



LOCAL ARTS

'Transformative' \$5 million gift aims to make Cornelius a mecca

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Drawings for the arts center include this view; planned are a 450- to 500-seat performing arts theater, art gallery, classrooms and an outdoor plaza/gathering place. C DESIGN / HOLZMAN MOSS BOTTINO ARCHITECTURE

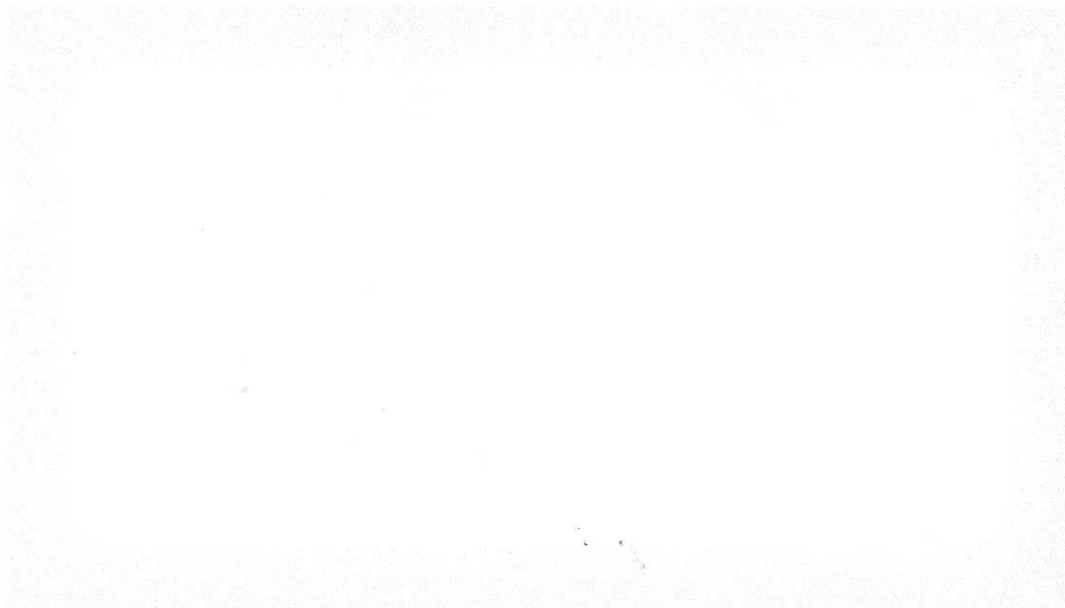
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Cornelius dream of building a major arts center just got \$5 million closer to reality.

And Ericka and Bill Cain in the town north of Charlotte will join the ranks of major-donor families with their names on museums and arts centers. At last night's town board meeting, Cornelius Mayor Woody Washam and Greg Wessling, a retired Lowe's senior vice president and chair of the Cornelius Arts Center board of directors, made the announcement:

What had been known as the Cornelius Arts Center is now, thanks to the Cains' lead gift, the Cain Center for the Arts.

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Another interior drawing shows the planned gallery.
C Design / Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture

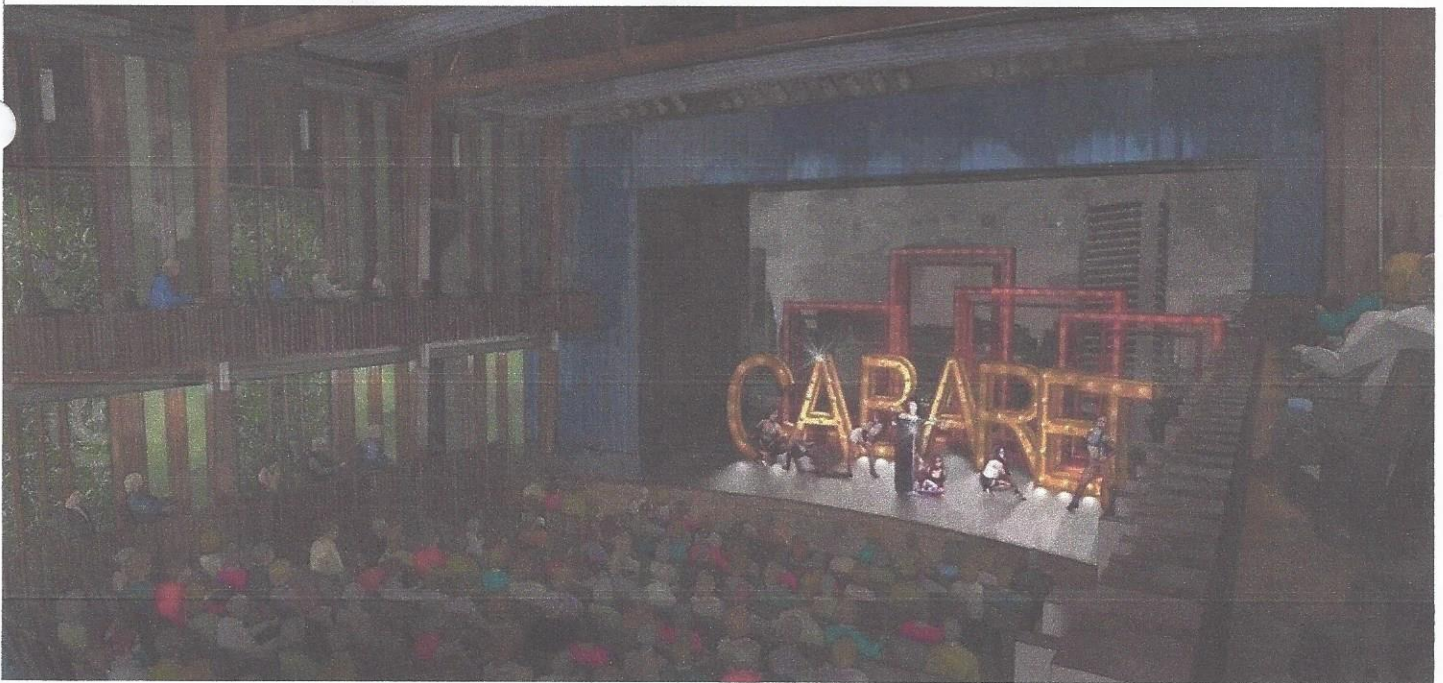
“This takes us from ‘Well, it might happen’ to ‘This is going to happen,’ ” said the center’s executive director, Justin Dionne. “It puts us in a whole new realm.”

It came “at a strategic and perfect time” and “really takes us to the next level,” said Washam by phone Tuesday. “We’re in the quiet phase of the campaign now and talking to other potential major donors.” The gift – which he called “transformative” – brings the center halfway to its \$25 million fundraising goal.

The Cains founded and own Financial Independence Group (FIG), a Cornelius-based company that helps insurance brokers market products.

Cornelius residents approved a \$4 million bond package in support of downtown redevelopment in 2013. The town paid \$1.5 million for a 1.85-acre parcel in “Old Town Cornelius” for the center. (Longtime Charlotteans call downtown “uptown.” Similarly, Cornelius has branded its future arts district “Old Town Cornelius.”)

The 48,000-square-foot center is intended not just as the centerpiece of Cornelius, but as a regional destination, said Washam. “A regional concept is what we’ve had in mind all along.”



An interior view of the plans shows the theater.
C Design / Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture

In addition to a 450- to 500-seat performing arts theater, plans call for an outdoor plaza/gathering place; “a major art gallery,” according to Washam; and classrooms for music, visual arts, dance and more. A number of community arts leaders, including Marla Brown – founder of one of Cornelius’ best-known arts organizations, the Warehouse Performing Arts Center – are involved as advisors.

C Design of Charlotte is collaborating with Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture of New York on the center’s design. Architect Malcolm Holzman designed ImaginOn and The Joe and Joan Martin Center in Charlotte; plans are at corneliusarts.org.

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