



Arts Commons Unveils Naming of State-of-the-Art Venue as Part of the New Werklund Centre Campus

New venue utilizing the latest in theatre technology will be named after lifelong arts advocates and supporters Al Osten and Buddy Victor in recognition of their \$12 million contribution to the Arts Commons Transformation Project

For Immediate Release – August 8, 2025 – CALGARY – As construction continues on Canada’s largest cultural campus, Arts Commons (soon to be Werklund Centre) is excited to introduce the Osten-Victor Playhouse, a cutting-edge 1,000-seat theatre that will be the centerpiece of the Werklund Centre expansion. Named after Albertans Al Osten and Buddy Victor, who have built a legacy through philanthropic giving across our province, the new venue fills a vital need in our city’s performing arts community.

Larger than the Max Bell Theatre, and more intimate than the Jubilee Auditorium, the Osten-Victor Playhouse provides a flexible performance space that can accommodate mid-size performances that might otherwise not engage Calgary audiences. It is also a dynamic venue in its capability to be configured in different orientations, allowing for a greater diversity of audience-performer dynamics than a typical proscenium theatre. Well-known for their love of Broadway musicals, the new venue will celebrate Al Osten and Buddy Victor’s legacy while contributing to the art form beloved by both.

“It is incredibly meaningful that we are able to share our life’s passion by supporting this beautiful new venue in Calgary and I am so humbled that I’m able to contribute to the richness of my city in this way,” Osten says. “Buddy and I were able to experience unbelievable moments through the arts, and I hope that this gift will allow that power of the arts to be shared with countless future audiences.”

Beloved members of the arts community, Al Osten and Buddy Victor’s love affair with the arts began in the 1950s as members of The Rover Boys in New York. They shared this passion for the 65 years they had together, generously supporting musicals both in their home province of Alberta and on Broadway in New York City. Buddy passed away peacefully on August 4, 2023; five days short of his 93rd birthday. Al Osten’s donation of \$12 Million in support of the Arts Commons Transformation project is the largest single donation in both Al and Buddy’s long history of philanthropy.

“Made possible through the incredible generosity of Al Osten, the Osten-Victor Playhouse will not only chart new paths forward for what is possible in the Canadian performing arts, but it also celebrates the loving legacy of two of the most beautiful human beings our city has ever known, both of whom have had an incredible impact on the development of new works, supporting artists from Calgary to New York City,” says Arts Commons President & CEO Alex Sarian. “Al Osten and Buddy Victor have given so much of themselves to

grow this arts community into the thriving centre that it is today. I am honoured that we are being entrusted with the stewardship of their newest contribution to Calgary.”

“When Calgary Centre for Performing Arts opened its doors in 1985, the city’s population was on par with what we now see come through our doors every year, yet our footprint remains the same,” says David Smith, Chair of the Arts Commons Board of Directors. “The Osten-Victor Playhouse, named after two of Calgary’s great philanthropists, will help to ensure future access to the performing arts in Calgary.”

“The Osten-Victor Playhouse is a testament to the power of generosity and the belief that arts and culture are essential to a vibrant city. Thanks to this exceptional gift, we’re building a world-class venue, and we’re honouring a legacy of love, partnership, and passion for the performing arts. This is a defining moment for Calgary’s downtown and our cultural future,” says Mayor Jyoti Gondeck.

Breaking ground in December of 2024, the Arts Commons Transformation (ACT) and Olympic Plaza Transformation (OPT) projects are being led in partnership by Arts Commons, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, and The City of Calgary. In addition to the 1,000-seat Osten-Victor Playhouse, the Werklund Centre expansion will add a 200-seat studio theatre space, adding two new essential venues to Calgary’s future vibrancy. The design of this new building will integrate with the new Olympic Plaza and the renovation of current facilities for a modern, accessible cultural campus.

“On behalf of all Albertans, I’d like to deeply thank Mr. Osten for his generous contribution to the Arts Commons Transformation Project. His enduring love for theatre, music and the arts is truly inspiring. Through this extraordinary gift, he and his late partner have left a lasting legacy that will continue to enrich the arts and culture landscape of our province for many generations to come,” says Tanya Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

To learn more about the Arts Commons Transformation and Olympic Plaza Transformation project, please visit artscommons.ca/act.

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Arts Commons (soon to be Werklund Centre) is the steward of Western Canada’s largest arts centre, and the artistic and civic cornerstone of Calgary’s downtown core. For 40 years, it has been a key contributor to the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual life and well-being of Calgarians—a commitment that is being renewed through the Arts Commons Transformation project, the largest cultural infrastructure project in Canadian history. It is home to six resident companies, including Alberta Theatre Projects, Arts Commons Presents, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Downstage, Theatre Calgary, and One Yellow Rabbit. It houses six gallery spaces, five theatres, and the Jack Singer Concert Hall