



Report to the Community

2014-15





Arts Commons

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Cover: Behind-the-scenes photo from Arts Commons video shoot with Eve Hell. © Tasha Komery. Left page: Arts Commons. © Marnie Burkhart

OUR VISION:

A creative and compassionate society,
inspired through the arts.

OUR MISSION:

To bring the arts... to life.



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New signage at Arts Commons. © Tasha Komery

What's in a name?



“Arts” Includes all forms of creative human expression.

“Commons” Derived from the old town square concept where ideas are shared, people from all walks of life gather, and different perspectives are welcomed.



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Welcome to your

Left page: Lila Downs, part of the BD&P World Music Series, Jack Singer Concert Hall. © Richard Lam. **Right page (Clockwise from top-left):** Born to Fly, part of Art!Flicks. © Richard Lam. Arts Commons, Downtown Calgary, Arts Commons centre court. © Tasha Komery. Jack Singer Concert Hall lighting booth. © Tasha Komery



Arts Commons



How did we get here?

In spring of 2014, we entered into a rebranding exercise in response to the need to replace the outdated EPCOR CENTRE name, modernize our public-facing brand, and reshape perceptions around our complete offering, better reflecting our current position today and our goals for the future. **It wasn't easy.**

We started our transformation in a very deliberate way over 5 years, including a revisit of our past and an exploration of what we and our community wanted our future to look like. When it came time to rebrand, we engaged and met with an inclusive group of community members and key stakeholders to refine and determine this organization's role today as a key contributor to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and well-being of Calgarians and visitors alike. We remained open in our minds and hearts to criticism, and sought solutions together to ensure we were doing the right thing, aiming to be our best, always.

The outcome of these conversations is what you are now seeing and experiencing, a year in the making. On the surface, you will see a new look, improved wayfinding, more public spaces, upgraded venues, greater accessibility, and new arts and education initiatives. At greater depth, you will see deeper community investment, more collaborative opportunities with both our community and our resident companies, and increasing support from our most loyal patrons and donors.

Today, Arts Commons is more than just a “centre for performing arts”. It is an inspirational gathering place for all Calgarians and visitors alike. We are a space, both physical and metaphorical, that stimulates senses, triggers emotions, challenges assumptions, starts conversations, and opens minds. Through the support of our community, Arts Commons offers our visitors, stakeholders, and supporters the place and opportunity to gather and co-create meaningful memories, shape a more compassionate and creative society, open minds, and inspire others.

Thank you to our resident companies, community partners, artists, donors, sponsors, volunteers, all three levels of Government, media, political leaders, and YOU, for your continued and inspired engagement with us.

This is your Arts Commons. We are proud to share it with you and grateful for your role in imagining our collective future.

~ Johann Zietsman President & CEO





Left page: Arts Commons is located across from Olympic Plaza. © Marnie Burkhart. **Right page (Clockwise from top-left):** The newly-opened Ca'puccini Theatre Café from The Teatro Group in Arts Commons. © Richard Lam. The Hot Sardines, part of BD&P World Music Series, Jack Singer Concert Hall. © Richard Lam. Kids at the Calgary International Children's Festival, Engineered Air Theatre. © Kelly Hofer. Artist Talk with Natalie Lauchlan, The Ledge Gallery. © Richard Lam.



What a year!

More than any other year, Arts Commons engaged local makers, creators, and contractors to help usher in our new era. We worked closely with our sign companies to help give our exteriors a fresh new look, and improved our wayfinding and navigation systems to help our patrons find their way to their venues. Exterior lighting was installed as well, making ourselves a brighter, more welcoming place for communal gathering.

Ca'Puccini, a member of the highly-regarded Calgary-based Teatro Group, became our brand new Centre Court café in January 2015. In June 2015, we also introduced building-wide Telus wifi for the public to begin sharing their experiences, no matter which venue they are in.

Behind-the-scenes, we installed new air handling and ventilation throughout the entire facility, installed energy-efficient LED lighting, renovated the acoustics of the Big Secret Theatre and Motel, and fixed our parkade entrance ramp, in service of the building's various life-cycle needs.

All of these changes, big and small, were done for the same simple purpose: to make sure that our guests have the best possible experience, from the moment they excitedly walk into our building, to the moment they leave, more enlightened, inspired, and hopeful.

Arts Commons Impact

Includes all resident company, partner, and third party events and performances.



1,215
Public events held,
between 315 community
organizations

1,754
Volunteers
involved

22,702
Volunteer hours
contributed

462,100
Tickets distributed
(paid and given)

53,403
Students attended
youth-oriented
performances

1,002
Artists engaged
or employed

238
Full time
Equivalent
jobs



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Students from St. Philip Fine Arts School spending the day in the new Arts Commons multi-purpose space, The Hub. © Richard Lam

Committed to Education

Imagine learning about geometry using theatre lights.
Or about atoms and molecules from a professional dancer?

We believe everyone is unique, and therefore our learning too must be unique. Last season, we piloted the **Hub for Inspired Learning**, a program in conjunction with Campus Calgary/Open Minds, aiming to teach core subjects in new and different ways. We knew we were truly making a difference when we had a breakthrough moment with one of the students during a creative exercise: a selectively mute Grade 4 student spoke in class for the first known time. Witnessing this was both inspiring and unforgettable. It reminded us of the importance of the work we do.

At The Hub, students have time each day to observe, focus, be inspired, reflect, and record observations about their week-long experiences at Arts Commons. The learning is interdisciplinary and inclusive, with parents and volunteers also getting involved. Subjects such as math, science, and social studies are interwoven with music, drama, and art, supporting student learning beyond the classroom walls. Students learn to slow down and see the world with all its nuances, gain enhanced writing skills, and take ownership of learning that will last a lifetime.

The space that became The Hub was also a dramatic transformation. After countless meetings with designers, and building code supervisors, we were able to build a new multi-purpose room on the +15 Level. It boasts a sprung floor ideal for dancing, and when not used by students, is capable of hosting meetings, rehearsals, and receptions.

“I need to emphasize that art makes my children smile and enjoy life. Happy children learn well together - I saw this during the Open Minds Arts Commons program.”

– Kristi Soderman, P.Eng.



Another example of our commitment to education includes Arts Commons' collaboration with the Calgary Association for the Development of Music Education (CADME), which introduced more than 600 students to The Marcus Roberts Trio. Led by one of the greatest jazz pianists of our time, Marcus Roberts, the week culminated in an advanced masterclass with some of Calgary's best high school jazz musicians. It was a chance for these young, aspiring musicians to meet their heroes, to learn from the masters, and later to hear The Marcus Roberts Trio perform live in the Martha Cohen Theatre. This was made possible, in part, thanks to TD Bank Group, who signed on this season as the title sponsor for our Jazz series.

In total, Arts Commons and its resident companies engaged 53,403 students and over 2,700 Calgary Board of Education teachers and staff this season. In May, Arts Commons was presented with the Lighthouse Award from the Calgary Board of Education, recognizing us for our years of dedicated service to student and teacher learning.

Whether helping students integrate their learning or introducing them to jazz masters; attending a presentation from *National Geographic Live* or a student performance from Theatre Calgary, Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, or Downstage; or more directly experiencing the fun and inspiration of One Yellow Rabbit or the Calgary International Children's Festival, the impact Arts Commons had on young people this year will reverberate for decades.



The Marcus Roberts Trio Masterclass, part of the TD Jazz Series. © John Anderson

A Place for Arts and Artists

What follows are just a few examples of how our own resident company, Arts Commons Presents, expanded and extended our artist interactions this season. With the ongoing sold-out success of *National Geographic Live* and PCL Blues, we added shows to double both series, allowing artists to share their stories with twice the amount of Calgarians across multiple days. Americana icon Rosanne Cash graciously joined our Founders Circle for a special reception and Q&A. And Visual & Media Arts grew, as we programmed a collaborative exhibition with the Calgary International Children's Festival, hosted receptions and art parties in conjunction with our Art!Flicks screenings, and even welcomed a new family member: Tiny Gallery's mini-plinths now on exhibit in our +15 hallways.

We also refurbished an under-utilized space for visual arts and transformed it into The Lightbox Studio, a unique experimental exhibition and studio space for artists and patrons to interact. Calgary artist Melinda Topilko offered an ever-changing exhibit of kitsch ceramics and mixed media in vibrant colours that commented on female roles in society, creating surprising and important conversations with the public. The Lightbox was voted, by *FFWD Weekly*, "the new gallery to watch for" in this first year of exhibitions.

"I really enjoy interacting with the public, especially when I can talk about art. I think it is important for the public to not only be able to see art, but also how it's made and who makes it." – Melinda Topilko

Artist engagement continued when Arts Commons Presents welcomed Alberta musician Kat Danser as our Blues Artist-In-Residence. Throughout the year, Kat extended deeper into our community than any other artist to date. She enlightened our Founders Circle members with stories of Blues history, hosted a discussion at an Art!Flicks screening about cultural song-catchers, and spoke to Calgarians about women in Blues music with Canadian Blues icon, Shakura S'Aida. She taught school groups how to write a Blues song and coached kids in the Adolescent Day Treatment Program on the healing power of music, creating connections and enriching lives.

“No skillful psychotherapy, no medication, no hospital stay could ever really come close to what [Kat] gave them today.” – Dr. Ursula Zanussi

These kinds of initiatives build authentic and meaningful relationships between arts and community. As a civic and community partner, our vision is to provide artistically diverse experiences and connect artists with Calgarians, hopefully inspiring others to do the same.

In total, Arts Commons Presents engaged 422 artists this season, and whether they were on stage, speaking at a lecture, working in our spaces, or exhibiting their work, we hope you were impacted by some of them. Including the contribution of all our resident companies, a total of 1002 artists were featured in the facility in 2014-15.







“The Arts Commons Artist-in-Residence opportunity was the highlight of my career... I was supported to grow, integrate and challenge myself in ways that I had not experienced previously.” – Kat Danser

Left page (Clockwise from top-left): Rosanne Cash (right) talks about her career at Founders Circle event. © Will Young. (2nd and 3rd) Melinda Topilko discusses her Glitter Salon exhibition in The Lightbox Studio. © Natasha Jensen. Calgary International Children’s Festival volunteer entertains a youth attendee on Olympic Plaza. © Kelly Hofer. **Right page:** Kat Danser’s Mississippi Juke Joint featuring Steve Dawson, part of the PCL Blues Series, Engineered Air Theatre. © Richard Lam

\$100 Film Festival

Aucamapu Folk Society

1827149 Ontario Inc.-Studio011

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Dance Spectrum

Canadian Society of
Petroleum Geologists

Canadian Bar Association

Calgary
Food
Bank

Bow Valley
College

Compass
Productions

Curiously
Canadian
Improv Guild



**A total of 974 events
were booked by
Arts Commons Event
Services this year. Our
clients include resident
companies, not-for-
profit organizations,
community groups,
and artists, from
across the spectrum.**

Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra conductor Adam Johnson. © Tasha Komery

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Fire Exit Theatre
Company

Live Nation Canada Inc.

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One West Events

...and many more!

For a full listing, please visit artsccommons.ca



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A Place for Building Communities

In 2011, our very first season of the distinguished *National Geographic Live* speaker series, Bob & Sue Benzen bought a subscription for not only themselves, but for 4 other friends and family. It was a chance to share a meaningful experience with people who are dear to them. Excited about what this new speaker series meant for Calgary, they grew their support during the 2012-13 season by also purchasing four Explorers Circle memberships to ensure they had the opportunity to meet all four explorers.

Deeply moved by the remarkable stories told by the explorers, and inspired by the leadership modeled by Ken and Chris Havard, Bob and Sue took the decision to grow their support further during the 2014-15 Season and became Engagement Sponsors, supporting photojournalist Steve Winter's presentation entitled *On the Trail of Big Cats: Tigers, Cougars and Snow Leopards*. To top it all off, Bob and Sue also became Visionary Members of Arts Commons Founders Circle to support Arts Commons' other programming and arts education priorities.

This is the story of two generous donors, but there are many stories like theirs. As we continue to strive to provide the best arts and cultural experiences, more and more people, just like you, are getting involved to help us grow and diversify our programs to better meet the needs and expectations of our audiences and our community.

“We feel like an intimate part of the remarkable Arts Commons and National Geographic communities.” – Bob & Sue Benzen



Left page (Clockwise from top-left): Celebrated photographer Steve Winter (centre) rubs shoulders with Sue Benzen who with her husband Bob Benzen were Engagement Sponsors for Steve's *National Geographic Live* engagement. © Will Young. Steve Winter answers questions from a roomful of students, Jack Singer Concert Hall. © Richard Lam. Audience members pose with a life-sized 'big cat' tiger, Jack Singer Concert Hall lobby. © Richard Lam. Tiger mother and cub in Bandhavgarh National Park, India. © Steve Winter

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A busy and bustling lobby during a *National Geographic Live* speaker event, Jack Singer Concert Hall lobby. © Richard Lam



Filmmaker and photographer Pete McBride poses on stage in front of over 1,000 students for his *National Geographic Live* talk Chasing Rivers. © Richard Lam

Support also came from our partners in government when the City of Calgary generously stepped up and provided us with an additional \$500,000 of funding after our long-standing operational grant was cut by the Alberta Government. Both levels, however, made a significant annual investment in our lifecycle work, bringing the total amount received or committed up to \$1.3 million. This allows us to maintain our historic building to serve you, while their support tells us we are a vital gathering space for the public and play a crucial role in this society. It is a gesture we never take for granted.

With the kindness shown to us by our donors, sponsors, and government, we also want to give back. Our Community Opportunity fund allows local organizations to perform in our spaces at a subsidized rate, giving them a professional venue to perform in and creating more opportunities for new audiences to experience art. This is the first year we purposefully grew this program, with seven participating organizations, including some new partners such as FunnyFest and the \$100 Film Festival.

“The Community Opportunity Fund gives us at Inside Out Theatre a way to give our performers the chance to take the same stage as the professional performers they so look up to in Calgary. Our company creates plays with adults with disabilities, and there is a great amount of validation and empowerment for us to perform in such beautiful and professional settings.” – Col Cseke, Inside Out Theatre



Bullies on the Loose, created and performed by Inside Out's Point of View Ensemble, April, 2013. © Citrus Photography, Tim Nguyen

A Place for Collaboration

With a momentous occasion like the Arts Commons rebrand, we wanted to celebrate and honour it with an event unlike any other: **Happenings!** Engaging and collaborating with many of our artists, musicians, and resident companies (Alberta Theatre Projects, Arts Commons Presents, the Calgary International Children's Festival, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Downstage, One Yellow Rabbit, Theatre Calgary) the entire facility turned into a free open house event on May 14, with surprising pop-up performances in every corner. Some of our best memories include our mayor dancing in the hallways to the music of Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra musicians; guests sharing their ideas about art and life with Alberta Theatre Projects, to create one story together; our brass manually-operated elevators becoming self-contained stages for our Arts Commons Presents artists; and the Calgary International Children's Festival turning the Arts Learning Centre into a place of wonder and imagination for kids of all ages.

Happenings was our way of showing that art is truly everywhere. We are excited to continue the **Happenings** tradition into the next season, promising more unique and engaging arts encounters.

Right page (Clockwise from top-left): The inaugural Happenings event kicks off in Arts Commons, as members of the public interact with artists and musicians. Clockwise: © Tasha Komery. © Tasha Komery. © Will Young. © Richard Lam



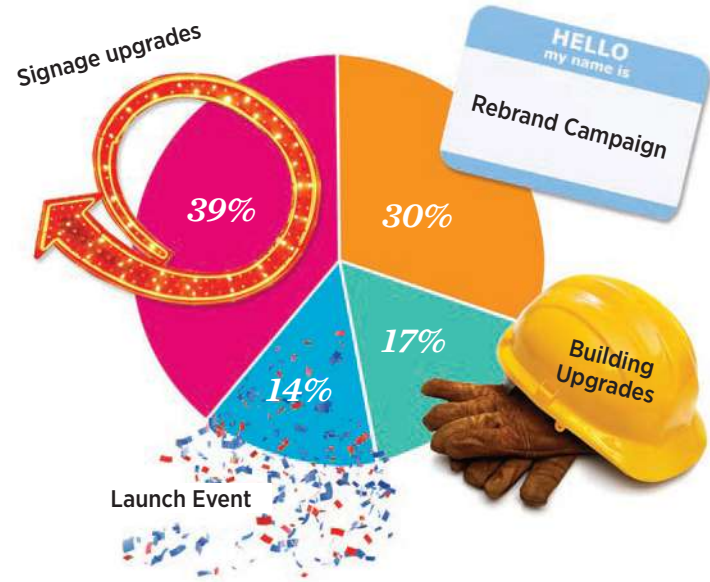


Financial Review

We ended our 2014-15 fiscal year with another modest operational surplus – \$140,940 – a reassuring indication of the continued success of our business model.

At our 2014 AGM, we announced our new name, Arts Commons, then began the process of officially launching our new identity and brand over the course of the 2014-15 fiscal year. While rebranding an entire city block was an ambitious project, what is perhaps more remarkable is how precisely we budgeted and planned for it. By combining savings from our current year’s budget, advancing projects from our capital replacement fund, and securing the approval from the Board of Directors to access our restricted fund, we were able to complete not only the major brand launch event (**Happenings**) but also major rebranding initiatives in the facility including interior, exterior, and wayfinding signage, lighting, carpeting, paint, and other building upgrades. Much to our delight, we even finished \$6,000 under budget!

Distribution of Rebranding Expenses

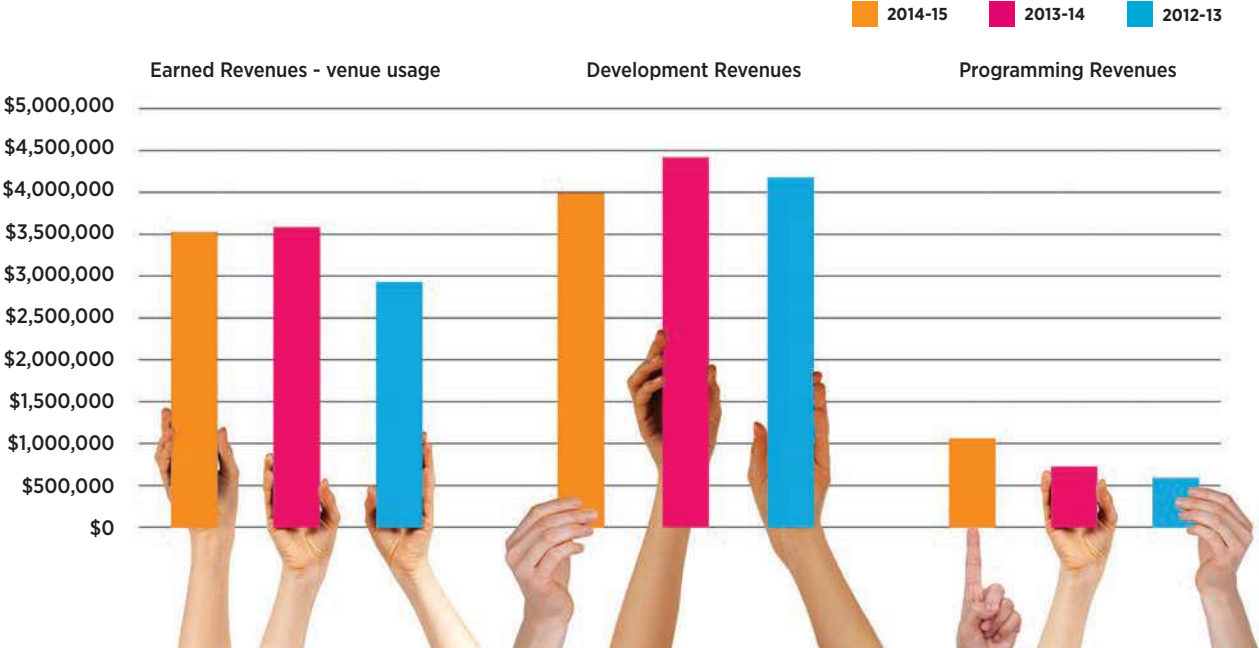


Complete financial statements can be found at artscommons.ca/reporttocommunity

Revenue Streams

Looking at our major revenue streams over three years, we saw increased revenues for our programming initiatives (58% increase), in venue activity (22% increase) and a slight decrease (4%) in fund development activities, reflecting the loss of the provincial operating grant in 2015.

As we continue to focus on increasing efficiencies, we introduced a new budgeting model this year to streamline the entire budgeting process in addition to adding the ability to forecast on-the-fly. This will allow us to address any variances to budget sooner, ensuring decisions such as taking on new and urgent building projects throughout the year can be made more organically.





Reflections

In the words of Col. John “Hannibal” Smith (of “A-Team” fame):
“I love it when a plan comes together!”

As this report shows, 2014-15 has been a culminating year for so many initiatives launched over the past five years. Led by our passionate Board of Directors, we deliberately set out to become a place of gathering for all (rather than a “palace for the arts”), to become more of an idea (rather than just a place), to be more open (not exclusive), and to embrace our community’s diversity in meaningful ways. We are still proudly home to seven Resident Companies, but we have also welcomed more than 315 other users and groups who call our facility “home”. This facility, in the heart of Calgary, has truly become the community’s lounge, which is now aptly reflected in our new name: **Arts Commons**.

During this transformative journey we have learned many lessons (and made a few mistakes), and we are ready for the next 30 years. Our community agrees with the 92% of Canadians who say arts and cultural activities make their communities better places to live¹; they agree with the 86% of Canadians who feel the arts is good for business¹; and, not surprisingly, they agree with the 95% of Canadians who say the arts are good for the development of their children’s intellectual abilities². We listened to our community (and to Canadians across the country), and continue to ensure that our offerings align with their priorities. We have become more community-focused, we run more like a successful business, and we prioritize the next generation. And above all: we present, support, and produce world-class artistic experiences.



¹Canadian Heritage, Access and Availability Survey 2012

²Business for the Arts, February 2015

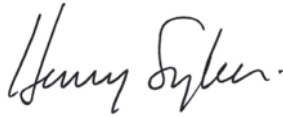
Looking forward, we have developed viable and exciting plans to expand our capacity. This will enable us to serve this community well for the next 30 years and will increase our financial sustainability. It will also enhance our civic urban district and add to the vitality of downtown Calgary.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our Board of Directors for their wisdom and guidance, our dedicated and loyal staff for their passion and service, our donors and sponsors for their treasure, our partners and stakeholders for their collaboration, to artists everywhere for inspiring and challenging us, and to you, our patrons and friends, for your aspirations and curiosity.

Sincerely



Johann F Zietsman
President & CEO



Henry W Sykes Q.C.
Chair: Arts Commons



Artist reception and drawing party for RandM Collective's exhibition *It's a Jungle Out There?!*, The Ledge Gallery. © Natasha Jensen

Arts Commons wishes to express our sincere appreciation to the following corporations, foundations, governments, and passionate community leaders who gave generously to support Arts Commons as we played a key role in the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and well-being of Calgarians and visitors during the 2014-15 Season.

Private and Public Sector Support



Re-branding Initiative



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Re-branding
Initiative



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Department of Community Services
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Government of Alberta through
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Gift from the Arts Commons
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The Calgary Foundation.



Arts Commons FOUNDERS CIRCLE

Members of Founders Circle help Arts Commons make the arts more accessible to those less fortunate in our community through a variety of innovative arts education initiatives and help bring renowned artists to perform in the BD&P World Music Series and TD Jazz Series, to name only two of the series presented by Arts Commons.

Honourary Members

Dr. Martha Cohen, CM, LLD
(in memoriam)
Sandra LeBlanc
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Arts Commons EXPLORERS CIRCLE

All membership levels of Explorers Circle help National Geographic Society inspire people to care about the planet and assist Arts Commons to bring the distinguished *National Geographic Live* speaker series to Calgary.

Engagement Sponsors

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In Memoriam (1920 - 2015)

Martha Cohen

She was known to anyone within Calgary's arts and culture industry as a visionary and a trailblazer. With the support of her husband, Harry, and along with Sandra LeBlanc and Vera Swanson, Martha Cohen raised \$89 million dollars, making their dream of a dedicated centre for the performing arts in Calgary a reality. The result of their efforts is the Calgary Centre for Performing Arts, now known as Arts Commons. Her name adorns the 400-seat theatre in Arts Commons, home to Alberta Theatre Projects, in recognition of her husband's gift of \$1 million dollars on the occasion of Martha's birthday.

She was passionate and committed to her cause – the arts – and it was her strength of character that truly set her apart as an ambassador in our community. She was awarded the Order of Canada, Calgary Citizen of the Year, an Honorary doctorate from the University of Calgary, and the City of Calgary's Centennial Award of Merit, among many other honours.

Martha Cohen dedicated much of her life to making Calgary an exceptional place for every citizen and visitor alike, and she will truly be missed.

Back Cover: Behind-the-scenes photo from Arts Commons video shoot with dancer Sarah Curtis © Tasha Komery.
Left page: Harry and Martha Cohen, in the Martha Cohen Theatre. © Mike Ridewood



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Lawrence Wan
Building Operator

Kenneth Wieder
Facility Maintenance

Hailey Workalemahu
Building Operator

Liaosu (Michael) Xia
Building Operator

Johann Zietsman
President & CEO

*And 82 Casual Stage Crew,
71 Front of House Staff,
12 Ticketing Services Staff,
3 Casual Maintenance Staff*



Arts Commons

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