

Cohen Arts Center benefits art and business students

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Art and business students at Alfred University will both benefit from the second phase for the Cohen Center for the Arts on Main Street in the village of Alfred. With a gift from Michele and Martin Cohen, the University is renovating the interior of the former Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) fraternity house on Main Street. The first floor of the Victorian-era house is being remodeled as a gallery where work by student artists will be exhibited. Running the gallery - from planning the shows to staffing the gallery - will be a joint effort by students in the School of Art & Design and the College of Business. AU Trustee Michele Cohen is enthusiastic about the idea. "The art gallery will give art students some practical experience, a chance to learn the business of being an artist." "A gallery that is operated on a cooperative basis by students from business and art is another example of the interdisciplinary opportunities that are a hallmark of an Alfred University education," said AU President Charles M. Edmondson. "We already have business faculty teaching art students who want to open their own studios how to run a business, and art faculty teaching marketing students the fundamentals of graphic design," noted Dr. William Hall, associate provost and interim dean of the College of Business. "The gallery takes the collaborative efforts one step further." Joseph S. Lewis III, dean of the School of Art & Design, said the gallery will feature "student-centered shows," as well as exhibitions of work by Master of Fine Arts degree candidates and visiting artists. "There has been lots of student interest" in the gallery, which Lewis confirmed will be operated "as a joint venture - one of several being discussed - between art and business." The second floor of the house, which received an exterior facelift as part of phase one, is being converted into two apartments for artists-in-residence or visiting faculty. Michele Cohen, who joined AU Board of Trustees in February 2002, said she and Marty "decided we wanted to make a gift to the University that would support the School of Art & Design. We wanted to honor our son Adam (who received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from AU in 2003) and his professors, who inspired him, nurtured him and became his friends." Phase one of the project also included construction of the new 8,000-square-foot Cohen Studio, located behind the original house, to provide attractive new space for the Freshman Foundation Program. "So far (the Cohen Studio) has been terrific!" Ted Morgan, chair of the Freshman Foundation Program, said. The facility replaces the old Music Annex that the Foundation program used for about 10 years. "The new studio offers more space than what we had before. It is open, flexible and able to accommodate a variety of activities," Morgan added. The location of the Cohen Center for the Arts took on a poignant dimension, Michele Cohen said. One of her first assignments upon joining the AU Board of Trustees was to serve on the Trustees' Task Force on Greek Life. Prompted by the death of Benjamin Klein, a junior business major and ZBT member who died in the creek behind the house in February 2002, the Task Force recommended that the University abolish fraternities and sororities. "This project allowed the University to create a space that's truly needed by the School of Art & Design; it involves the historic restoration of a 150-year-old house; it brings back to useful life a house with a somewhat tarnished image; and it demonstrates Alfred University's commitment to Main Street," Cohen said. Robert R. McComsey, chairman of the Alfred University Board of Trustees, was especially appreciative of the Cohens' gift for all of those reasons, but most of all because of its connection with Ben Klein. "At the time of his memorial service, I expressed the dream that some good could come out of that tragedy," said McComsey. "That dream came true, thanks to these two people - Michele and Marty Cohen."