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## Scientology starts renovation work on Braley Building, vacant since 2006

By Janette Williams, Staff Writer  
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Construction materials are taken out of the Braley Building as a part of a renovation by the Church of Scientology in Pasadena Friday January 8, 2009. (SGVN/Staff photos by Walt Mancini)

PASADENA - Renovation has finally started on the historic Braley Building in the heart of Old Pasadena, where it sat empty since being bought by the Church of Scientology in 2006.

Church officials say it will be ready to open this summer.

"They are taking out the insides, ready for renovation," church spokeswoman Linda Peters said. "We're just gearing up for the new year, ready to rock and roll, and it's going to go pretty fast."

Almost immediately after the church bought the imposing 50,800-square-foot building at 35 S. Raymond Ave. officials bought out or evicted 22 small business tenants, including an antiques mall and a popular restaurant.

Since then, city officials and preservationists have sounded the alarm over the building's vacant and deteriorating condition, tattered awnings and possible safety issues.

Now, although putting a church in the heart of the city's prime retail and dining district wasn't universally popular, Old Pasadena Management District President Steve Mulheim said everyone is "thrilled" to see progress on the building.

"We're happy to see it moving along," Mulheim said. "Certainly the activity will help generate some traffic for other businesses as well. For any sort of dining and retail destination, foot traffic is a big key, and we're happy to have more activity than less."

People in Pasadena "are going to be delighted" with the result, church spokeswoman Wendy Beccaccini said. "We have several other historic buildings opened, and we really work hard at preserving their integrity as buildings."

### Photo Gallery

The church is expected to serve about 10,000 Scientologists from the entire San Gabriel Valley and from Sunland/Tujunga to the Inland Empire and San Bernardino.

[Scientologists Convert Braley Building](#)

And it won't attract them only on Sundays, Beccaccini said.

"It's not like an ordinary Christian church. It's actually quite a lot different. It will be a seven-days-a-week place," Beccaccini said.

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Plans for the main floor include an information center, to include displays on Scientology's religion and social programs, plus film and conference rooms, seminar spaces and a chapel/auditorium available to the community. There are also plans for a bookstore and cafe. The upper floors will have counselling rooms, offices and a sauna used in the Scientology "detoxification" program, Beccaccini said.

"Having a building like this, it will be marvellous to make spaces available to the community, share it with other nonprofits...and the community," she said. "We always have intended to make this a place where people want to come."

The Braley Building, built as a bicycle store in 1906, was bought with contributions from "1,400 or 1,500" local Scientologists, who have now given title to the church, officials said. The \$6.5 million to \$7 million needed for the interior conversion and exterior restoration also will be covered by member donations.

Pasadena's Planning Manager John Poindexter said all the permits were in place for the interior demolition and only permits for "minor" exterior changes remain to be issued.

The new church was difficult to classify for planning purposes but needed a "change of use" permit from office building, Poindexter said.

"It isn't only a Sunday church. It's more of a counselling center, in terms of how it functions," he said. "And the parking requirements had different impacts on neighbors."

Poindexter said at the moment the church is leasing off-site parking at Parsons.

The church plans to provide introductory and parishioner services at the new church daily, until 9:30 p.m. weekdays and weekends until 6 p.m.

"Our new beautiful church is a whole new expansion for us and it is going to be a wonderful community asset," said Eden Stein, president of the Pasadena Church of Scientology, established in 1980. "We are greatly looking forward to sharing it."

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(SGVN/Staff photos by Walt Mancini)



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