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Calgary's King Edward School to be reborn as creative hub cSPACE

By Marsha Lederman

Closed in 2001, the 103-year-old building will feature studios, production facilities and a 130-seat theatre

The King Edward School was built with sandstone in South Calgary in 1912, closed by the school board in 2001 and is about to rise again – as cSPACE King Edward. A groundbreaking ceremony will be held next Wednesday for the project: a 47,000-square-foot creative hub and arts incubator for a diverse group of artists and arts organizations. It will have studios, offices and production facilities, as well as exhibition and performance spaces – including a 130-seat theatre built in a new glass wing.

The idea is to bring artists, non-profits and creative entrepreneurs together "to collaborate, feed off each other's energy and create new work," cSPACE president and chief executive Reid Henry says. "I'm very interested in this building being a place where every facet of the cultural and creative sector come together, so whether you're working in community projects or non-profit, performance art or commercial art, even, ... we want to be a space for them to incubate their ideas."

The building is scheduled to open in late 2016 with tenants such as the Alberta Craft Council, the experimental company Theatre Encounter and the collaborative arts centre Studio C.

Outside the LEED Gold project, an arts-infused park will have four art cubes for pop-up works of public art and tiny exhibitions.

cSPACE bought the site in inner-city, up-and-coming Marda Loop from the school board in 2012, master-planned the space and subdivided it, selling off two parcels of land to private developments (a seniors' complex and Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired luxury condos). It has raised 85 per cent of the \$28-million project goal, with funding from the city, the province, the Calgary Foundation and others – as well as that land sale.

The project is expected not just to make a difference in the neighbourhood, but to help fuel the cultural renewal happening in Calgary.

"There's an energy here," says Mr. Henry, pointing to projects such as the National Music Centre and the new central library. "There's wonderful cultural momentum in this city, but what has kind of been passed over is that small, ground-level arts organization that is struggling for space in this city because of our real estate cycle and our energy cycle. It's really, really tough on our small non-profits and artists, so we're trying to aggregate that demand into a powerful, community-building place."

He adds: "I think for a city of 1.2 million, our artists and our small theatre [companies] deserve a better environment."

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