



An Art Space for Everyone

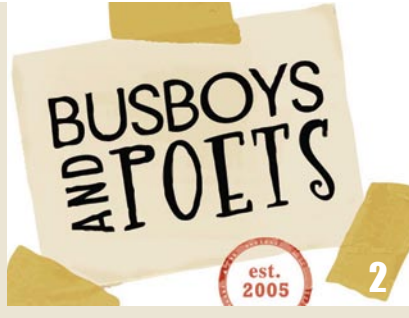
Standing in the second floor Great Hall, under the circular grand staircase, voices echo. “We’ll put a small stage here, for music acts and poetry readings,” Jon Palmer Claridge says. “We need some acoustical treatment so there’s not so much bounce.” Claridge, Program Director of the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division, is leading a tour of the former Newseum space, and imagining the inside transformed.

Every space will be used for the arts, even this space tucked under the stairs.

“We see this area as a Wi-Fi Town Square, with lots of tables and comfortable chairs.” And of course the small stage. The wide windows open out to a view of Wilson Boulevard, and the sunlight streams in.

What he’s describing is the County’s plan for a multidisciplinary cultural complex, with a black box theatre, a ballroom, an art gallery, a cafe, retail stores, and classroom space. It’s an exciting prospect. Right in the heart of Rosslyn, a gathering place: an Arts Space for Everyone.

The space, original home of the Newseum, is owned by Monday Properties, who is providing it to Arlington County rent-free for ten years, as part of Monday’s community benefit package for their re-development of another Rosslyn offer is for a “cultural or



1. Washington Shakespeare Artistic Director, Christopher Henley (R), Kathleen Akerley in *Richard II*
2. Busboys and Poets Restaurant
3. Synetic Theater's Artistic Director, Paata Tsikurishvili in *Hamlet*
4. Bowen McCauley Dance's Artistic Director, Lucy Bowen McCauley
5. Classika Theatre's presentation of *The Classical Fool*
6. Ellipse Arts Center
7. Rosslyn Art Complex

museum use,” and would allow the Arts Space time to grow.

“The Arlington community has been looking for a central arts space for almost forty years,” says Norma Kaplan, Chief of the Cultural Affairs Division. She notes that the County has had plans for an arts center at Courthouse Square. “But when this space opened up, we jumped at the opportunity. Rosslyn is so accessible, with the Metro stop just blocks away, and the highways so close. This is near Key Bridge and Memorial Bridge. It’s a wonderful location!”

As the Arts Center develops, Kaplan has planned carefully so that revenues will cover expenses. After free rent for the first 10 years, rent will escalate annually in years 11 through 15. A five-year renewal of the lease will be available at market rates. The original opening date projected for the Arts Center has a nice ring to it – 09-09-09 – but it is realistic to see the opening by the end of 2009.

The space is iconic and unusual, with its Dome and its circular floor plan, rooms spiraling off the central staircase in all directions. To the visionaries at the Cultural Affairs Division, the design is a large part of the space’s appeal. It will allow for several events and exhibits to be

open simultaneously, and they plan operating hours from 11:00 am to 11:00 pm daily.

Box office and fine crafts

On the first floor, there’s room for a retail shop of fine crafts, to be run by the Artisans Center of Virginia, now based in Waynesboro (see box).

Claridge is particularly excited about a Central Box Office on this level, where patrons can purchase tickets for every arts event in Arlington. “We’ve been wanting this for years,” he says. A booth and touch-screen kiosks will inform the public about events sponsored by all of Arlington’s arts groups, no matter what neighborhood they’re in.

Busboys and Poets

Escalators sweep patrons up to the second floor, with the Town Square area and its expansive street views. A cafe on this level, possibly run by Busboys and Poets, and the comfortable seating that Claridge envisions, will make this a popular place. Beyond the cafe are the Ballroom and Theater.

The Ballroom

The Ballroom is a cavernous hall, formerly the location of the Newseum’s

video wall. It will be fully covered by a wood dance floor. “This will be the largest ballroom in the region, other than Glen Echo,” says Claridge, who emphasizes the Ballroom’s flexibility. In addition to the wood dance floor, he says “we want to create a portable stage and install theatrical lighting.”

In addition to ballroom dances and dance lessons, the ballroom will be perfect for activities ranging from modern dance performances to Heritage Arts events, such as the Mongolian Children’s Festival, the Bolivian National Day celebration, or a Belly Dancing Festival.

Kaplan points out that many of these groups “represent important populations in Arlington and the region.” She wants to help bring their cultural richness to a wider audience, to foster greater understanding and enjoyment of the cultural traditions practiced in Arlington and the region.

In addition to offering space to cultural groups already in Arlington, Kaplan plans on programs with a strong international flavor. She envisions using the space to expand some of the popular programs they are already doing elsewhere in the County, such as cultural exchanges with Sister Cities, and concerts by international

performers, such as the ones they hire for the annual Planet Arlington festival.

Black Box Theatre

On the far side of the Ballroom, the former television studio will become a black box theater that will seat approximately 125 people. This will be the new home of the Washington Shakespeare Company. Claridge points out the future dressing rooms, talks about raising the lighting grid higher. It is a beautiful space, and more intimate than the Clark Street Theater, where the company currently resides. "The folks at Washington Shakespeare are quite happy," Claridge reports. "They really like the synergy of the other groups in the arts center."

Kaplan agrees, "It's all about cross pollination. We think having so many different groups together makes the space more interesting." And she hopes that the space will encourage audiences to try something new. "We want a vibrant place where you can come hang out, you can go to Hamlet and then take a dance class later that same day."

The Dome Theatre

The second theater is housed in a familiar architectural element of Rosslyn – the gigantic white dome atop Freedom Park. Accessed from a different section of the Town Square, the bulbous Dome Theater, which makes such an impression outside, from the street, is equally impressive inside. The 220 seats are raked along one side of the soaring sphere, facing a stage. This is expected to be home to Classika Children's Theater.

Claridge also would like this space to become a community forum. "This is perfect for cabaret, a film series, or small bands," he says, noting that community groups and individuals can step forward with ideas and produce their own events. "I'd like to see something different in this space every single night," he says.

Walking up the grand staircase to the third floor, Claridge points out that the Town Square space will be on two levels. "This would be a great place to curl up with your espresso and your laptop during the day, but it would also make a great club space in the evenings."

Ellipse Arts Center

The third floor will also be home to the Ellipse Arts Center. The gallery space is huge, and includes a classroom, the Arts Education Lab, plus a mini-cinema with

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Proposed Arts Partners

Most programming for the new Art Space will be provided by Arlington-based arts organizations currently performing in other Arlington locations. Several are losing their leases to redevelopment, or using school auditoriums or other alternative spaces. The Art Space offers attractions such as nearby restaurants and easy access to public transit, and, most importantly, a stable home for these organizations.

Washington Shakespeare Company

This well-loved theater company, known for its provocative, bold interpretations of classic works of theater (both time-tested and contemporary), is losing its lease on the Clark Street Theater in Crystal City. Its current space is convenient to Highway 395, but its closest neighbor is the parking lot of a tow truck company, and offers virtually no other amenities.

www.washingtonshakespeare.org

Ellipse Arts Center

An exhibition space already managed by the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division, the Ellipse Arts Center is currently hidden in an office highrise in Ballston. The County has long sought an alternate space that could bring in more foot traffic. The gallery's focus is on providing opportunities for artists, and developing an engaged and educated audience.

arlingtonarts.org/ellipseartscenter

Artisans Center of Virginia

The official State artisans center is currently operating a very popular gallery in Waynesboro, Virginia. They feature a wide range of traditional and contemporary crafts in clay, wood, metal, fiber, paper, and glass. A second space allows them to showcase more juried artists from throughout the state, and sell in an entirely different region.

www.artisanscenterofvirginia.org

Busboys and Poets

This popular restaurant, bookstore and gathering place, already making waves in Shirlington, has two Washington, D.C. locations. It creates an environment where shared conversations over food and drink allow the progressive, artistic, and literary communities to interact.

www.busboysandpoets.com

Classika Theatre

Currently wedged into a tiny space in a row of Shirlington retail stores, Classika, known for its innovative family theater and educational outreach programs, could use more space to grow. The Rosslyn location would also put them next to their partner theater company, Syntetic.

www.classika.org

Bowen McCauley Dance

Known for their range of contemporary dance that encompasses ballet and modern styles, Bowen McCauley Dance, which the *Washington Post* has called "the area's premier dance company," has been housed at Gunston Arts Center in South Arlington and the Schlesinger Center for the Arts in Alexandria.

www.bmdc.org

Jane Franklin Dance

Currently performs at the Gunston Arts Center, in an auditorium shared with a Middle School. Voted Best Dance Company in 2008 by the *Washington City Paper*, the company is known for cross-disciplinary collaborations with musicians, poets, filmmakers, and sculptors, and for integrating children and adults into performances with professional dancers.

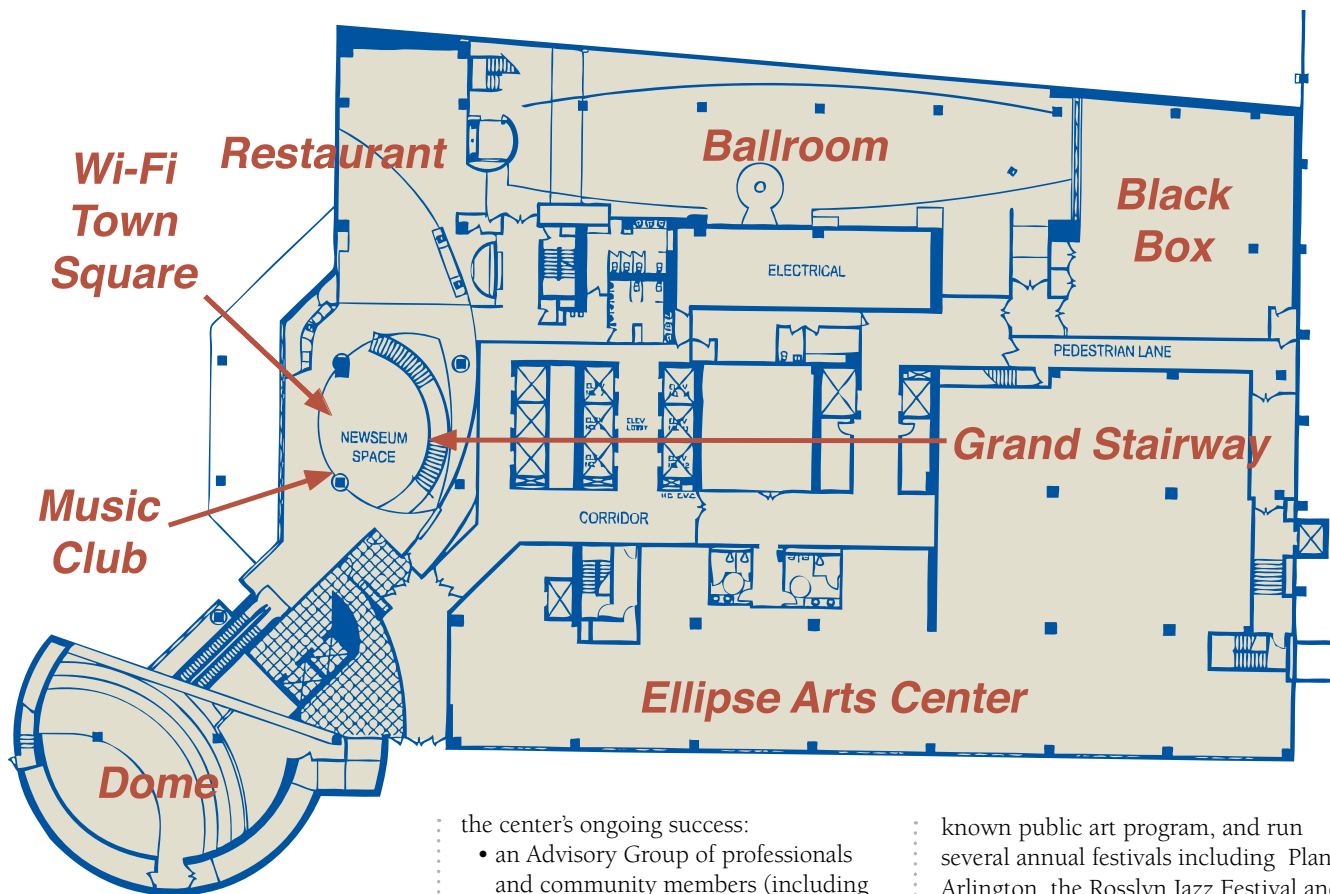
www.janefranklin.com

Rosebud Film Festival

Formerly housed at the Rosslyn Spectrum Theater, this annual day-long summer festival, sponsored by Arlington Independent Media, highlights innovative, experimental, unusual, and deeply personal films and video from Washington, Maryland and Virginia. Their quirky sensibility and wild range attract a hip, urban audience.

www.rosebudact.org

Other arts organizations that could also participate include: Educational Theatre Company, Hesperus, National Chamber Ensemble, Northern Virginia International Jewish Film Festival, Opera Theater of Northern Virginia, and Slapsticon Silent Comedy Film Festival.



36 seats for presenting film and video art. The space opens out to a terrace, overlooking Freedom Park, where an outdoor bar is planned, with bands performing in good weather. The terrace faces the Potomac River, and there's a nice view of the Washington Monument framed between two high rises.

Spectrum Theater

Kaplan sees the Spectrum Theater, just across the street, as part of the “arts campus.” It is proposed that the Spectrum would have its stage area extended, to better accommodate its role as the home of Synetic Theatre, among other arts groups. Future re-development of the Spectrum site could possibly mean a new state-of-the-art theatre there, as well.

How It Will Work

The former Newsroom has nearly 54,000 square feet of space, in addition to the existing Spectrum Theatre. In order to keep such a large, complex space operating seven days a week, Kaplan says about 20 employees will staff the center, not including sales clerks and waiters in the retail spaces. Some County employees will be assigned to the Arts Space, to work with 14 or so new hires. She estimates that the Art Space will bring “over 300,000 people into Rosslyn each year.”

Three teams will be formed to ensure

the center’s ongoing success:

- an Advisory Group of professionals and community members (including representatives from the Rosslyn Renaissance);
- a focus group of target participants in the 21-to-35 age group; and
- an Operating Committee of representatives from the groups using the space.

For the first years of implementation the Cultural Affairs Division will manage the facility in partnership with an advisory group comprised of community stakeholders and arts experts. During this time a 501c(3) will be formed and within three years the management of the center will transition to the not-for-profit organization – with the advisory group becoming the Board of Directors.

Arlington’s Cultural Affairs Division is uniquely suited to spearhead this ambitious project. Considered one of the top arts agencies in the country, they conceived and managed the Arts Incubator Program, which won a \$100,000 Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation and the John F. Kennedy School of Government. They currently manage six theaters, an art gallery and numerous support spaces for arts production in other Arlington locations, train heritage arts groups through their Hearabouts program, offer annual monetary grants to arts organizations of every discipline, manage a nationally-

known public art program, and run several annual festivals including Planet Arlington, the Rosslyn Jazz Festival and Arlington Arts al Fresco, a free summer performance series.

Funding for the \$3,000,000 operating budget will come from Arlington County, through a reallocation of existing arts resources and from the Rosslyn Business Improvement District, a strong advocate of maintaining the space for local arts groups. The Rosslyn BID has pledged up to \$1 million over five years to support operating expenses. “The BID is a strong and important partner for cultural events,” Kaplan says.

Funds to operate the center will also come from ticket income, rent, commissions against sales, catering, other government and private grants and sponsorships.

Claridge imagines an ideal patron: someone who comes in to buy handmade jewelry at the Artisans Center, then goes upstairs to get a cup of coffee and a snack, and decides to stay for a cabaret performance in the Dome Theater. Afterwards, they enjoy the current exhibit at the gallery, and then, before leaving, check out upcoming concerts and plays at the Box Office. “I hope people will come and hang out here, regardless of who’s performing,” he says.

Kaplan adds, proudly, “We are creating a new model for an arts center for the 21st Century. We do not know of any other arts center quite like this one.”