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Funding drives progress of future Cornelius art center

Carrie C. Causey Jan 2, 2019

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Concept renderings and a major donation were among the advancements in 2018 for the future Cain Center for the Arts.

CORNELIUS – Steps taken in late 2017 and throughout 2018 are helping to set the stage for the establishment of the area’s new arts center.

A major donation that led to the official naming of the future Cain Center for the Arts, as well as conceptual renderings and the launch of some program offerings are among the actions taken that paint the picture for what it could become.

“2018 was definitely a big year,” Cain Center Executive Director Justin Dionne said. “There was so much, especially in the second half of 2017 and into the first half of 2018. At times it could almost seem as if it were moving slowly, but if you take a moment to look back, like at the start of a new year, you see a lot of the great stuff we’ve done.”

After completing market studies, brainstorming sessions and a traffic study, the nonprofit’s board moved forward. Conceptual designs and renderings released last May by project architects C Design of Charlotte and New York’s Holman Moss Bottino Architecture showed possible designs of the facility that aims to house gallery, theater and education space in the heart of downtown Cornelius at the site of the old mill – a decision that was reaffirmed last year.

“These were big, big important things we had to get done to put ourselves in the position the second half of the year to get going on the quiet phase of fundraising,” Dionne said of the background legwork.

The nonprofit’s board members contributed more than a million dollars, which was added to a promised \$5 million from the Town of Cornelius through voter-approved bond money. And at the end of September, Bill and Ericka Cain of Cornelius, gave another \$5 million to the \$25 million campaign. Dionne called it a “momentum-changing gift and investment” that has led to a rebranding, which will be completed soon, to reflect the naming of the Cain Center for the Arts with a new logo and the website www.cainarts.org.

Private fundraising efforts have continued, though Dionne said more public fundraising is expected in the second quarter of 2019, including through the establishment of a founders society where donors of different levels can be recognized for giving to the project prior to its groundbreaking. To handle the administrative side, the board hired Development Associate Allison Elrod.

“The goal for the year is to get the rest of the (remaining) \$12.5 million,” Dionne said. “We want to get this thing done in 2019.”

In 2018, the arts center also moved forward with other initiatives, including holding a senior dance class through a partnership with Charlotte Ballet. While the classes are on hold until the fall as more planning takes place, educational outreach will take place this spring.

The \$25,000 state grant acquired by the nonprofit will get performances in area schools in the north Mecklenburg, south Iredell and east Lincoln areas.

“We look at this as a regional project,” Dionne said of the target audience for the center. “We are going into those communities. We are now getting into what we are going to be doing. It’s easy to get caught up in the building – and that’s great – but you want to build what will happen in the building and because of the building.”

He said he hopes this year takes the project further along thanks to the work done last year.

“2019 is the time,” he said.