

Alfred University to dedicate new Miller Theater

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Alfred University will dedicate its newest building - the Miller Theater - in a ceremony at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 15, in the new proscenium theater that is the heart of the new facility. Presiding at the ceremony will be Peter Cuneo, chair of the board of trustees. The by-invitation-only ceremony will be followed by a performance of "MOTOR" by the Brian Brooks Moving Company, which is also by invitation only. The public may see the performance at 8 p.m. Saturday. Admission for the Saturday performance is free, but reservations are required. Marlin Miller Jr., a 1954 alumnus of Alfred University, as well as a chairman emeritus and current member of the Board of Trustees, donated \$23 million - part of a \$35 million gift announced in 2006 - to build the new theater, which is connected to the Miller Performing Arts Center, which Miller also gave to the University and which opened in 1995. The new building is "an exceptional facility that will showcase the work of our students in Performing Arts and enhance what we offer to the community," said President Charles M. Edmondson. With the addition of the 498-seat theater, new costume shop, dressing rooms and choral rehearsal studio, all found in the new building, as well as the facilities in the original Miller Performing Arts Center, Alfred University will have a performing arts complex that "rivals anything found at much larger schools, and even theaters in major cities." The new theater is housed in a 31,000-square-foot building connected - visually and physically - to the existing Miller Performing Arts Center. Architect Bruce Wood of Kallmann McKinnell & Wood Architects, Boston, designed the original structure with the addition of a theater in mind. The new building is located to the north of the original structure. Both are built of brick. The theater completes the performing arts complex first envisioned by Miller in 1991. At street level, the new building has a lobby, with a wall of glass that faces State Street and presents the public view of the new facility. At the time of the ground-breaking in 2008, Wood explained, "The new structure is designed to relate to phase one, but to also project a more public image." Inside is "effectively a single performance space, with support areas for performers and the public." As Wood explained, the original building, which has won architectural awards, is "upside down," with the main spaces on the upper levels and the faculty offices on the lower levels. "The building has two scales: the large scale of the valley side, where the practice rooms overlook the open landscape, and the small scale of the campus side, where individual rooms overlook the street." Rather than rising above the lobby level, the new building takes advantage of its hillside location, with the bulk of it not visible from State Street. The performance space is designed to accommodate music, dance and theater productions, with a key element being an orchestra pit that can easily be converted into an extension of the stage, bringing musicians and dancers closer to the audience, Wood noted. The stage itself is about 3,000 square feet. Moveable orchestra shells allow the stage opening to be adjusted, depending upon the size of the production. Acoustics are an important consideration in any performance space; the theater in Miller features unusual wood panels that enhance the acoustics. Lighting and sound systems are considered to be state-of-the-art.