

An Arts Center is born

By **Monica Deady**/ Staff Writer

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Construction on Watertown's long-anticipated regional arts center began last week, with a May opening already predicted.

The Arsenal Center for the Arts, which has been in the works for several years, will be constructed inside an existing building at the 37-acre Arsenal on the Charles site and include both classroom and performance spaces.

"It is so incredibly exciting," said Amy Imber, director of development of the Arsenal Center for the Arts. "It's happening. We've been waiting a long time and working hard."

Imber said construction company Richard White Sons was selected early last week and construction began almost immediately. Right now, the work has been minimal, she said, but said the building has been secured and initial things have happened.

The center will include a mix of interior spaces, including a 380-seat theater named for donor Charles Mosesian, a black-box performance space, classrooms, artist studios and galleries. With programming scheduled to take place morning through night, for people of all ages, the center will be a cultural facility and a regional resource.

Richard White Sons of Auburndale were selected for their "quality, integrity and history" Imber said.

The construction company, which boasts nearly 100 years in the business, has worked on projects for Harvard Business School, Dartmouth University, Boston College, Wellesley College, the New Bedford Whaling Museum and the First Church of Christ Scientist, as well as winning multiple local and state awards.

Michael Miner, executive director of Arsenal Arts on the Charles, said the construction company also had a history of working with the architect for the project, Amsler Woodhouse MacLean Architects.

"We wanted a contractor who could understand the complexity of the design," Miner said, who added that Richard White Sons also had ideas about cost savings.

The construction cost is \$5.75 million at the base, Imber said, but added that there would be other costs associated with it. So far, Watertown Arts on the Charles, the entity that oversaw the establishment and planning for the center, has raised more than \$6.5 million, and hopes to continue its final fund raising during construction.

Watertown Savings Bank provided the organization with \$1.2 million for construction financing, and Imber said they are still waiting for some longer pledged gift payments to be made.

Those who have been working closely on the project for several years are not the only ones who have been waiting.

The New Repertory Theatre, currently in a converted church in Newton, will become the resident professional theater company in the new Arsenal Center for the Arts complex.

"Excited doesn't exactly cover it," said producing artistic director Rick Lombardo about the start of construction. "We're ecstatic. We've been waiting for several years."

Lombardo said the organization hopes to move as soon as the building is finished, and may perform their final show of their regular season, "Into the Woods," in the new space.

He said the group had been looking for a place to relocate or build its own theater when they heard about the Arsenal center several years ago. Their current space, with 155 seats, had become too small, and Lombardo said he thinks the large theater at the new arts center will better suit their needs and still be local enough to serve their audience base.

An official groundbreaking ceremony will be planned for sometime in October, Imber said.

"We've waited a long time for this arts center," Imber said. "It's a major effort to build a major cultural institution."

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Photo Gallery



Workers begin construction on the Arsenal Center for the Arts, with a spring opening planned. - STAFF PHOTO BY KEITH E. JACOBSON

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