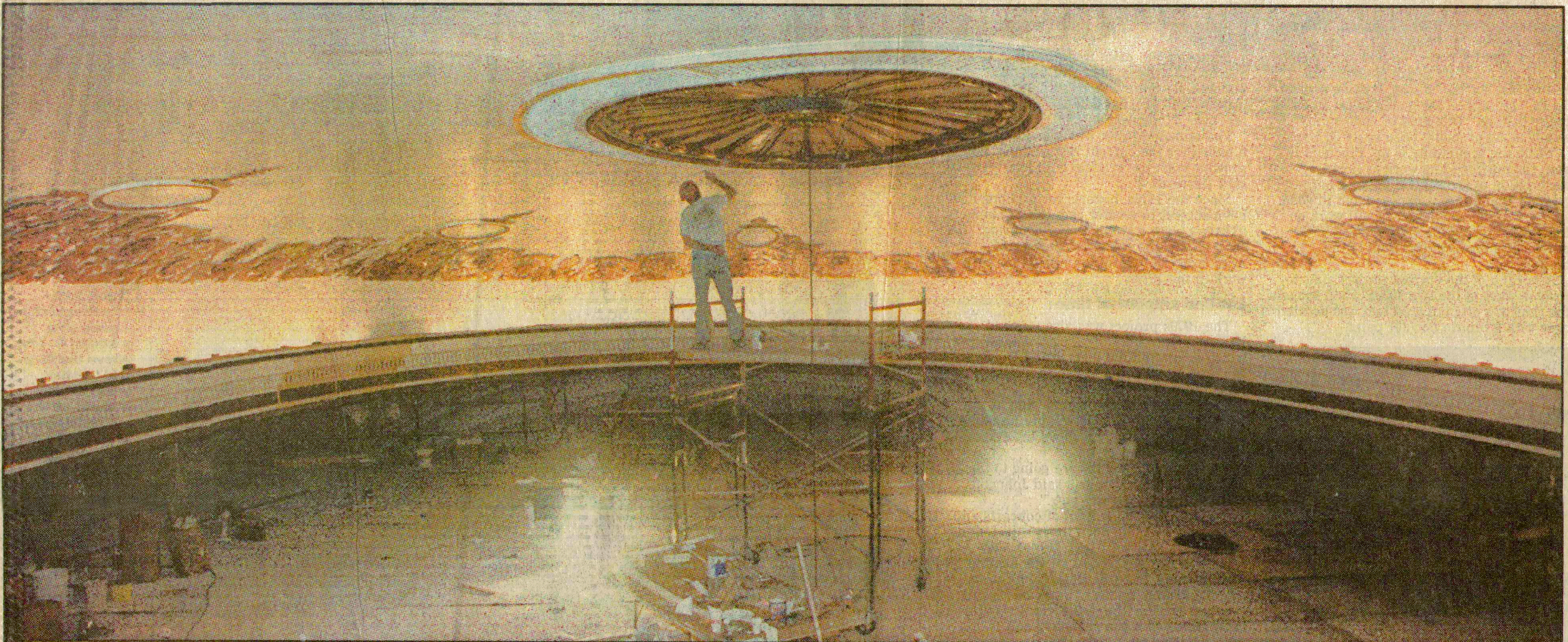


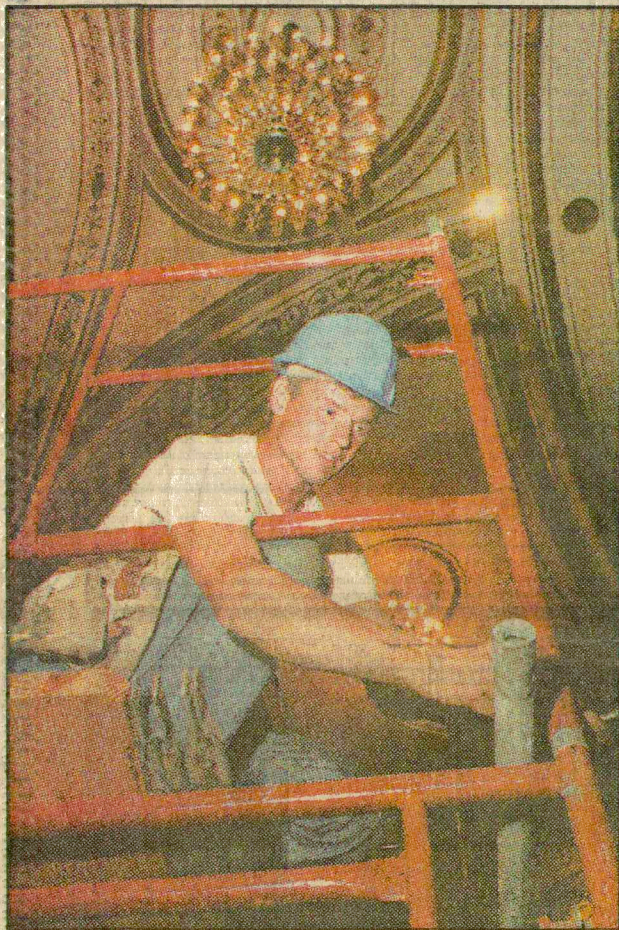
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Chedly Gassab paints the white trim around the ceiling dome at Proctor's Theatre. He stands atop scaffolding which took two weeks to erect and fills the theater.

Photos by AIMEE K. WILES Gazette Photographer



Carl James of Tri-City Scaffolding hooks together one of the 500 metal frames used to erect the massive scaffolding so architects and preservationists can work on Proctor's high ceiling.

Good as Gold

Project restoring luster to Proctor's ceiling

By JUDY PATRICK
Gazette Reporter

SCHENECTADY — Today's multiplex movie theaters may have a dozen films, stadium seating and digital sound, but the theaters themselves are not the stars they once were.

"In the '20s and '30s, going to the movies was a real experience, not just to see a movie but to experience the ambience," said James Cohen, the architect overseeing a \$210,000 restoration of the ornamental ceiling under way at Proctor's Theatre.

Built in 1927 as a movie theater and vaudeville house, Proctor's has in the past 20 years developed as more of a venue for live entertainment, with occasional movie screenings. The fall schedule includes touring productions of Broadway shows such as "Annie" and "Cats," as well as concerts by Julio Iglesias and Mandy Patinkin.

The restoration project is accenting the ceiling with color and with gold, with workers painstakingly applying ultra-thin sheets of "Dutch leaf" gold, a mixture of gold and bronze, to raised plaster flourishes.

"We're putting a halo on our jewel of a theater," said Harry Apkarian, chairman of Proctor's board of directors. "But this project is more than about beautifying a theater. It's about revitalizing Schenectady, restoring pride in Schenectady, and getting everyone to work together."

On a platform of plywood 60 feet high, Kim Stephenson sat on an overturned five-gallon pail, paintbrush in hand. Before her, on the curve of the ceiling as it slopes down to the wall, was a plaster medallion covered with a fresh coat of white primer.

"It looks kind of like the frosting on a wedding cake," she said of the swirling scrolls and curlicues awaiting their gold.

Getting right look

Gold leafing, offering the illusion of solid gold for a fraction of the price, dates back to Egyptian times, according to Armand Herreras, the foreman of the Proctor's project for EverGreene Painting Studio of New York City.

Different types of gold leaf are available, from expensive 22-karat gold to mixtures with less pricey metals that lessen the cost.

Dutch leaf, a percentage of gold mixed with bronze, was used in the original Proctor's construction and is being used again for the ceiling restoration.

Unlike gold, however, bronze tarnishes. Restorers are consequently applying a sealant over the gilding to protect it from discoloration.

When first applied, the gilding is brilliantly bright. It's pretty, but not historically accurate, said Cohen, a principal with Mesick Cohen Wilson & Baker Architects LLP of Albany.

A glazing, similar to that originally used, will tone down the shine and make the restored areas harmonize with the rest of the theater.

Dutch leaf, like other kinds of gold leaf, comes hammered in 4-inch squares, separated by similarly sized pieces of white and orange tissue paper bound together in small books that fit neatly in the hand.

"We're using thousands and thousands of sheets of gold on this project," Herreras told a group of theater patrons earlier this month. Real gold costs about \$1 for a sheet half the size, he said. Dutch leaf is about one-12th the cost of real gold.

It's not the gold leaf that makes the project expensive, said Cohen. It's the labor involved in applying all the paint, sizing, sealants, varnishes and glazes, as well as the tricky job of applying the gold leaf.

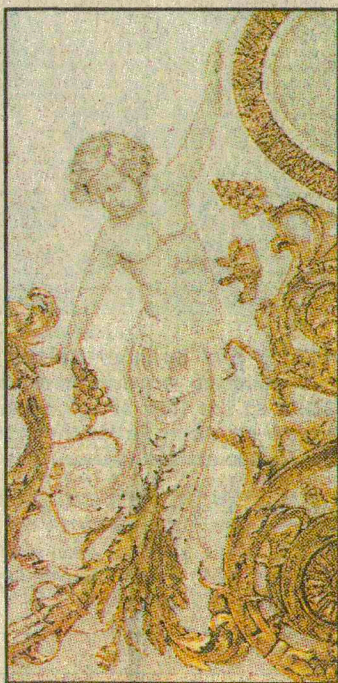
The huge scaffolding needed for the project, one that took two weeks to erect and fills the theater, consumed \$55,000 of the \$210,000 budget for the project. "There's the cost of erecting it and of dismantling it, as well as for renting it each day it's up," said Cohen.

Up-close view

The scaffolding enables architects, workers and even some theater enthusiasts to get a rare bird's eye view of the ceiling.

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Restoration of Proctor's decorative ceiling began with a washing, which wiped away 70 years of accumulated dirt from the ornamentation.



On a platform 60 feet high, Kim Stephenson touches up the paint around some freshly gilded flourishes decorating Proctor's Theatre in Schenectady.