

11 Phoenix groups unite to form Central Arts District



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Major arts-scene players in city join forces on branding the area and offering discounts.



(Photo: David Kadlubowski/The Republic)

Some of the biggest players in the Phoenix arts scene have joined forces to create the Central Arts District, a grouping of arts and cultural venues and groups within walking distance of each other, similar to the popular Roosevelt Row Arts District and Grand Avenue Arts and Small Business District.

The new district is meant to coordinate the thousands of performances, exhibitions and shows held in the area each year and raise the visibility of its members.

Founding members are the Phoenix Art Museum, Heard Museum, Phoenix Theatre, Arizona Opera, Phoenix Center for the Arts, Playhouse on the Park, Phoenix Community Alliance, Arizona School for the Arts, Hance Park Conservancy, Metro Arts Institute high school and Viad Corporate Center, which will soon change its

name to Central Arts Plaza.

"Art-goers don't attend just one organization, they attend multiple arts organizations, so informing them that we're all there and working together is going to be fantastic," said Vincent VanVleet, managing director at the Phoenix Theatre.

The district is bounded by Seventh Street and Seventh Avenue between Roosevelt Street and Virginia Avenue, a swath known for its concentration of big-ticket arts venues.

The Arizona Opera is across the street from the Phoenix Art Museum and Phoenix Theatre, all mere feet from the light-rail stop at McDowell Road and Central Avenue.

About \$60million has been invested in the area in recent years, through the expansions of Phoenix Theatre and the Phoenix Art Museum and construction of the Arizona Opera headquarters.

Although the idea of creating the district has been discussed for about 20years, VanVleet said, the conversation became earnest after Arizona Opera opened its new location and people weren't sure how to describe where it was located. Street signs call the area the Uptown Arts District, and there's a Midtown Museum District Neighborhood Association, but neither name fit, he said.



The new Arizona Opera Center building. (Photo: Harrison Hurwitz/Handout)

"It was that moment that inspired some of us to come together and say, 'We really need to brand this area,' " VanVleet said.

The first step is making the unification official. Specifics on a website, branding, cross-promotional events and deals for patrons, such as a multiorganizational pass, are in the preliminary stages. The group owns the domain name CentralArtsDistrict.com but is working together to create a website that can be populated with the 2,000 events member organizations put on each year.

Uniting the district also could inspire collaborative work. For instance, Arizona Opera's recent take on "Don Pasquale" was set in the golden age of Hollywood, inspired by the Phoenix Art Museum's "Hollywood Costume" exhibition, said Ryan Taylor, the opera's general director.

"We're looking with a more critical eye at how our work can magnify those of our partners," Taylor said.

The district is close to the Grand Avenue arts district and borders Roosevelt Row, a group of restaurants, galleries and boutiques south of the district. Grand Avenue activist Beatrice Moore said the new district probably will help boost traffic in Roosevelt Row and vice versa.

"It's creating a bridge between the two," she said. "It might get patrons of bigger institutions to come south, and get people who go out and hang at little galleries to patronize museums."

VanVleet said cross-promotion will help all three arts districts.

"I don't think we're in competition with each other. In fact, I think the rising tide floats all boats," he said. "Phoenix has suffered from a reputation that you had to go someplace else if you wanted to see great theater, just as an example, and this initiative is really reinforcing that a renaissance is occurring across the Valley."

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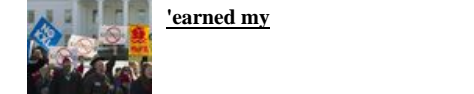
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