

Cornelius tabs Dionne to head arts center

Written by Staff



CORNELIUS, N.C. — The Town of Cornelius doesn't have a new arts center yet, but it does have an executive director. Following a national search that yielded more than 80 candidates, the Cornelius Arts Center has hired Justin Dionne for the job, and among his first responsibilities will be leading a capital campaign for the new center with the help of the town's Arts Center Board of Directors.

It won't be his first time spearheading such an effort. As the former managing artistic director of the Lee Street Theatre in Salisbury, Dionne led a capital campaign to renovate a historic warehouse into a performing arts center along with curating five seasons of programming. His efforts helped establish the organization as a leading cultural destination in the state.

"Justin Dionne is just the right person to help us put this important project in place," says Cornelius Commissioner Woody Washam. "He will be an experienced, energetic and enthusiastic advocate of the new center and the community as a whole. I am confident that he can effectively take us through the many important decisions and efforts ahead including the design, fund raising, construction and programming of this wonderful and exciting project which will serve our entire region."

Adds Cornelius Commissioner Jim Duke, "Justin is a real talent and huge asset to the Arts Center project. I worked with him on the strategic planning group and was impressed with his creativity, range of talent and drive. We are indeed fortunate to have him on board."

Dionne brings a background in community development and non-profit arts management, including experience in downtown development, tourism and arts council boards.

The Salisbury native earned a bachelor's degree in theater arts at Catawba College and studied theater management at the graduate level at Florida State University. "I am honored to lead a project that will make such a large cultural impact on Cornelius and the entire Lake Norman community," says Dionne. "I look forward to working with community members, leaders and businesses to make this dream a reality."

The Cornelius Arts Center, to be built in downtown Cornelius near Town Hall and the Cornelius Police Department headquarters, is planned as a diverse, not-for-profit arts facility for creativity, learning, entertainment and enjoyment.

"We are very excited to have Justin on board and are extremely confident in his ability to lead this effort," says Greg Wessling, chairman of the Cornelius Arts Center Board of Directors. "With his previous experience in building and managing a similar center, among other arts-oriented positions in his career, it was clear he was the perfect fit for us. We were gratified to have drawn such national attention for our program, and thrilled to be able to bring Justin to Cornelius and the Lake Norman region."

In 2013, Cornelius residents approved a \$4 million bond for use on downtown redevelopment projects. A community arts center was identified to complement the already thriving arts district in Old Town Cornelius. The Town has purchased 1.85 acres near historic Oak Street Mill and the former cotton gin location, with plans to open the arts center in 2020. The center is viewed as a catalyst for the continued redevelopment of downtown Cornelius and the anchor of a proposed arts and cultural district.

"Not only is Justin a great actor and producer, he brings the skills of understanding the business and many facets of running an arts center," says Cornelius Mayor Chuck Travis. "This is a very important step in moving forward with the creation of the Cornelius arts district. Expect new development with restaurants, entertainment and a lively streetscape that will become a regional attraction."

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