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# The Cain Center for the Arts in Cornelius is making strides



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The Cain Center for the Arts (formerly Cornelius Arts Center) has been strategically and organizationally laying a foundation in preparation to construct this multi-million dollar facility. The Cain Center’s mission is to provide exceptional visual arts, performing arts, and social experiences in the Lake Norman region. In 2018 several planning and fundraising milestones were reached.



## The Model

Concept renderings, completed by C Design and Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture, were released in May 2018 at a community meeting, in which Executive Director Justin Dionne presented the results of the market research study conducted the previous year. Its findings were the drivers of the direction of the space, primarily its functionality. Notable attributes were the flex-use theater space and the outdoor green space that could serve as a downtown public park.



“A 450-500 seat theater will be one of the primary featured components of the new center, attracting concerts and productions of a high-level caliber,” Dionne shared in a recent article. “The theatre space will also be flexible (with a movable floor and seats) for conventions, rentals, and special events which include partnering with many of the region’s growing performance companies.”



“Concept renderings included an outdoor “green” space which would provide additional opportunities for concerts, performances, or even outdoor movie nights. A rooftop lounge and unique architectural design were also features in the new renderings,” according to Dionne.

## The Investment

### 2013

Cornelius residents approved a \$4 million bond for use on downtown redevelopment projects. After much research and conversation, a need for a community arts center was identified to complement the already thriving arts district in Old Town Cornelius. The town purchased 1.85 acres in downtown Cornelius and has agreed to an owner/manager business model with the center.

The diverse, not-for-profit arts organization will be a place for creativity, learning, entertainment, and enjoyment.

### 2017

Established as a 501-c-3, the center will be a hub of arts and entertainment, serving the entire Lake Norman and North Mecklenburg community and beyond.

### September 2018

At a town board meeting, the Cornelius Art Center board of directors announced its combined pledge of over \$1 million and that the center will be renamed after local community leaders Bill and Ericka Cain. The renaming comes as a result of the Cain's generous lead gift of \$5 million to the center's comprehensive campaign.

### January 2019

The Cain's gift, initial fundraising, the pledges from the board of directors, and public funding from the Town of Cornelius bring \$12 million towards the center's \$25 million campaign goal.

Cornelius Arts Center Board President Greg Wessling believes the Cains' lead gift will help to build further momentum and excitement for the project during the early phase of the campaign. "We are honored to have Bill and Ericka Cain make this legacy investment to name the facility," says Wessling. "It not only provides a foundation for the center, but calls all of us to action in following their lead. It tells everyone that this arts center project is a reality."

## The Team

The Cain Center for the Arts is a community-driven partnership that includes a non-voting advisory board, a board of directors, and staff. Dionne and administrative assistant Anita Overcash have been steering the direction of the project through board advisement for the past two years. This month a new position was announced and the center welcomed Allison Elrod, development director, to the team.

Elrod's experience and enthusiasm is an energizing contribution to the already thriving project. Here is a summary of an interview with Allison Elrod:

**Tell us about your background:**

**Elrod:** I'm a Tar Heel girl, born in Raleigh, and a North Carolina resident for almost all of my life, with the exception of my middle school years when my family lived out west. I'm an alumna of UNC-Greensboro, where I earned a degree in Business and Marketing.

I've been in marketing, communications, and development in various capacities over the years, both as a consultant and on staff, most recently with a Charlotte non-profit. I'm glad to be able to contribute to a great project right here in my own backyard!

**Do you consider yourself an artist? If so, in what way?**

**Elrod:** A common thread that runs through every aspect of my life is my love for putting words on paper. Professionally, I've had the pleasure of serving as wordsmith and editor for some wonderful clients and on some amazing projects. In my personal life, I'm a poet and essayist. North Carolina, and this region in particular, is such a great place to be a writer. Not only is our literary heritage deep and wide, but the community of writers is generous and talented.

**What aspects of The Cain Center are you most looking forward to?**

**Elrod:** I truly believe in the power of the arts to transform lives, and The Cain Center is going to be an incredible—and needed—resource for transformation. It will be a new heartbeat in downtown Cornelius, a place where people can connect on common ground, experience the arts, learn, celebrate, and find inspiration. And the best part about the project is the way it extends the groundswell of arts infrastructure that is already in place in Cornelius' emerging arts district.

**What are your favorite parts about the Lake Norman area?**

**Elrod:** My family came to Davidson about 15 years ago, and we have loved every minute of our time here. I like having access to all the cultural events at the college, being able to walk to town, being close to the lake, and especially all the interesting people who have come into my life and the life of my family since we joined the Lake Norman community.

**What's to come:****Justin Dionne provided a sneak-peek into some exciting developments on the horizon:**

-A new branding campaign to be announced in spring 2019

-The team has been working on identifying and designating neighborhood captains in surrounding areas to get the word out on the latest developments and to champion the fundraising efforts

-Community members and local businesses who pledge a gift payable over three years will be included in the Founders Society. As Founders Society members, they will receive certain membership perks and have the opportunity for their name to be engraved on a monument located

at The Cain Center.

We all have a chance now to play a part in something that will transform our community for generations to come and serve as an anchor to a thriving arts and cultural destination.

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Information requests can be sent to Anita Overcash at [aovercash@corneliusarts.org](mailto:aovercash@corneliusarts.org).

For more information on the Cornelius Arts Center project, visit [www.cainarts.org](http://www.cainarts.org).

Read related coverage of Old Town Cornelius:

*Sept. 2018 – Cornelius Arts Center Has a Name*

*May 2018 – Concept Renderings and Model Revealed at Cornelius Art Center Conversation*

*Oct. 2017 – Acclaimed Architect Firms Will Design Cornelius Arts Center*

*Oct. 2016 – With Town Board Support, Arts and Community Center Plans Move Forward*