

POSTLOCAL

Talk to us. Talk to newsmakers. Talk to each other. Join the conversation at postlocal.com



PHOTOS BY JOHN KELLY/THE WASHINGTON POST

Why National Gallery's East Building shed its pink marble skin



John Kelly's Washington

If it were possible for a bunch of bricks and stone to be embarrassed, the National Gallery of Art's East Building should be blushing right now. After all, like a highfalutin fan dancer, it's stripping down to its nakedness in front of everyone.

But I prefer to think of what's going on over near the Mall not as burlesque but as performance art. Call the daily show "Calloused

Hands and iPads: How Do You Keep the Walls From Tumbling Down?"

Well, perhaps "tumbling down" is a bit melodramatic, but here's what's happening: In 2005, the pink marble panels that envelop I.M. Pei's stunning museum started to show worrying symptoms. Excess mortar and lead shims had inadvertently tied the stones together. Instead of each being able to float freely over the brick and concrete wall behind, they were locked to one another. As temperatures rose and fell over 30 years, the fastening system failed. Stones started to pull away from the building.

It is a bad thing to have stones pulling away from a building. Flatten a single tourist with a 450-pound slab of falling marble and people talk. And so a challenge was issued: Who can fix this?

The response came from people such as Lenny Pagliaro, a mason and one of a team of contractors who have come together to take off all 17,000 stones, refinish them and put them back in exactly the same places. It's an \$85 million project that won't be finished until 2014.

"This is the largest stone job I've ever worked on," Lenny told me as I toured the site late last year.

Contractors Balfour Beatty and Smoot Construction joined forces to execute the repairs, along with masonry contractor Pagliaro-Lorton-Nardi and the design firm Robert Silman Associates. It was a challenge just to come up with a way to do it. For starters, the museum has to remain open for the duration. It's sort of like rebuilding the Great Pyramid of Cheops and then rebuilding it — with Pharaoh watching.

Then there's the little matter of making sure



Pablo Garcia, a mason's helper, above, reattaches a marble panel to the National Gallery of Art's East Building, at left. All 17,000 pieces of the building's marble cladding are being removed and reattached to correct a problem with the fastening system.

what happened once doesn't happen again. The marble cladding is attached with various anchors, and each panel is supposed to be free to move independently. Engineers came up with a sophisticated set of components to replace the old method, along with a soft silicone gasket that won't stress the stones. Then they built a training facility in Bowie just to test the technique and teach workers how to use it.

Eleven months into the three-year project, they have it down to a science. Three types of scaffolding surround the East Building. Elevators take workers and equipment up and down the eight-story facade. Each stone is photographed, measured and given a number that indicates where it came from. It also gets a barcode and is scanned with an iPad. Stones are removed and placed in cradles that slide along a monorail. (When the stones were pulled off one section, a graffito was revealed: "Pittsburgh Steelers #1," probably spray-painted by an ironworker in 1975 or '76 as the building was going up.)

In Lenny Pagliaro's masonry shop the stones are cleaned and milled: Bumps are ground down, depressions filled in. The aim is to take 50 stones off the building each day, send 50 stones through the shop and put 50 stones back on. As stones wait their turn, they rest in serried ranks on huge metal

shelves.

At times, all the equipment around the museum — the scaffolding, the monorails — looks like a Mark di Suvero sculpture. It's hard to detect Pei's sublime design.

It's a design that over the years has drawn countless hands to the dramatic knife's edge on the building's southwest corner. There's something about that severe, 19-degree angle that just makes you want to touch it. So many people have touched it that the marble there has been polished to a sheen by the oil in their hands.

As I toured the site, I voiced my concern that the shiny patch would be scrubbed away in the stone shop. Not to worry, said Susan Werthelm, the gallery's chief architect. It will get only a light cleaning. "We didn't want the stones to look brand new," she said.

You may not be able to touch the Picassos or Pollacks inside the East Building, but eventually you'll be able to again touch the biggest masterpiece of all: the building itself.

kellyj@washpost.com

To take a video tour of the East Building's exterior renovation, go to www.washingtonpost.com/local. To read previous columns by John Kelly, go to washingtonpost.com/johnkelly.

High school football needs a new plan, a championship game



Mike DeBonis

Sometimes a football game is more than a football game. Sometimes there's more on the line than adolescent dreams, parental pride and popcorn sales. Sometimes educational philosophies, deep tradition and mayoral campaign promises are at stake.

So while Clark Ray has one job to do in the next 10 months — a championship football game for D.C. public schools — it's actually more complex than that.

Yes, of course, there's the venerable Turkey Thanksgiving Day matchup of the top two teams, D.C. Interscholastic Athletic Association. That, however, is part of the problem; the DCIAA includes only high schools in the D.C. public school system.

With more than 40 percent of students attending independent public charter schools, rather than traditional D.C. public schools (DCPS), Ray is faced with reconciling a storied history of D.C. school athletics with a governance structure that is increasingly incompatible with the reality of public schooling in the District of Columbia.

Putting DCPS and charter students on a level playing field, as it were, has been a priority of Vincent C. Gray (D) — himself a schoolboy athlete some renown — dating back to his term as D.C. chairman. Gray quietly made Ray, the former parks and recreation director and an ex-D.C. candidate, the city's first "statewide" athletic director last month. The "statewide" part of his title is a nod to his place in the administrative superstructure. Superintendent of Education Hosanna Maha has responsibility for overseeing education in traditional public schools and charter schools. It's up to Ray to bring the two under the same athletic umbrella.

Ray's first task is to plan a new city football championship open to all public schools. It's no simple chore, and if he can accomplish it, the relentlessly upbeat Arkansan will have solved the larger obstacles that stand in the way of a sweeping integration of DCPS and charter athletics.

"How that's going to look, no one knows yet," he said. "I'm sure everyone has many different opinions. Right now, the key word is flexible."

Ray might seem an odd choice to accomplish Gray's signature goals. Ray was, after all, a member of predecessor Adrian M. Fenty's Cabinet before the long-time incumbent council member Phill Mendelson (D-At Large).

But Ray has kept a low profile after his failed bid, and he's kept a reputation for being a get-it-done guy who can manage tricky politics and tricky personalities. And he said his ill-fated run and fatherhood have cured him of his political ambitions.

He'll have to deploy his considerable energy and political savvy in his new assignment. "There's a little bit of everything involved," he said. "There are a lot of hurdles. There's buy-in."

For one, he'll have to soothe concerns that integrating charter schools into school athletic programs means discarding decades of DCPS tradition. He'll also have to address the even trickier issue of creating uniform eligibility standards for all public schools — something that's been a particularly nettlesome issue in the past.

"The men and women who created the DCIAA certainly need to be paid homage," Ray said. "We need to take the model they have and expand on it. I don't think it will go away at all."

But how that happens remains to be seen. Will charter high schools be granted admission to the DCIAA? Will the extant Washington Charter School Athletic Association become a parallel organization of the DCIAA, setting up an epic DCPS-charter showdown — much as the NFC and AFC championships meet in the Super Bowl?

Last week, Ray convened a first meeting of dozens of DCPS and charter school coaches and directors to talk through how they might go about bringing their worlds together via a football game.

The good news is that most everyone agrees the status quo cannot persist. The unsurprising and so-good news is that there's little consensus on what things should change.

Azaar Abdul-Rahim — coach of charter Friendship Collegiate Academy's extremely good football team, which last year could probably have beaten any DCIAA team — has as much to gain from a more equitable city athletics regime as he said he was pleased with the initial talks.

"Both sides want to definitely get something accomplished," he said. "It's going to be a little difficult than a roundtable. . . . At the end of the day, I don't think everyone is going to be happy."

DCPS interests, for one thing, appear to wa-

From Virginia

Post readers responded to an article about a homeless veteran who faces four federal counts related to manufacturing and possessing a homemade gun after he made a phone call from the Virginia Tech campus to tell a Department of



Dr. Gridlock

Excerpted from washingtonpost.com/drgridlock