich heritage of the entire Three Rivers region with its many different people and cultures. □

# Museum will Adapt to Depot Floorplan

**H**OW DO YOU turn an old passenger depot into a modern museum? It takes vision, ingenuity, creativity and a lot of hard work. As the floorplan diagrams below denote, the Three Rivers Museum board, with the help of architect Mike Martin, has developed a plan for adapting their space to the floorplan of the old depot.

The State Historic Preservation Office was insistent that the renovations to the old depot would remain true to the original design and purpose of the building. It was built to be a railroad depot and that is what it will look like when renovations are completed. The museum will fit its plans into that depot space.

Exhibit A shows the old freight area of the depot. This is a 100 x 30 foot space where freight was originally loaded onto the Midland Valley trains. This space will become

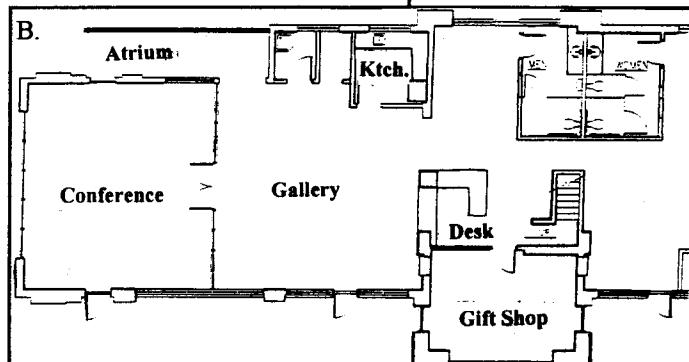


the main exhibit hall for the museum. Exhibit B shows the area where waiting rooms for the railroads passengers once stood. This area will be used for a conference center, more exhibit space and an information booth.

The restrooms for the museum will be in the same location as the depot's restrooms.

The old ticket booth will house the museum's gift shop. Along the back wall, the museum will use the space for a kitchenette.

Much attention has been paid to replicating the original fixtures of the old depot. Visitors



## THREE RIVERS MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP

You can be a part of history! Join the Three Rivers Museum today. Your annual membership fee entitles you to a membership card, subscription to the quarterly journal, free admission to the museum and a 10% discount on purchases in the museum gift shop.

Please complete this form and mail with your check made payable to the Three Rivers Museum.

Individual Membership \$25     Family Membership \$35     Business Membership \$100  
 Sponsor Membership \$250     Corporate Membership \$500

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Clip or copy and mail to: Three Rivers Museum  
P.O. Box 1813, Muskogee, OK 74402



## The Three Rivers Area

What makes up the Three Rivers Area? It is defined to include Muskogee County, all the counties that border Muskogee County as well as Southern Mayes and Western Sequoyah Counties. The Three Rivers Museum hopes to collect and preserve historical artifacts from this entire region.

# Contact Us

The Three Rivers Museum is always looking for historical artifacts pertinent to the Three Rivers area of Oklahoma.

A representative from our Museum Development Committee would be happy to meet with anyone who would like to make a donation of such artifacts.

Please call us at 686-6624 about making a donation to the Three Rivers Museum. Together we can preserve the past for future generations.

## *Editor's Note:*

The "Three Rivers Historian" needs your historical articles. If you have information on historical events, people or places in the Three Rivers area, please submit them to:

Three Rivers Historian,  
Attn: Managing Editor,  
P.O. Box 1813,  
Muskogee, OK  
74402.

Or you can send us an e-mail at  
[3riversmuseum@muskogee.ok.us](mailto:3riversmuseum@muskogee.ok.us)

# Three Rivers People

## Roger Bell Steers Museum Into Future

**E**ven great ideas can falter and fade without leaders to nurture them, guide them and steer them into the future. The Three Rivers Museum has been fortunate to have such leaders, first in Dorothy Ball its first chairman and now in its current chairman Roger Bell.

Roger stepped into the role as chairman of the museum's board of directors in October of 1994, less than two years after he had been invited to join the board. Mike Leonard had learned of Roger's interest in history when he moved back to the Muskogee area and began work at First National Bank. He suggested to Dorothy that she invite Roger to a museum meeting.

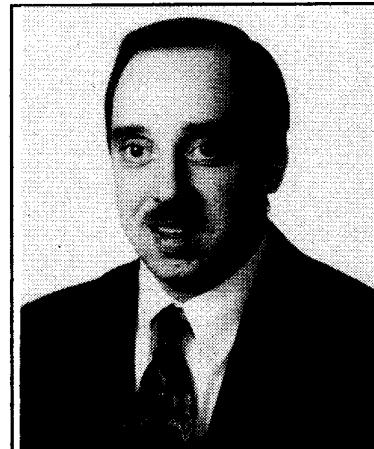
"I had always had an interest in history," Roger relates. "My dad took us to museums around the area and fostered that interest. Even as a kid I had a vision for a museum in Muskogee. I would collect souvenirs from the places we visited in Oklahoma. When I was in the fifth grade I set up a museum in my bedroom using all those souvenirs and I even charged admission!"

Now Roger is working with the museum board to make his vision as well as the vision

of Dorothy Ball and so many other individuals become a reality.

Longtime board member, Shirley Rogers has said, "It was Dorothy's dream to

make the Three Rivers Museum a first class operation and Roger is exactly the person to make that happen."



The most important goal for Roger is to create a museum that the whole Three Rivers area can be proud of. "I want us to educate residents and visitors on the rich history of the different cultures in this area which, until now, has been untold and unpreserved," Roger says. "There is much that the people of this area can be proud of." The Three Rivers Museum will be a museum that people want to come to as Roger steers it from its humble beginnings into an exciting future.

## Museum Wish List • • • •

The following items are some of the many things needed to furnish the Three Rivers Museum. If you would like to donate an item or money towards its purchase, please contact us. Donors will be recognized for their gifts within the various rooms of the museum.

### Dorothy Ball Memorial Meeting Room

- ◆ 4 folding tables
- ◆ speaker's podium
- ◆ TV/VCR with rolling stand
- ◆ slide projector
- ◆ framed pictures

### Kitchenette

- ◆ microwave
- ◆ refrigerator
- ◆ commercial coffee maker
- ◆ kitchen utensils

### Information Desk

- ◆ cash register
- ◆ telephone with answering machine
- ◆ closed circuit television monitor
- ◆ personal computer

### Entrance Gallery

- ◆ display cases