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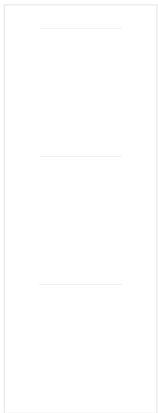
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## Keeping up with the Cain Center



By Todd Olvis

Lake Norman's future looks bright, and it is about to get even brighter. We recently had the pleasure of sitting down to talk with North Carolina local and Executive Director of The Cain Center for the Arts, Justin Dionne.

This story begins in 2013 when Cornelius residents approved a \$4 million bond referendum for downtown redevelopment projects and soon after identified the need for a community arts center to complement the Old Town Cornelius Arts District.



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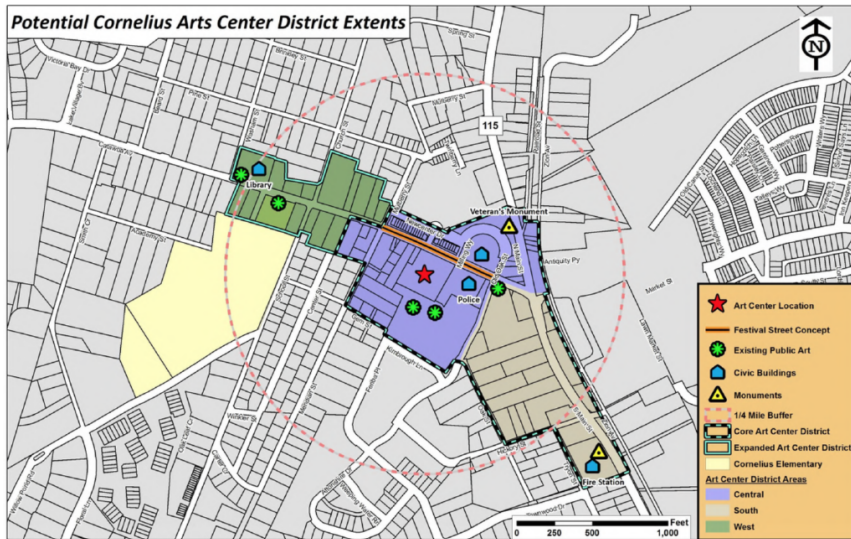
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Rendering of the view from Town Hall on Catawba Ave. The future Art Center to add a bustle of activity to Town Center.

Projected to break ground in late 2020, early 2021, and be completed in 2022, The Cain Center for the Arts will bring a new vitality to the Cornelius-Lake Norman community. The Cain Center will be located on Catawba Avenue to the West of the police station situated between neighborhood pub Old Town Public House and the increasingly popular Oak Street Mill in Old Town Cornelius, adding what is sure to be an exciting element to the area and to the community grass roots art movement pioneered by Bella Love nearly ten years ago.



Art District (Proposed)

Rowan County born and bred, Dionne graduated from West Rowan High School and then attended Catawba College, graduating in 2007 with a degree in Theatrical Arts. Immersed in the arts, Dionne moved to New York and later to Chicago where he further honed his craft in the arts. He returned to Salisbury where he got involved in local theatre, and a campaign to renovate and transform a historic 9,000 square foot 1920's warehouse into a performing arts center. His efforts helped establish The Lee Street Theatre and Salisbury as a leading cultural arts destination in the state, and Dionne, as a man who gets things done.



*Dionne speaking at an event with daughter, Vivienne.*

Currently the finishing touches are being put on an outdoor amphitheater across the street from the Lee Street Theatre that Dionne helped conceptualize and write a grant for.

Receiving a full scholarship, Dionne then went on to Florida State where he studied Theatre Management and soon after was given the opportunity to come to Cornelius to take on his latest role directing The Cain Center.

Turning 35 this month, Dionne might seem a bit young to be heading up a project of this magnitude, however, after learning of his accomplishments in theatre and event management, fundraising and bringing projects from conception to completion it becomes quite clear why this self-proclaimed serial entrepreneur is at the helm.

Dionne says the plan is for this to be a game changer for the community and the entire Lake Norman area in terms of education, economic development, and the overall enjoyment the Cain Center will bring to the region for generations to come.

Dionne, “The Cain Center will complement the efforts of Bella Love and the events they currently host like the popular Tawba Walk Arts & Music Festival, 2nd Friday, and Food Truck Invitational. The Cain Center is sponsoring the upcoming Tawba Walk on Saturday, Sept 28 and we’re excited for the possibilities of working together on future projects. It’s a win-win situation for everyone.

Dionne further adds that Bella Love has been a tremendous asset to the community and local artists, and there’s a need for a comprehensive public arts facility to bring the entire scene together. Currently, you have to venture to Charlotte for that kind of experience however, that will all change when the Cain Center is completed, and Lake Norman residents will have a world-class arts and community facility right here in their own backyard.



*Learn more about the mission of the Cain Center at [Cainarts.org](http://Cainarts.org)*

We plan on launching our official public campaign in the spring of 2020. In the meantime we’ll be continuing our education programs. Like last spring we delivered ballet, theatre and symphony programs to over 8000 children ages K-12 in the Lake Norman area. There are other programs in negotiation phase right now and we’re looking at ways to work with Bella Love to strengthen the grass roots art movement that’s already begun here. We wanted to start going public with these programs and we’re working with Bella Love to enhance and support the things that already exist like the Tawba Walk. There’s a lot of potential here to create something special and to strengthen the arts and quality of life in our community.

Overall, the Cain Center project is a bit outside of the box, and because it’s so new and unique for the community it’s difficult for some people to wrap their heads around it and understand exactly what it is and what it isn’t. For instance; speaking of the grass roots art movement that Bella Love is fostering, which is at the other end of the arts spectrum from what The Cain Center will represent, I’m sort of fighting this stigma where some people tell me we’re just building this for the wealthy people, and that is simply not true. This is going to benefit everyone. It’s going to bring people together. It’s going to be a special place where everyone can go to

have fun, to learn, and to enjoy art in the wonderful downtown area of Cornelius. The Cain Center will bridge the gap between Bella Love's boots on the ground approach to facilitating and cultivating local artists, and the full embodiment of the arts that Cain will represent. We're all creating a stronger and more robust community through the power of the arts, and that is something transformative and beautiful. It will bridge gaps in our community while providing opportunities and a lot of enjoyment for years to come. It is something that I think everyone can get behind.



*Rendering of the view from indoors of the future Cain Center for the Arts*

No doubt, this is a huge project that's going to take everyone's help to bring to fruition. We've had private fundraising so far that was led by a generous \$5 million donation from Cornelius residents Ericka and William Cain, along with \$4 million from the Town of Cornelius. We're close to the \$25 million total needed and will be launching public fundraising events in the Spring of 2020. We encourage everyone to help out in any way they can by volunteering or donating. Whether it's \$5 or \$500, every little bit will help. At the end of the day the people of this town are going to be proud of what we've accomplished together, and the Cain Center will be a beacon of light and inspiration in this community for generations to come.



*Members of the Cain Center's Board of Directors and Executive Director with Bill and Ericka Cain – center (photo: Waldeck)*

The Cain Center for the Arts will offer performance art, education, gallery and community spaces designed to be beautiful, flexible, and close to home for residents of the Lake Norman region.

Our vision is simple: we want to empower children and adults alike to create, experience, and enjoy the arts, right here in the heart of the region where they live, work, and play. Conceptual plans include a 400 seat theater,

gallery space, event spaces, classrooms, and a community green space.”

For more information visit: <http://cainarts.org>

Read More of OTC’s related coverage:

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*



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