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Provo City Center Temple open house to begin in January, dedication in March

By Tad Walch, Deseret News Tuesday, June 9 2015

PROVO — The Ogden Utah Temple open house lasted five weeks late last summer and drew 540,000 visitors. This spring, more than 400,000 people attended the four-week Payson Utah Temple open house.

If those are good measuring sticks, the seven-week open house for the new Provo City Center Temple, announced Tuesday by the LDS Church, could bring 750,000 or more visitors to downtown Provo early next year.

More than five years after flames gutted the historic Provo Tabernacle, the free open house for the temple rising in the tabernacle's place will begin Jan. 15 and run every day except Sundays through March 5, according to the announcement by the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



Work Zone Cam

Past performance doesn't always guarantee future results, but if anything, Ogden and Payson could undersell the interest in the Provo City Center Temple. The Tabernacle, opened in 1898, was 112 years old when it burned in December 2010.

At that point, it was a local landmark and home to graduations, concerts and school and interfaith events, serving far more than the local LDS community. That broad impact, the history, the location in the very center of Provo on the corner of Center Street and University Avenue, and curiosity about the unique (re)construction of the building all could contribute to unusual interest in the 16th LDS temple in Utah.

Downtown merchants and city leaders have been looking forward to the completion of the temple for years now, but Provo officials now are bracing for the open house crowds.

"We are excited to be the focal point of so many LDS Church members as they come to visit this amazing addition to our downtown," Provo Deputy Mayor Corey Norman said. "In anticipation of almost a million visitors, we've organized an internal team that's been meeting for months already in preparation. We are communicating with church officials, our downtown merchants, government agencies and other stakeholders to assure that the city is prepared and provides the best experience possible."

The December 2010 fire that gutted the Provo Tabernacle broke hearts around Utah Valley. President Thomas S. Monson drew audible gasps at the LDS Church's Conference Center during a general conference session on Oct. 1, 2011, when he announced plans to convert the burned-out tabernacle site into a temple.

"Late last year the Provo Tabernacle in Utah County was seriously damaged by a terrible fire," he said. "This wonderful building, much beloved by generations of Latter-day Saints, was left with only the exterior walls standing. After careful study, we have decided to rebuild it with full preservation and restoration of the exterior, to become the second temple of the church in the city of Provo. The existing Provo Temple is one of the busiest in the church, and a second temple there will accommodate the increasing numbers of faithful church members who are attending the temple from Provo and the surrounding communities."

Church leaders broke ground for construction on May 12, 2012. Then the project became even more interesting.

After work crews removed two of the exterior's five layers of brick, they stabilized the shell by placing steel ties around the remaining three rows and inserting a concrete wall on the inside of the brick.

Then, for months, the 7-million-pound tabernacle shell stood on 40-foot-high steel stilts while workers excavated the ground underneath for two underground levels of the temple and an underground parking garage.

Once that was done, crowds gathered in March 2014 to watch workers place the traditional Angel Moroni on top of the temple's tower.

The church also announced plans Tuesday for a cultural celebration on March 19, between the open house and the dedication of the temple.

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The dedication will be held on March 20 in three sessions. Regular church worship services in Utah will be canceled that day with the dedication broadcast to meetinghouses throughout the state. The dedicatory sessions will be held at 9 a.m., noon and 3 p.m.

Latter-day Saints consider temples to be sacred, literally the house of the Lord.

On the day he announced the Provo City Center Temple, President Monson said, “no church-built facility is more important than a temple. Temples are places where relationships are sealed together to last through the eternities. We are grateful for all the many temples across the world and for the blessing they are in the lives of our members.”