

# Whorton: 'A lot of red tape' stands in way of making prison a museum

By Geoff Dornan  
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Saying the old Nevada State Prison is "extremely closely tied to the history" of Carson City, former Director of Corrections Glen Whorton called on community leaders to help make converting the old prison into a museum a reality.

A prison museum could be a huge economic benefit to the capital as a tourist draw and a location for filming major motion pictures, Whorton told the crowd at Tuesday's Chamber of Commerce monthly business luncheon at the Gold Dust West Casino.

Whorton said the prison's history is rich, if somewhat checkered, and predates statehood by two years.

It was converted from city founder Abe Curry's Warm Springs Hotel in 1862 but burned down in 1867 and again in 1870. Officials then decided to build it from sandstone quarried right on the site.

That sandstone, Whorton said, also went into the state Capitol, old attorney general's office and Carson City Courthouse, among other buildings around town. That makes the quarry one of the nation's first prison industry programs, he said.

The old prison was shut down in 2012 because keeping it open got too expensive.

"That institution has been out there 150 years, and it has had a dramatic effect on our community," Whorton said.

With strong community support, he said, the old prison would become a major tourist draw like Alcatraz is in San Francisco. He is the leader of the Nevada State Prison Preservation Society, which was formed to make the museum project a reality.

Whorton said a prison museum would combine well with the V&T Railroad, state museum and proximity of Reno and Lake Tahoe and would provide moviemakers with an ideal set for prison movies.

To flesh out the museum, he said, there are lots of artifacts from the prison's history at the state museum and in the homes of people who worked there.

In addition, there are the archaeological finds on the prison grounds, including prehistoric bones and mammoth footprints in the once-soft sandstone.

The prison's history includes the great escape of 1871, in which 29 dangerous felons got out after wounding warden and Lt. Gov. Frank Denver. Six people died before the escapees were brought to justice.

In what Whorton termed a severe lapse of common sense, the warden took three inmates serving life sentences to Reno on a Saturday night in 1928. One of them, Leonard Fristoe, fled. He said Fristoe was not recaptured and returned to the prison for more than 40 years — in 1969 — but that he didn't stay long.

"He was pardoned in 1970," Whorton said. "It was not a unanimous vote."

At one point, the prison — in true Nevada fashion — even had a casino for inmates inside its gates.

Nevada conducts executions at the prison.

Whorton said the Board of Prison Commissioners has authorized a letter to the Department of the Interior asking that the prison be listed as a national historic site.

Carson City Assemblyman Pete Livermore said he thinks the project can seek not only state support but grants to pay the cost of converting and restoring the prison.

Whorton was joined by Chamber Director Ronni Hannaman, who said the city "has a terrible history of allowing great historical buildings to be torn down." She mentioned the old V&T Railroad roundhouse.

"We cannot let that happen with the Nevada State Prison," she said.

Getting there will take a lot of work and money, Whorton said.

"The red tape involved is substantial," he said.

The prison is still state property, and Whorton said the state "is not going to give it away."

He said a study has been put together to bring a plan for the prison back to the 2015 Legislature. Livermore said he will bring that plan to his colleagues and try to build state support for it. He pointed out his bill enabling the study of creating a prison museum passed both houses unanimously in 2013 and was immediately signed by the governor.

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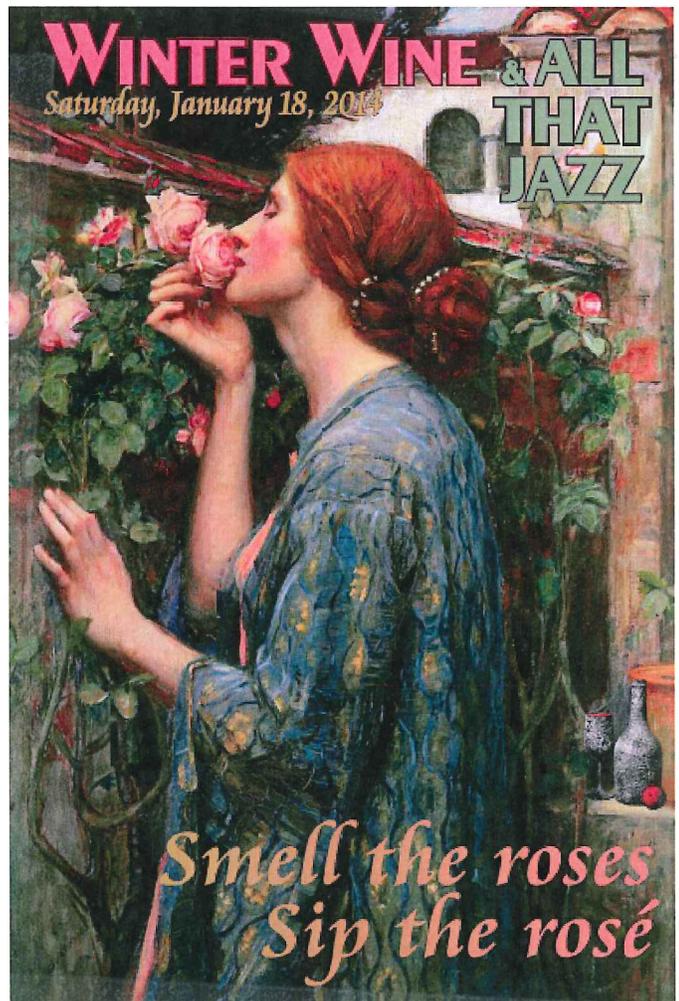
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**From:** Tami Shelton <tami@breweryarts.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 17, 2013 9:31 AM  
**To:** Tami Shelton  
**Subject:** Press release - The Brewery Arts Center joins SENarts Partnership, please share and forward, 9/17/13

For immediate release: 9/17/13  
Contact: Tami Castillo Shelton, Director of Programs  
[775-883-1976 Ext. 114](tel:775-883-1976)

**FYI**

## **SENarts Continues Beyond the 2013 Legislative Session**

*Partnership Between the Brewery Arts Center and Senate Results in Three Art Shows Per Year*

CARSON CITY – The Nevada Senate announced today that the Brewery Arts Center has joined the SENarts Partnership, collaborating with the Nevada Division of Museums and the Nevada Arts Council to bring high-quality art experiences to Nevada’s Legislative Building. As one component of this partnership, the Senate and the Brewery Arts Center jointly announced today that a new art show comprised of about 50 pieces by local art students has been installed on the second floor of the Legislative Building and would be in place for four months. Best time to visit the exhibits will be 10AM-2PM daily, as lighting is curtailed during other hours for energy conservation purposes. A new collection of locally-produced art will be rotated into display in January 2014, and every four months thereafter.

“We are very excited to celebrate local Nevada artists in this very prestigious location,” said John M. Shelton, Executive Director of the Brewery Arts Center. “Our students truly appreciate this showcase and the promotion of art and culture in the Legislative Building.”

The SENarts initiative has dramatically increased the artwork on display in Senate areas, with new signage developed showing the artists’ names and the titles of each piece. The Senate played host to monthly arts presentations during the Legislative Session as part of the “Work of Artists” series, in collaboration with the Nevada Arts Council. The SENarts Spotlight Series was also launched in 2013, a competition that ultimately featured four art collections from regional artists. The Senate has also received donated artwork from a variety of donors in 2012-2013, including silk artwork donated by the Taiwanese Consulate as the 2013 Session commenced.

“The staff of the Nevada Senate is committed to developing new educational and cultural programs to invite Nevadans of all ages to visit the Legislative Building,” said David Byerman, Secretary of the Senate. “We hope that programs like SENarts will encourage

participatory democracy and civic engagement, and give our residents another reason to stop by and visit the people's branch of government.”

More information on the Brewery Arts Center can be found by visiting [www.breweryarts.org](http://www.breweryarts.org) or calling [\(775\) 883-1976](tel:(775)883-1976).

SENarts works in concert with other Senate programs, including “uLegislate” legislative simulations, the Nevada Youth Legislature, and the Channel 21 public information network, to engage the public about the democratic process. For ongoing updates about SENarts and other programs of the Nevada Senate, visit the Senate website at <http://leg.state.nv.us/Senate/> or follow the Secretary of the Senate on Twitter [@NVSecSenate](https://twitter.com/NVSecSenate).