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**Connecticut State Grant Funds Work at New Visitor Center at
Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center**

Ridgefield, CT – As indicated by the recent installation of an eight-by-four-foot sign on Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center’s (KTM&HC’s) front lawn, construction has begun at the site’s new state-of-the-art museum collections storage and research facility. The project is partially funded by a Good to Great grant from the State of Connecticut’s Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), which requires posting of the sign.

The project is unfolding at the new Visitor Center, where Ridgefield-based Sturges Brothers, Inc. – the general contractor selected through a state-mandated competitive bidding process—is working to transform the raw space in the building’s lower level. The facility, which has been designed by Sean O’Kane AIA Architects, will be accessed from a ground-level door leading to a new reception/research area for visitors. The adjacent secure and fire-protected storage area will have museum-grade, high-density moveable shelves and storage racks. The storage area’s dedicated HVAC system will maintain the space at the correct temperature and humidity to conserve KTM&HC’s thousands of fragile artifacts, documents, pamphlets, ledgers, journals, books, glass photo plates, and ephemera.

The Good to Great project, for which a 25-percent match was required, is part of Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center’s larger “It’s Our Turn to Make History” site transformation and capital campaign. The \$75,000 DECD grant was matched through generous donors’ capital campaign contributions; ongoing fundraising efforts will be dedicated to improving visitors’ overall experiences at KTM&HC.

“We continue to fundraise for our transformation project,” says KTM&HC Board President Rhonda Hill. “With better access to our collections, we now can more easily create new experiences for visitors, both online and on site.”

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She points to the walking tour now available on the four-acre property, which uses early 20th-century photographs from the museum's collection to help visitors envision its appearance during the site's 50-year ownership by the family of architect Cass Gilbert. The photographs and accompanying brief text are now displayed via laminated sheets stapled to wooden stakes.

"Additional funding will help create more permanent signage and complementary audio or smartphone-based content about the site's history," Ms. Hill added. "Better 'wayfinding'—paths, signage, landscaping—is needed, too, to improve visitors' enjoyment of our beautiful buildings and grounds."

The Good to Great grant program provides state bond funding for capital projects that link art, history, and tourism to enhance visitors' experiences; it is administered by the Department of Economic and Community Development in cooperation with the Connecticut Office of the Arts and State Historic Preservation Office. Awarded late last year to 12 nonprofit organizations, the grants help cultural and historical sites that have received little state support in the past.

"The grant process was competitive," said Hildegard Grob, Executive Director of KTM&HC. "We are grateful to the state of Connecticut for recognizing KTM&HC as the important regional history center that it is. Our mission is to explore the site's lives and events and the insights they provide into three centuries of our national experience and interpret their contemporary relevance for our shared citizenship and civic culture."

KTM&HC tells 300 years of the town's—and nation's—history through the lives of its past residents. The 4-acre historic site, including the Keeler Tavern Museum, Cass Gilbert-designed Garden House and Gardens, and Carriage Barn, is open for visitors Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Additional information about the site, including rental of the Cass Gilbert-designed Garden House and Walled Garden for private events, can be found at keelertavernmuseum.org or [Facebook.com/KeelerTavernMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/KeelerTavernMuseum). Follow KTM&HC on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



GoodtoGreatSign.jpg

Photo caption: From Left to right: Architect Sean O’Kane of Sean O’Kane AIA Architect PC; Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center Executive Director Hildegard Grob; KTM & HC Board President Rhonda Hill; Don Sturges of Sturges Brothers, Inc.; and First Selectman Rudy Marconi stand in front of the recently installed sign indicating that new construction on the site is partially funded by a 2018 Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) Good to Great grant. The grant is substantially funding the creation of a state-of-the-art museum collections storage and research facility in the lower level of KTM&HC’s new Visitor Center located at 152 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT.

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