A GATEWAY TO THE ARTS

More than three million people a year now visit Detroit’s Midtown neighborhood, which has received a remarkable $4.4 billion in public and private investments over the past decade. Over the past five years in particular, the area has experienced rapid growth in residents, refurbished buildings and new construction, restaurants and bars, and retail outlets. The Shinola store alone welcomes 5,000 visitors a week.

Wayne State University has been a leader in fueling Midtown’s economic resurgence. In addition to community engagement and thoughtful investment, student housing and the Live Midtown program have brought in new residents. And, importantly, the strong efforts of Wayne State’s police department have created an area where students, residents and visitors feel safe and comfortable.

Wayne State will soon enhance the growing and vibrant area just south of campus by creating the Hilberry Gateway Performance Complex. This $48.6 million performance complex will strengthen Wayne State’s important role in Midtown and upgrade and expand the current Hilberry Theatre to establish a new venue for theatre, music, dance and arts-related events.

Built for the 21st century, the Gateway project will be a cultural anchor in an area brimming with new energy, economic vibrancy and artistic innovation.
Storied history leads to vibrant future

Since 1963, the Hilberry Theatre has been a vital part of the Wayne State University landscape. The theatre provides a training ground for actors, designers, stage managers and theatre managers—a place where they can hone their craft and grow from talented artists to skilled professionals. Now, there is a project that will further solidify Wayne State’s reputation as an artistic leader.

The Hilberry Gateway Performance Complex will begin with the construction of a new 350-seat main theatre on the corner of Cass and Forest, adjacent to the current venue. The new space will feature a full-thrust stage with appropriate wing space and a fly system. With these changes, the company will be able to pursue more complicated production schemes and smoothly transition between productions.

The facility will include new dressing rooms, make-up rooms, green rooms and production accommodations. New audio and visual booths will bolster the performances, allowing state-of-the-art audio, video and lighting technology during production. Administrative work for the theatre will take place in new office space located within the complex.

A modern café will be a highly visible and energetic space where guests mingle before and after events, during intermissions and beyond, while the patron lounge will allow invited guests to relax and socialize before the show. A gallery showcasing the incredible history of the Hilberry, with a variety of artifacts, photos and memorabilia, will be another gathering place.

Occurring simultaneously will be the construction of adjoining scenic, scenic art and costume studios, as well as scenery storage areas. With this enhanced space for behind-the-scenes activity, designers will be able to build sets on site and move pieces from storage to the stage efficiently and safely for the first time in the theatre’s history. Once the new theatre is completed, the current Hilberry Theatre will be reconstructed into the Gretchen Valade Jazz Center.
Gretchen Valade Jazz Center

In December 2015, Wayne State announced a major philanthropic investment in support of the Gateway project with a $7.5 million commitment from Gretchen Valade, noted philanthropist and chair of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation. The primary portion of her commitment—$5 million—will restore and update the current site of the Hilberry Theatre, which will be renamed the Gretchen Valade Jazz Center (GVJC).

The GVJC will be an active venue that will draw an array of audiences seeking the very best in music, dance and theatre. It will host up to two dozen external jazz events as part of the Detroit Jazz Festival, while 50 dates reserved annually for Wayne State’s Department of Music will feature student performances and recitals, faculty performances and related events.

The GVJC also will increase visibility for the dance program, providing a high-caliber venue for public performances. The 200-seat space will offer ample seating for parents, patrons, donors and interested members of the community. In addition, the space will enable the dance program to feature master classes and lectures.

A fresh approach

The Hilberry Gateway Performance Complex will herald a new approach to theatre at Wayne State. Faculty members have unanimously approved a move away from repertory theatre toward a model that allows for greater variety, better serves students, and reflects regional theatres across the nation. A new curriculum in musical theatre, for example, will create a series of performances that blend dance, music and theatre.

And for the first time, students in the Hilberry program will live together in a dedicated learning community. The Thompson Home, a Victorian building across from the new complex, will be transformed into a unique living and learning environment, augmenting students’ social and educational experiences while fostering a sense of community in the university’s performing arts programs.

Detroit’s new destination for the arts

The Hilberry Gateway Performance Complex will be a destination for residents and visitors alike. More than a place for theatre, the complex will feature a constellation of opportunities for artistic pursuit and appreciation. Support for the Gateway project will help ensure its fruition and the continued strength of the arts at Wayne State University and in Detroit.
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