

that's what HE Said



JUSTIN DIONNE

SPOILER ALERT: *Men and women are different. Ok, so maybe that fact didn't really surprise you. After all, it's been 27 years since John Gray popularized the idea that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. And as much as we love sharing women's stories, we decided it was time to lend the Martians of LKN our ear, too. This month we share the perspective of Justin Dionne, executive director of Cain Center for the Arts, on life in Lake Norman.*

Where did you grow up? When and how did you meet your wife? Tell us about your family. I am a homegrown North Carolinian, born and raised in Salisbury. My wife, Rachel, grew up in Lexington. However, we didn't meet until she crashed my 26th birthday party. We began dating a few years later when a couple of days after I had quit smoking I ran into her at a bar and she overheard that I was quitting. She said that if I made it to a month she would take me out to dinner. I've been smoke-free for almost eight years now! Rachel and I welcomed our daughter, Vivienne Leigh, on June 18 last year. She's at such a great age right now because she is experiencing so many firsts. It's so much fun to watch her grow and discover new things!

What was the impetus behind Cain Center for the Arts? In so many ways the arts are thriving in LKN. We want to be a home for the arts and increase accessibility. There are roughly 300,000 residents in the four-county region, but for many, the distance and headache of traveling to Charlotte is a genuine barrier. The center will be life-changing for our communities here in Lake Norman. Not only will it help to spark an economic renaissance for downtown Cornelius, it will truly be a cultural centerpiece for us all.

What kinds of events and performances will be held at Cain Center for the Arts? The facility will consist of a 400-seat theater, gallery space, classrooms, meeting rooms, and a two-story lobby. It is being designed to host everything from touring musicians, exhibits, and performances to local companies and community events. Imagine what it will be like to come here and see a national touring musician one week, the Charlotte Symphony the next week, and a performance from a local troupe the next. While all that is happening, there will be art exhibits by local students in the gallery and dance and painting classes underway in the classrooms. We plan to host wedding and baby showers, fundraising events, and more!

What is your biggest challenge right now? Raising \$25 million. It's a big goal, but as of June, we secured just shy of \$15 million, so we are well on our way! Anyone interested in contributing can visit cainarts.org for more information on how to pledge. We have a Founders Society established for people who pledge before we break ground. Also, we would love for folks to get involved—not only through volunteering but by helping us to spread the word about this project! 🎯