



Michele Stanners, from left, executive director of The Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society, Reid Henry, president and CEO of cSPACE Projects and Troy Emery Twigg, the cultural society's artistic director, tour the renovated King Edward School in Calgary on Thursday. The school will soon be a gathering place for artists. **MIKE DREW**

School makes way for artistic ventures

First tenants named for building undergoing \$33.5M transformation

ERIC VOLMERS

In 1914, William Aberhart staged the Calgary Board of Education's first theatrical play with students from King Edward School. The future premier of Alberta was then principal of the school, which had been built two years earlier.

He thought drama would be a good way for the students to learn elocution and public speaking. It was the middle of February and, at the time, in the middle of nowhere. But Albertans came from far and wide to see the production.

So, it's fitting that the century-old school in south Calgary, which was decommissioned in 2003, will soon be a gathering place for artistic endeavours.

"We've got arts cred from 100 years ago," jokes Reid Henry, president and chief executive of cSPACE Projects, the organization that is transforming the 113-year-old inner-city building at 1721 29th Ave. S.W. into an arts incubator.

On Thursday, the project took the next step, announcing the 29 tenants that will be occupying the space beginning in December.

Media were invited to take a hard-hat sneak-peek tour of the facility, which is still very much under construction.

But eventually the \$33.5-million project will house organizations

such as the Alberta Craft Council, The Alberta Magazine Publishers Association, The Alexandra Writers' Centre Society, The Rozsa Foundation and The Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society, among other groups.

Alberta College of Art and Design instructor Brian Batista, sculptor and jewelry artist Shona Rae and filmmaker Ramin Eshraghi-Yazdi are among the artists who will have studios there.

Henry said cSPACE could have filled the spaces "three times over" given the interest from city artists and organizations. He said tenants were chosen on the basis of a "four C's" philosophy: creativity, community, collaboration, change.

"We were interested in trying to find creatives who wanted to be a part of the changing Calgary landscape, they want to shape it," he said. "We wanted people who could see the physical platforms that we provided — whether it's the technology, whether it's the space, the rehearsal spaces, the mix of spaces we offer, the outside infrastructure — as tools to amplify what they want to do to make Calgary a more interesting city."

"It sounds ambitious and it sounds like, holy crap, who could fill all those things? But you'd be surprised about the depth of the organizations and the artists we

chose to propel that forward."

The artists and organizations were given flexible leases, from one to 10 years, at below-market rental rates. The 47,500-square-foot facility will eventually include a 150-seat theatre, to open in the fall of 2017.

The project received capital funding from the Calgary Foundation, City of Calgary, Canadian Heritage and the Province of Alberta.

But the facility's operations will be self-sustaining and not receive government subsidies, Henry said.

For Roy Emery Twigg, artistic director of the Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society, the new organization's new space will lead to broader collaborations.

"We are very community oriented," he said. "For elders and children, it's going to be a great space. We have everything here. We don't have to go all over town. Everything is housed under one space."

The Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society oversaw a theatrical production in 2014 that explored the historical significance and implications of Treaty 7, featuring musicians, dancers and poets.

"Part of my vision is continuing to build those relationships with other artistic organizations to explore other ideas surrounding the treaty — we talk about the aftermath, the events leading up to," he said. "It makes us very accessible to other organizations to expand on those collaborations. Partnerships is the way to do it now."

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