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Ballet Fantastique moves forward to the grand opening of its new “City Center for Dance”

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Eugene’s downtown revitalization now includes dance! Ballet Fantastique’s new City Center for Dance is scheduled to open on September 12, 2010 in the former Tiffany’s Gold Cross Drug Store, a historic storefront location at 960 Oak. The bright, beautiful space with abundant character—including two walls of floor-to-ceiling windows, a two-story vaulted ceiling, and open layout—will anchor the east end of the Eugene City Council’s proposed eventual Art and Theater District.

“Eugene’s Art and Theater District may still be in the works, but we’re investing in it. We want to be part of making this dream held by so many in our community a reality,” said Artistic Director Donna Marisa Bontrager. “The Ballet Fantastique City Center for Dance will be a space where people in our community can see art being created, performed, and inspired.”

The City Center for Dance will house dance classes for the Academy of Ballet Fantastique, as well as the seven professional dancers of the Ballet Fantastique Chamber Company, and the organization’s multifaceted ballet seminars and outreach programming. For the first time since its original establishment (October 1 marks the organization’s 10-year anniversary), Ballet Fantastique will be able to consolidate all of these operations under one roof. In the beautiful-but-small current studio, tutus are literally piled to the ceiling, Academy classes have waiting lists, company rehearsals are cramped, and meetings and seminars must be held off-site completely.

Co-directors, co-founders, and mother-daughter team Donna and Hannah Bontrager are thrilled to see the organization grow. The original Ballet Fantastique space, less than one half the size of the City Center for Dance, is located just around the corner on 10th Avenue. The studio opened when Hannah was 16 years old.

“I vividly remember standing in the window before we moved in or renovated, looking in to this empty space and just *seeing* the future dancers, the training, that would happen there,” said Hannah. “Keeping our

beautiful studio—the place where we started all of this—and then also expanding around the corner as well is just a dream come true.”

The dream for expansion into the larger Oak Street storefront became a reality when the Bontragers and Ballet Fantastique’s dedicated network of board members and volunteers opened a letter from the prestigious Meyer Memorial Trust, awarding the organization \$24,930 as the lead gift for the City Center for Dance project.

“We framed the letter,” said Hannah. “We are still in awe of this generosity and this investment in our growth and our future. It’s really an acknowledgment of everything Ballet Fantastique does for and means to the arts in our community—and that feels so good.”

Such lead gifts are highly unusual in the arena of arts giving, since foundations usually want to be sure that organizations have all of the needed funding in place to fully accomplish a project before making an investment in the project. A quote from Meyer Memorial Trust about their gift to Ballet Fantastique for the City Center for Dance is available by request to the Trust.

Other funding and support has come from private donors in gifts ranging from \$10 to \$2,000, and a gift from the Dimmer Family Foundation in Washington state. Many Oregon businesses have stepped forward to help with building materials, including BRING Recycling and Moman Lumber in Roseburg.

In a letter of support for Ballet Fantastique and the project, Douglas Beauchamp, Executive Director of Lane Arts Council, said, “Notably, [Ballet Fantastique’s] commitment to Eugene’s downtown core is exemplary, indeed the only dance company that attracts families and students into the cultural center of the city. This suggests an essential function of the artist: to interact with all layers and styles of the people in the city’s urban core, its heartfelt place.”

The organization’s support network for the project also includes Mayor Kitty Piercy, who participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the City Center for Dance on July 2 as part of the First Friday Art Walk. In a letter of support for Ballet Fantastique, Mayor Piercy stated, “Over the past 10 years, Ballet Fantastique has played an important role in the community. It has managed to grow and flourish in difficult economic times. The expansion will enable Ballet Fantastique to build on its success and continue its positive work within our community.”

When the new City Center for Dance officially opens in Fall 2010, Ballet Fantastique will be able to double the size of its current pre-professional training academy, while maintaining the organization’s small student-to-teacher ratio. The studio will also provide open and drop-in Pilates, Yoga and ballet classes to residents of the Eugene community, as well as housing panel discussions and seminars for artists and educators, and informal events and open rehearsals that break down the choreographic process and preview the company’s season repertoire.

Just as the goal of the planned programming and the ultimate goal of the Center is to bring the City together to learn about, experience, share, and study dance, the process of renovating and outfitting the space has brought the organization together as well.

When the organization missed a final grant it was hoping for from Oregon Cultural Trust by just one point (the organization was ranked number 12 on a list of 11 grants awarded across the state), Ballet Fantastique had to work even more aggressively and creatively to pull the project off in the planned timeline. Car washes, a Golf Tournament Fundraiser at River Ridge Golf Course, and many other fundraising events have been held or are planned to raise the additional \$5,000 needed, and donations of building materials and professional services are also being accepted gratefully. A full list of planned events and needed materials is available at www.balletfantastique.org, where it is also possible to make a secure online donation.

Ballet Fantastique company dancers and students are taking their turns helping to paint and clean the space, and even Ballet Fantastique resident composer Jeremy DeKyle Schropp, board secretary Dianna Campbell-Bressler, and Ballet Fantastique photographer Dmitri Von Klein have taken their turns in the space, helping with drywall and mudding.

“We’re excited to see this happen. This project is a big deal. It means something for everyone who has a connection to Ballet Fantastique or who cares about the arts in our city,” said DeKyle Schropp.

The project coordinators are also reusing materials wherever possible, and several walls in the mezzanine loft were repurposed instead of being rebuilt completely. The organization’s goal is to make only one trip to the dump, with other materials not used being donated back to BRING and to high school shop classes.

Donna Marisa summed up the project’s central vision: “With your help we will return a vacant space to creative life. Together we will restore a piece of the city’s past in a way that contributes to its future. The Ballet Fantastique City Center for Dance will play an important role in the redevelopment of downtown Eugene. It is a participating symbol of the resurgence of the area and the culture that thrives here.”

To learn more about upcoming events at Ballet Fantastique and the new City Center for Dance—or to make a tax-deductible donation to the project online or by mail, visit www.balletfantastique.org.

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