

# MoCo Arts breaks ground on new building in Keene

By PAUL MILLER Sentinel Staff 3 hrs ago (0)



No attendees were left out of Thursday's photo to mark the ceremonial groundbreaking for a new MoCo Arts facility on Roxbury Street in Keene. The \$5 million state-of-the-art facility is expected to open sometime next summer. All but a half million dollars has been raised.

Bill Gnade / Sentinel Staff



Like one might expect, Thursday's ceremonial groundbreaking for a new MoCo Arts facility on Roxbury Street in the city was rhythmic ... even performance-like.

There was no hiding the anticipation, as students sang, remarks were offered, and hard-hat-wearing, shovel-toting officials and dignitaries lightly tossed dirt into the air.

It was lightly scripted, perhaps, but the vibe was one of momentum.

"This is a re-energizing moment for the project," Katie Day, communications and marketing manager for MoCo Arts, said on the site prior to the groundbreaking.

Mike Blair, president of the MoCo board of directors, said the organization's state-of-the-art home will "allow a new hub of creative arts education ... to reach deeper into the community." And that, he added, "is really, really cool."

MoCo Arts' new two-story center will feature three full studios, a dedicated 200-seat black box theater, parking and offices. The building will be 17,000 square feet, compared to MoCo Arts' current 7,700 square feet on Railroad Street, where it has operated for all of its more than two decades.

"One of the things I first think of," John Hoffman, chairman of the project's fundraising effort, said, "is what this does toward downtown revitalization. This is in the center of town, an activity for family and kids.

"If you want to make long-term social progress, it starts with kids; kids who are socially engaged and sensitive. It's so important, and that's what we will have here."

The Keene-based MacMillin Company's big rigs were working and moving their own dirt at the site right up until the start of Thursday's ceremony, attended by more than 100 people.

It is a \$5 million project, of which all but half a million dollars has been raised. The goal, officials said, is to move into the new home next summer. The building will be on the property that formerly houses the Keene Family YMCA.

The fundraising campaign was 80 percent complete when it went public in June.

"It has all gone at remarkable speed," Hoffman said Thursday. "I'm positive we will be OK. ... The community recognizes the value that (MoCo) brings. And that value goes way beyond the MoCo family ... it's for the city, it's for everyone who lives here."

MoCo Arts is a nonprofit organization that provides arts education to children ranging from 18 months to 18 years old, and serves more than 2,300 kids a year. It offers dance programs in styles such as ballet, tap and hip-hop; a variety of theater programs; and a slew of camps.

Some two dozen of its students, ranging in age from 6 to 16, performed "Moving MoCo," a campaign song written by Deanna Zilske and Steve Cady, during Thursday's groundbreaking.

Day was giddy. The project, for her and all the MoCo team, is several years in the works. Thursday gave it a "sense of reality," she said.

"You get to come up for air for a moment," she said, "and at the same time realize how far we've come. This is solidifying; it sets the next phase in motion."

She pointed to the MoCo students waiting to sing. "There they are," she said, "standing next to a pile of dirt, and saying, 'I'm going to dance there someday.' It's awesome."

She acknowledged that the final part of the fundraising is always "the hardest push."

Blair, wearing a hard hat at the podium as he offered welcoming remarks, said the event Thursday "symbolizes what a bright future the MoCo organization has in store."