

Project Focus: MCC Performing Arts Center

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On Oct. 24, Mesa Community College (MCC) unveiled the campus' new Performing Arts Center (PAC), a project that took nearly five years to complete, from concept to finish, and was a complete renovation of the old Harkins Fiesta 5 movie theatre at the southeast corner of the campus, which originally opened in 1979 and closed in May 2009.

The PAC will primarily support MCC's music and dance programs, allowing the college to host many performances on campus which formerly were held off site due to insufficient space. The grandiose PAC design included adding a 460-seat educational and entertainment theatre venue to the existing Harkins building. In addition to the performance space, the remodeled theater includes a band room, choral room and production support space. MCC also acquired the old Fudrucker's building adjacent to the theatre to use as a storage facility.

Designed by Jones Studio of Phoenix and built by Layton Construction Group, many of the elements of the old building, like the Fiesta 5 sign and the red seats of the original theater, were incorporated into the new building as an artistic nod to the origins of the building.

Brian Furling of Jones Studio said the design of the project was slow and deliberate in order to produce an ideal concept for MCC's vision.

"We met with the music department extensively to discuss the concept. We asked what some of their most loved music musical pieces were and designed the building with those in mind. For example, the north front entryway is an homage to George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. We took a spectrogram of



The Performing Arts Centre, renovated from the former Harkins Fiesta 5 includes a 460-seat theatre.

the frequencies of the music and translated it into the design of the entrance wall," Furling explained.

"The architecture firm did a beautiful job. They were charged with taking all of our input and creating a formal design, as they did with our Rhapsody in Blue entry, that we are so pleased with," said Dr. James C. Mabry, Ph.D, MCC vice president of Academic Affairs.

MCC Facilities Manager Richard Cluff said that Associated Mechanical Engineers handled the mechanical, plumbing and fire protection for the Performing Arts Center, but that MCC has its own staff of HVAC technicians that installed the new air conditioning units.

"The facility is pretty much two buildings. One part has 12-13 rooftop units on it and the theatre has two, large ground units," Cluff explained. "The install went very well, but with a facility that size, there are still some bugs to work out, like figuring out what a

comfortable temperature is in a theatre filled with 462 people, with stage lights and machinery going."

The electric work was performed by Woodward Engineering, and Cluff said the contractor had to do a complete gut.

"The electric is new all the way through," said Cluff. "It has LED fixtures, daylighting, and skylights, too."

Dr. Mabry mentioned that one key point to keep in mind is that the MCC PAC is not just a performing space, but an education space.

"For example, every theatre has a control box in the rear designated for lighting and sound, but most are so small that they only allow for one or two occupants. The box in the Performing Arts Center is much larger and allows for lighting and stage craft students to learn in a hands-on environment," he said.

MCC Dean of Instruction Dr. Rodney Holmes stated, "In the past, MCC held almost 100 performances around the East

Valley that will now have a home in a state-of-the-art teaching and performance facility. It will help us reduce the expenses for renting performance space and decrease the demands on the Theater Outback, which will now only house the Theater department."

"The new Performing Arts Center and Art Gallery, combined with the remodeled Theatre Outback provides MCC new and updated facilities to showcase the talents of students, faculty and staff in cutting edge venues while providing opportunities for community members to enjoy the performing arts. The new PAC will have a positive impact on the Fiesta District revitalization efforts," Holmes said.

"The new performance center is beautiful. It will engage students in academic learning, promote retention, promote interactive learning, and help students reach industry standards in lighting technology and sound. The project went very well. We had a good contractor and team, really outstanding," said Mabry.

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