

Sinkhole Corvettes Being Brought Back to Life

by Jim Stickford

It took approximately a minute for eight classic Corvettes to fall into a sinkhole in Kentucky.

But getting those vehicles out of the hole is taking considerably longer.

The incident took place at the National Corvette Museum Skydome exhibit area in Bowling Green on Feb. 12.

Work on retrieving the classic cars began the week of Feb. 24.

Museum spokesperson Katie Frassinelli said the rescue squad was able to get a crane into the "Skydome" area of the museum.

"We didn't have to take the roof off to put the crane in because the Skydome room's ceiling is about 10 stories high," Frassinelli said.

"We began by finishing shallow test borings in the remainder of the Skydome floor to insure there was no immediate danger of another sinkhole collapse happening in the remaining floor space. These tests proved successful.

"Before heavy equipment such as manlifts, excavators and cranes (which are on site and ready to approach the sinkhole area) could be brought into the Skydome area, deeper test drilling was performed to insure a sufficient thickness of earth and rock was present to support this equipment's entry and operation.

"The last test hole was completed on the morning of Feb. 26, and the 'positive data' recorded has now been turned over to the engineers and geologists for their analysis and verification.

"Additionally on that same day, drillers moved their operation to the outside foundation of the Skydome and have begun the drilling, high-strength grouting and installation of steel-cased micro-piling connected to the dome's perimeter foundation.

"This operation, securing and reinforcing the building's founda-

tion, will continue for approximately one-and-a-half to two weeks."

After receiving permission to proceed with the rescue efforts, the museum put "Operation Corvette Plus" into action, Frassinelli said.

"Since the beginning of the project, the number one goal is to 'proceed cautiously' with the recovery and reconstruction in such a manner to keep safety of the facility and the workers the main priority and, number two, plan and perform in a positive 'plus' direction daily," said Mike Murphy, CEO of Scott, Murphy & Daniel Construction.

"Because there are so many unknowns within the boundaries of this project, having an exact schedule 'in stone' is not practical or possible. Every day's planning and action determines the next step in executing a successful operation."

Murphy said the ultimate goal is to keep the existing building up in its original position, raise the Corvettes out of the sinkhole and bring the concrete floor back up to its original levels.

On March 3, the first Corvette – the 2009 Blue Devil ZR1 – was removed from the sinkhole, Frassinelli said.

The museum was able to stream the event live via the Internet to the world.

The crews have been working six days a week since the sinkhole incident. On March 1, the crews rigged up the ZR1 and did a few test lifts. John Spencer, Manufacturing Integration Manager at the GM Corvette Assembly Plant, helped consult the team on the best points to strap up the car.

"With Mike, worker safety is number one. There are no compromises," said Spencer.

"I was worried about the wheels," said Murphy. "This morning we took so long because we wanted to add some second-



GM's 2009 ZR1 Corvette was the first classic car rescued March 3 from the sinkhole at the Corvette Museum.

ary straps in case the wheels pulled. It was just a little more insurance."

"It's been a huge relief. It went better than expected," Murphy said.

"The 'Blue Devil' is in remarkable shape," said John Spencer, manufacturing integration manager for Corvette. "Cosmetically, the carbon fiber running boards are shattered, there's some mi-

nor paint damage, and a small crack in the windshield. Mechanically, the worst damage is a split in the oil-supply line for the 6.2L

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