



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **COCA COMPLETES RENOVATION PHASE OF \$29M CREATE OUR FUTURE EXPANSION ANNOUNCES \$5M GIFT FROM KIM KUEHNER**

*Gift brings campaign total to \$41 million; New construction begins this summer*

**ST. LOUIS, JUNE 8, 2018**—COCA – Center of Creative Arts today unveiled significant renovations to its historic Erich Mendelsohn-designed University City building and announced a \$5 million gift to its Create Our Future Campaign from Kim Kuehner, a St. Louis philanthropist and retired business owner. This most recent gift brings the total raised to \$41 million to fund the community organization’s plans to grow its University City campus and build its endowment and reserves.

“Kim’s extraordinary gift is transformational for COCA and the community we serve,” said COCA Executive Director, Kelly Pollock. “Words cannot express my gratitude for not only this gift, but also for his infectious passion for our mission, especially our students.”

Kuehner’s gift also brings to three the number of local families who have committed \$5 million to support COCA’s growth and future. A new east wing will be named in honor of John and Alison Ferring, who led the campaign with a \$5 million first gift. Kuehner’s name will adorn the historic west wing of COCA’s building, and a new theatre will be named in honor of the Berges Family Foundation, which issued a challenge and matched \$5 million in gifts made to the campaign last summer. The new central gathering space, Centene Commons, will be named in recognition of a \$3 million lead corporate gift from the Centene Charitable Foundation.

A Community Open House, Saturday, June 9, celebrates the completion of the first phase of the ambitious project. Opening is the Staenberg Performance Lab, a sunlit central studio, rehearsal hall, and performance space. Also opening are new dance studios – Peacock Studio and Emerson Studio; The Gold Art & Design Studio – a flexible space for artists, makers and creators; and the Dierbergs Kitchen at COCA – to be used for culinary programs in addition to hosting and serving events.

“This is a milestone moment for COCA,” said Jesse Hunter, President of COCA’s Board. “We are excited to welcome the entire community into our beautiful renovated spaces and celebrate the commencement of COCA’s next chapter as we break ground on our expansion.”

Work will begin this summer on Phase 2 of the Create Our Future project, which will extend COCA’s current building to the east nearly doubling its campus. It is set to open in early 2020.

Designed by a partnership between Christner Inc. and Axi:Ome, COCA’s new east wing will include a state-of-the-art, 450-seat theater; new studios; a community commons area; and a safe and accessible location for families to drop-off and pick-up students. The expansion will allow COCA to serve more students in multi-disciplinary classrooms and studios and deliver innovative dance and theatre performances, while substantially growing the organization’s endowment, ensuring COCA will be able to serve the St. Louis community for years to come.

“I was instantly captivated by COCA’s kids and their stories of transformation, and recognized the possibilities this project provided for the region,” said Kuehner. “COCA’s vision for the future is bold, and I can’t think of a more exciting place in St. Louis right now.”

The Create our Future Campaign is the largest in the organization's history with a goal of \$45 million.

"We witness the life-changing power of arts education in the thousands of young people we serve each year, and we want to provide these transformative opportunities for even more kids," said Pollock. "As we expand, we remain focused on providing equitable access to our programs for everyone."

Key to the expansion was replacing COCA's parking, accomplished through a partnership with Washington University, which opened a shared parking garage adjacent to its 560 Music School Building this week.

COCA will remain open throughout construction, with some performances moved off-site. The renovations are complete just in time for COCA to welcome a total of more than 3,000 summer campers through its doors over the course of the summer.

Cheryl Holman chairs the campaign steering committee, with honorary chairs Alison and John Ferring. Members of the committee include Lisa Boyce, Bill Carson, Carolyn Gold, Tom Hillman, Jesse Hunter, Kristin Johnson, Lee Kaplan, N.S. "Jim" Knight, Ned Lemkemeier, Melissa Merlin, Dave Peacock and Donald Suggs.

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#### **About COCA**

Founded in 1986, COCA is the fourth largest multidisciplinary community arts center in the country, one of only 16 schools in the nation accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools (ACCPAS), and a national leader in innovative arts education. With a mission to enrich lives and build community through the arts, COCA serves 50,000 people of all ages and skill levels, from enthusiastic amateurs to emerging professionals—all taught by a faculty of distinguished arts educators. We provide meaningful arts experiences in our own studios, gallery and theatres as well as in schools, community centers and corporate settings in order to build a vibrant St. Louis that is creative, connected and inclusive. Visit [www.cocastl.org](http://www.cocastl.org) to learn more.

#### **About Christner Inc.**

Christner is a collaborative design firm bringing innovation, research and insight to the practice of architecture. The firm serves distinct markets that demand sophisticated planning and design solutions: healthcare, science and technology, education, and corporate. They also seek opportunities to expand their creative reach through the design of libraries, museums, conservatories and other special commissions. Its staff includes architects, planners, MBA's, urban designers, landscape architects, interior and graphic designers. Each discipline contributes rich experience and perspective – brought together through skilled process leadership, structured methods, and leading-edge technologies. With 50 years in practice, Christner is poised to discover tomorrow's solutions.

#### **About Axi:Ome**

Axi:Ome was formed in 2001 in Providence Rhode Island, primarily as an architectural research practice evolving from the public media projects of Sung Ho Kim. Heather Woofter joined in 2003 with eight years in full time architectural practice. Since then, Sung Ho and Heather balance teaching at Washington University with design practice, working with a variety of partners to help shape innovative design solutions. Sung Ho and Heather are involved in all phases of Axi:Ome's work in a desire for the projects to operate in a continuous dialogue at multiple scales, experimenting with shared ideas and concerns. Their work focuses on the concept that a building's spatial form and innovation are inextricably woven to one another and that architecture's progressive future lies in speculation, imagination, research and resolution of the intellectual development of design process.