

Dream to Reality, a School for the Arts: How Cincinnati Made it to Reality

By Curtis J. Moody

The dream - combining two nationally recognized Cincinnati Public Schools, the current School for Creative and Performing Arts (SCPA) for grades 4-12 and Schiel Primary School for Arts Enrichment for grades K-3, into the new K-12 School for Creative and Performing Arts - has come true.

Project Contributors:

- Curtis J. Moody, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP, Lead Project Designer. Moody • Nolan, Inc.
- Jeff Dodge, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, Project Manager, CR architecture + design
- Ronald Fanning, AIA, PE, REFP, Educational Programming, Fanning Howey
- Terrance Liette, PE, LEED AP, MEPT Engineering Principal, Fanning Howey
- Michael Burson, Facilities Director of Cincinnati Public Schools
- Jan Leslie, Director, Greater Cincinnati Arts and Education Center (GCAEC)
- Erich Kunzel, Conductor Emeritus of the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, Founder and Honorary Chair of the Greater Cincinnati Arts and Education Center (GCAEC)

Undertaking a project of this magnitude demanded great public support. This project embodies an example of a community learning center for the arts that will provide opportunities for cultivating special interests in any of the performing arts venues – for both students and the broader community. A synergy is formed by the integration of the arts community and the academic community, thus creating a more vibrant mixture of diverse talents in one school.

The visionary and champion for this private and publicly funded project, Erich Kunzel, was key to this project becoming a reality. Several celebrities have traversed the corridors of the current schools: Nick and Drew Lachey, Sarah Jessica Parker, Ron Bohmer, Carmen Electra, Alton White, to name a few. Having visionaries to provide leadership, champion the effort, and reinforce private sector and community supporters, is important. Private sector leadership from the beginning was the primary force used to generate half of the



The primary southern entrance with its volume enclosed with curtainwall, the zinc metal panels proceeding from the east side leading over the entrance glazing producing the building signage backdrop.

funding for the project goal, which resulted in a commitment to raise \$31 million of private funding to match the \$31 million of state and local funds which resulted in a total of \$62 million budget for design and construction. Additional site acquisition and preparation funding of

\$10 million was provided by Cincinnati Public Schools. Over 800 private donors, individuals, corporations and foundations contributed to the effort.

Key individuals providing leadership to secure the private sector funding were Erich Kunzel and cur-



Western side of the balcony in the 750 seat performance venue/theatre, looking east across the curved lower seating bowl.

rent GCAEC leadership, Tom Klinedinst, chairman; Bill Knodel, president; and Norma Petersen, honorary president. In addition, Nick Lachey, a graduate, produced the MTV show "Taking the Stage" which created international exposure and awareness for the programs at SCPA. Erich Kunzel was the major visionary initiating the gathering of support from the professional arts groups, community supporters and corporate sponsors in the greater Cincinnati area.

Erich's vision was to bring both Schiel and SCPA together in one building located near his beloved Music Hall, in the Washington Park vicinity. "Our dream has been embraced by people all around the community," said Erich Kunzel. That vision, widely communicated, eventually matured into what is now the new School for the Creative and Performing Arts (K-12). His dream became a reality through the formation of the Greater Cincinnati Arts and Education Center (GCAEC).

Key to success of the project was Erich and Norma Petersen's formation of GCAEC and its continued role as SCPA progresses into the future. Erich and Norma gathered arts supporters, Turner Construction and other professionals to produce a feasibility study for the viability of doing this project in this locale. This feasibility study led to the formation of GCAEC in 1996, a non-profit organization designated to raise funds and support this project.



Standing in the southern entrance lobby looking into the 'Corbett Theatre' pre-function space. The wall on the right displays the private donor recognition plaques.



From the stage of the 300 seat performance venue/theatre looking out at the straight seating bowl arrangement. The piano in this photograph was Erich Kunzel's personal piano and was donated from Erich's family to the school.

Prior to the formal presentation in Washington, DC, Jan Leslie had the opportunity to capture Erich's vision and dream on a videotaped interview. After Erich Kunzel's premature death on September 1, 2009, the facility was renamed the "The Erich Kunzel Center for Arts and Education" in his honor. Without his vision and dedication, this project would not have been the success it is.

In the video interview, Erich's true passion for the dream is portrayed. The main concept of the building was to locate it centrally within the performing community, giving students easy access to arts professions. Over-the-Rhine is home to many of the premier art institutions of the region, including

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the Opera, Symphony and Pops; Art Academy, Ballet, CET, Public Media Broadcast Headquarters, Ensemble Theatre, Memorial Hall and more. Erich discusses the creative synergy that will exist between the younger grades who might glean motivation and inspiration from the next upper grade levels. This creates a great progression of arts education in each student’s respective area of interest. The project is expected to serve as a further catalyst for the neighborhood’s revival. It is the largest urban redevelopment project in Over-the-Rhine, a great historical district as Erich describes it, since the Music Hall was built in 1878. The key to maintaining success for this public/private partnership is having leadership of the arts community serving as members of the school’s governing Board through GCAEC, working with school-level members to effectively lead this school in a great direction.

The design challenges, including its atypical funding method, nontra-

ditional features, and a tight urban site in a historic neighborhood have made it distinctly unique.

• Budget Constraints

- o Develop and maintain the cost model elements and reconcile the cost estimate at 50% and 100% stages of each design phase.
- o Stakeholder’s interests were accounted for in developing the Program of Requirements.
- o \$10 million added to budget and programmed square footage reduced to 250,000 total

• Site Constraints

- o 3 acre site, 252,000SF required 4 stories above grade and 1 story below grade.
- o The tight, urban site occupies an entire city block and addresses the city skyline and the opposing Washington Park in Over-the-Rhine.

• Zero Lot Line

- o In concert with Construction Manager, the building footprint was kept back from property line preventing costs for shoring at all the sidewalks.

• Floor Plan Organization

- o The five story, 252,000-sf school features a 750-seat performance theater, a 300-seat theater for more intimate settings, and a flexible black-box theater.
- o The theatrical spaces are serviced by a back of house scene shop, costume design shop, lighting lab, and sound studio.
- o Inspirational & private areas contained in the same building to support both the arts and the academics.

• Massing

- o Keep the form of the building to prevent adding unnec-



One of the visual arts classrooms; this one currently dedicated to the painting students. The left wall shows a blue-colored glazed opening that is an integral part of the design on the northern façade.

essary volume so that at the end of the project this did not have to be pared down.

- o The southwest façade curves back from the masonry context, revealing the main 750 seat theatre covered in zinc and stainless steel panels.

- **Community Interest Groups**
 - o Respectful of the neighborhood, the school’s facades adhere to the Cincinnati Historic Conservation Board’s guidelines.

Curtis Moody continued with championing the project effort to

the private sector. This process included developing support materials and identifying people with a shared passion and dedication to the project.

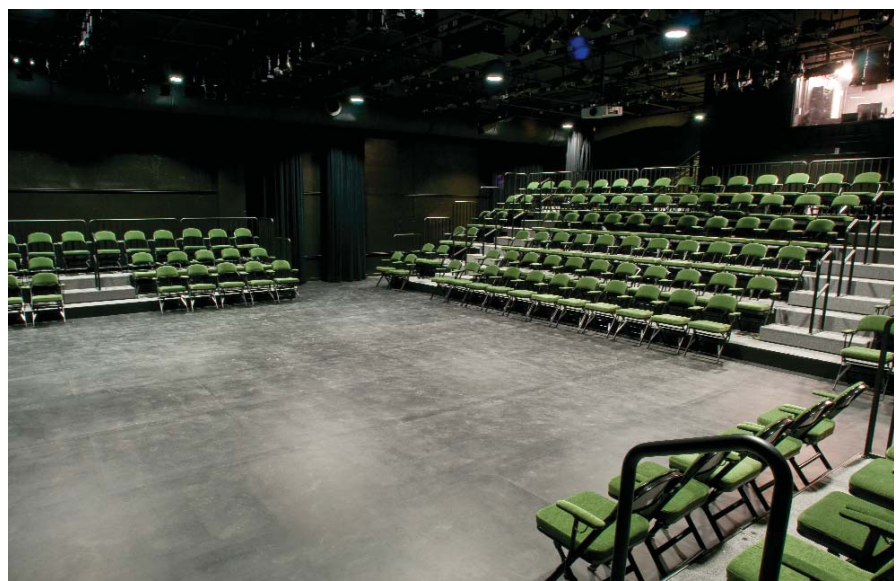
There were, of course, many funding challenges and several opportunities. Private sector individuals assisted the Cincinnati

• **Elevations**

- o Many of the surrounding buildings are of masonry construction. Keeping with this vernacular, the school has masonry veneer, but to reveal the contemporary nature of this facility an “Urban Curve” was introduced.
- o This is a transitional building, going from active downtown commercial area to a neighborhood in transition.

• **Aesthetics/Signature Design**

- o Owners requested a signature design statement for the building.



The flexibility of the portable seating platforms are shown for the Black Box performance 125 seat venue.

Public Schools in their bond issue campaign to complete funding for a district-wide facilities master plan. With help from the private sector, the bond issue passed and helped to fund this school from the public side. The private sector was mindful that the Board of Education had certain criteria that needed to be met for the education model to be successful. This co-management and sensitivity fostered the growth of this private/public partnership into a fully functioning project team. Setting up a governance agreement, to help govern the administration of SCPA, was one very successful avenue used for maintaining the desired results from the private sector without any sacrifice of academic value as the school continues to grow in the future. GCAEC will have seats on the school's governing board and will have input on issues such as the hiring of the provost and principal for this school. Immediate needs and future governing issues are contained in this agreement that establishes a new kind of public/private sector partnership to support the new SCPA.

GCAEC also initiated an Arts Endowment fund to help with budget for special performing arts program costs, additional costs for operations of this unique performance venue, and to support arts excellence going forward.

CPS received 23% co-funding from the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC). OSFC brought the state design manual and guidelines for collaboration efforts as a part of their participation in this project. OSFC was also a governing agency with design criteria that had to be approved. The various formats of media depicting the building design allowed OSFC, and others, a more comprehensive review of the building during the design phases. CPS and OSFC's involvement in the project review and approval process was augmented with GCAEC's Project Manager/Liaison, David Crafts, retired Procter & Gamble,

who assisted from design through to the completion of construction.

With a private sector partner of this caliber, the school district was able to release some of the reins of control on how the project moved forward and was programmed. The magnitude of private monies indicated that this group was capable of assisting in the school district's and the student's best interest. All the standard contractual obligations and specific project requirements mandated through OSFC and the State of Ohio were used to comply and foster further partnership between private and public entities.

The private sector helped push the effort for the public and private partnership in the fundraising campaign. Some of the means utilized were:

- Donor recognition opportunities within the building.
- Naming rights, seat recognition, brick pavers, academic labs, art donations.
- Potential cost savings through arts support groups/organizations involvement.
- In-kind connections and collaboration with personnel specializing in performing arts groups.

Marketing strategies for potential key donors included:

- Capturing the imagination of the potential donors.
 - o Meeting potential donors early enough in the design process so that their desires could be incorporated into the building design.
 - o Listened to key investors and the architecture responded to their valued input.
 - o None of the initial design intent was sacrificed in following through with these donors' design considerations.
- Meeting with private sector individuals, sharing the

dream/vision and all the presentation media that had been developed portraying that dream/vision.

- o Discovering which individuals have shared passion for the arts is fundamental to this aspect of the project development.
- 3-D models were a useful tool when meeting with potential donors and governing agencies to further enhance the momentum the project was gathering.
- A video fly-through was developed and distributed to potential donors to garner support for this project.

This project is a wonderful example of what can happen when a community is dedicated to the arts and the future of their city. The success of this school is closely tied to the responsible use of public education dollars while addressing the needs and desires to cultivate and celebrate young talent. This unique arrangement enabled SCPA to open its doors in 2010 as the first public K-12 arts school in the United States, one that is both publicly and privately managed. ■

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Award-winning architectural designer Curtis J. Moody has been involved in the design of projects that exceed several billion dollars in construction over the last 37 years. A winner of the prestigious Whitney M. Young, Jr. award as an outstanding African American Architect in the U.S. in 1992, Curt's designs have won more than 147 design citations. Curt was awarded the AIA Gold Medal in 2007 and Moody-Nolan received the AIA Gold Medal Firm of the Year Award in 2006. Curt serves as a peer reviewer for the Architect/Engineer selection panel for the General Services Administration (GSA) Design Excellence Program.