



Greeting, Cougar History Buffs.....with major progress being made on our new library this month, we thought it would be a good time to go back and re-visit our LAST major capital project....our Performing Arts Center, which was opened in 2003. Here's a write-up from the April 20, 2002 *Arizona Republic*, along with the architect's rendering, right after the groundbreaking....

SMCC theater dream come true

Work begins on performing-arts center

By Connie Cone Sexton
The Arizona Republic

Jerome Garrison never gave up his dream for South Mountain Community College to get a performing-arts facility.

He just never expected it to take 18 years.

Even when college leaders agreed to the project, even after taxpayers came through with the money, it wasn't quite

real for Garrison.

Until Monday. After the groundbreaking, with its speeches and the turning of soil. Only then could he finally enjoy the excitement.

"I can't explain how thrilled I am," said Garrison, chairman of communication, fine arts and developmental studies at the college.

He submitted his first proposal for the project in 1983.

"I was rejected," Garrison said. "But I kept submitting to faculty to get the concept and idea going. And it finally happened."

Plans call for a 24,600-square-foot building, including a 350-seat theater, a stage, an orchestra pit, a control suite, dressing rooms and a lobby.

An additional 7,600 square

See SMCC Page 6



Jones Studio Inc.

An artist's rendering shows the entrance of the new South Mountain Community College Performing Arts Center.

From Page 1

feet will include four classrooms, two for multipurpose use, one for dance instruction and the other for a black-box theater space that could be arranged as a recording studio, experimental theater or rehearsal space.

A scene shop, costume shop and makeup lab will be included.

The project cost is \$9.9 million, to be paid for with about \$7 million from revenue bonds and the balance from general obligation bonds.

The project architect is Jones Studio Inc. Layton Southwest is handling the construction. Both are Phoenix companies.

When the performing-arts center opens in fall 2003, it will be the tallest building on campus, but that's not the only reason the college president believes it will get plenty of notice.

"We're hoping that it will be a beacon for the community," Ken Atwater said. "We're just really excited about it being a viable community outreach center and hope people will

join us and take advantage of it."

He envisions various community groups using the facility: "Not only local high schools but maybe churches or business groups."

Garrison expects the center will help draw in many more students.

"It has always been a challenge to recruit students who are passionate about the arts, and we have lot of them in community," he said.

South Mountain couldn't offer them the same experience that Phoenix College had with

its arts facilities.

"I look at this center as building a bridge to the community," Garrison said.

It was worth the wait, the Phoenix resident added.

"I tell everyone it was like preparing for a concert and it took 18 years for us to actually perform," said Garrison, who has been a music instructor for a number of years. "This was just the longest rehearsal we've ever had."

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