

## **AVP 4-25-12 The MOAH the merrier - museum to open May 5**

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LANCASTER - The excitement is building at the corner of Ehrlich Avenue (Elm Avenue) and Lancaster Boulevard as the Lancaster Museum of Art and History, fondly referred to as MOAH by city officials, prepares for its grand opening May 5.

Workers scurried to and fro, carrying ladders, scraping floors and walls or measuring the enormous empty spaces comprising the 20,000-square-foot two-story facility with a rooftop terrace and a

multipurpose room designed for special events or private parties.

"The biggest challenge has been when will we be done - when will the construction be done," said Andi Campognone, executive director and curator for the museum.

"(The museum) was supposed to be open a year ago. I was brought on board in November to get the project back on track, and things are really progressing."

Campognone is no stranger to museum openings or the daunting task of creating artistic harmony out of blankness. After 22 years in the industry, she has a proven track record.

"I started out in the arts as a photographer, but I worked as an assistant to an executive director who was also a curator and I discovered I enjoyed it more," she said.

Before being wooed to the Antelope Valley, Campognone was the associate director and curator for the Riverside Art Museum, and for 12 years before that she was the coordinator for The Millard Sheets

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Center for the Arts in Pomona.

While this is the first construction project from the ground up she has overseen, Campognone said she has been involved in massive renovation projects at other sites and served as a construction infrastructure expert.

She and her husband Alex Couwenberg, a non-objective abstract painter, also own a gallery in Pomona, one of two they built, along with a New York-style deli with the feel of a bistro that features a jazz club on the second floor.

"Before that we opened a wildly successful wine bar art gallery in Pomona," Campognone said with a smile.

Campognone's second child, daughter Smyth, 22, is a chef at the restaurant and runs the whole operation, her mother said.

Son Cooper, 24, attends law school, and younger daughters Nani, 13, and Maile, 12, are still at home.

As several staff cut through the layers of wrapping protecting the artwork to be displayed in one of the

upcoming exhibits, Campognone kept a close eye on their efforts.

"Oh, please be careful with that knife," she said. "You're making me nervous."

Cautiously, the men tore off the plastic covering to reveal a painting of a stormy desert landscape by Los Angeles artist Samantha Fields before gently placing it against a wall of the second-floor gallery, where it will be hung later this week.

"The MOAH opening has been anticipated with great excitement," Mayor R. Rex Parris said previously. "It marks a new era for the city of Lancaster, providing the public with another spectacular venue where they can enjoy the arts. It also offers area artists a much-needed space in which to display their works."

"It's going to be fabulous," Campognone said confidently, brushing her short brown hair back from her forehead as she surveyed the starkly white and mostly bare spaces.

"This is a world-class building with world-class exhibits," Campognone added.

The museum, at 665 West Lancaster Blvd., will open with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11 a.m. May 5.

Admission is free opening day, and the celebration will take place in the museum.