

Museums Will Be Restored to Preserve Puerto Rican History and Culture

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San Juan, Puerto Rico – Several museums in Ponce have already been allocated funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to repair these structures tasked with preserving historic treasures. The approval represents nearly \$2.1 million earmarked for repairs after Hurricane María; and over \$379,000 to address damages after the 2020 Earthquakes.

The museums that will benefit tell Puerto Rican history from various angles: the development of trade and agriculture, the remembrance of significant events and the preservation of popular music.

“Museums are an essential component to learn about our ancestors and the origins of the traditions that define who we are today. The restoration of these museums will contribute to the economic recovery of the municipalities and will allow them to reaffirm their identity and history, to which Hurricane María and the earthquakes definitely added a footprint,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

One of the main attractions of the Stately City is the Museum Castillo Serrallés, which welcomes about 4,000 visitors a month. Once the residence of businessman Juan Eugenio Serrallés Colón and his family, today it’s a museum that exhibits the development of the sugar industry.

Over \$385,000 were allocated for repairs to windows, slabs and other parts of the museum due to damage after Hurricane María; while \$26,000 were allocated to seal cracks in parts of the structure as a result of the 2020 Earthquakes, both for the museum and the Cruceta El Vigía.

Frances Torruella de Alustiza, president of the Castillo Serrallés Board of Trustees, said it is important to preserve the castle because it is one of the few remaining architectural jewels in Puerto Rico. She added that the castle has a great economic impact because it attracts a lot of tourism and business.



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“A lot of weddings are celebrated here. People stay in hotels, use the caterers, the music bands... they also celebrate *quinceañeros*, graduations; everything. [We also] have a tour where people come to see how rum is made,” Torruella said.

Also within the municipality’s urban area is the Museum of Puerto Rico Music, which promotes the island’s cultural traditions and popular art. The facilities have \$1.7 million assigned to the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) to repair damage caused by Hurricane María. The work includes the replacement of ceiling panels, electrical transformers, lighting fixtures and the elevator, among other tasks.

Meanwhile, the Folkloric Research Center, headquartered in the Casa Paoli, will benefit from over \$230,000 to address the damage caused by the 2020 Earthquakes to this neoclassical building with 20th century elements. The Casa Paoli, which opened in 1976, is part of Puerto Rico’s general heritage and was once home to Puerto Rican tenor Antonio Paoli. Today, the space is a cultural center for exhibitions, workshops and public events, and is filled with historical archives on the life and work of great island artists, musical genres and folklore.

For his part, Néstor Murray Irizarry, executive director and founder of the Center, said: “These funds are important because we have to preserve the cultural heritage we have here. We have to repair the serious problems we have in order to continue to serve our people more effectively and to provide the services we have traditionally offered, such as exhibitions, concerts, book presentations and recitals.”

On the other hand, the municipality also has nearly \$123,000 for the repair of other museums, among them the Ponce History Museum — or the Casas Salazar and Zapater — and the Casa Mameyes, a museum that houses the history of the Mameyes landslides; a tragedy that took the lives of some 120 people in the early morning of October 7, 1985.

Meanwhile, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, said: “Recently, with the executive director of the ICP, Carlos Ruiz, I visited several museums in Ponce that will soon begin their reconstruction. At COR3 we are committed to continue supporting them in the development of their permanent works aimed at preserving the history and culture of Puerto Rico. Currently, ICP leads 48



permanent works that have \$32.6 million obligated by FEMA.”

To date, FEMA has allocated nearly \$30,400 million in Public Assistance funds to over 10,600 projects that will contribute to the reconstruction of a more resilient Puerto Rico.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 y recovery.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

