



CHANCELLOR NANCY CANTOR STRENGTHENS
SU'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY
THROUGH NEW COLLABORATIONS IN
THE ARTS AND A VIBRANT PRESENCE
IN DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE

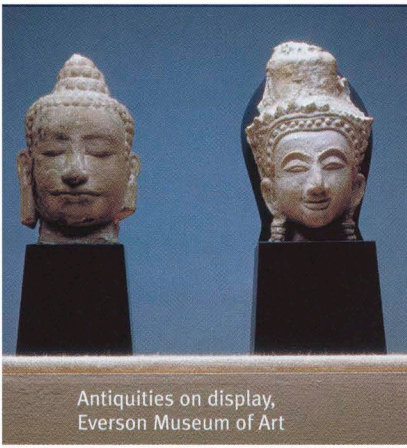
BY AMY SPEACH SHIRES

LIVE PERFORMANCE

From her first days on campus, Chancellor Nancy Cantor has communicated a clear vision for SU—a vision that places the University within the center of the local and global communities as a resource, contributor, and actively engaged partner. Cantor believes the arts can play a vital role in bringing that vision to life, serving as an effective form of communication that invites people of all ages and backgrounds to participate, regardless of individual experience or status within a community. “The arts are extremely important on a number of levels: to individual well-being, to community well-being, and, importantly, to a campus and to education,” says Cantor, who has nurtured the University’s creative spirit since arriving here. She believes the arts contribute to the vibrancy of a community and provide a safe environment

for honest expression that leads to positive exchange. “The arts are really a form of conversation,” says Cantor, who grew up in an artistic family amid the cultural abundance of New York City and studied ballet. “And, as a conversation, they are important in drawing people together and engaging people—with an aesthetic experience, and also with the issues of the day and different people’s perspectives on their experience. In all forms, from visual to performing, the arts provide a context for exchange that we must nurture.”

She notes the inauguration ceremonies held on campus in November as an example of the kind of dialogue made possible through the arts. “For me, that celebration was very much a representation of the notion of the exchange of people and ideas, and the ways artistic conversations



Antiquities on display, Everson Museum of Art

John Dowling

help enliven that exchange,” she says. “The storytelling, the puppets, the composition by a music faculty member, all the singing and dance that took place on the Dome turf afterward, and the evening community performances at the

Everson Museum—that’s really what the arts are about: bringing people and ideas and experiences together and expressing and exploring them through various media. Creativity is the way of that exploration.”

Cantor thinks of SU as a creative campus where ideas and viewpoints are shared and discussed freely and safely and where collaboration is key, both on and off campus. “The arts play an essential role in the creative campus, where there is a vibrant exchange of people and ideas, and where people are deliberating about and analyzing their own experiences and issues in the world at the very same time that

plines in the College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) are scheduled to move into the renovated warehouse in August, bringing hundreds of students and faculty to downtown. “This move represents an important step in building connections with the community,” Cantor says. She believes the building’s proximity to other arts organizations, including the Museum of Science and Technology, The Redhouse, and the Delavan Art Gallery, as well as the revitalized Armory Square, lends itself to the creation of an arts district that will attract people to the city and help enliven the nearby neighborhoods. “The new programmatic uses and open space create natural connections between the cultural and daily lives of the campus and the city,” Cantor says. “And one should never forget how important it is to neighborhood revitalization to have the arts as a central meeting ground and as a positive experience, especially for children.”

The University’s downtown presence will be further enhanced through plans to purchase the 900 block of East Genesee Street, across from Syracuse Stage. This property will be used to create an arts cluster with practice and recital space for drama and music students. Plans also include the eventual construction of a performing arts facility and the development of a three-mile pedestrian pathway known as the “Connective Corridor.” The corridor, which will have an accompanying shuttle bus circuit and feature public art displays, will link the University and downtown’s arts institutions, entertainment venues, and public space. “We have at the University extraordinary offerings in the arts and architecture,” Cantor says. “The City of Syracuse also has extraordinary arts organizations—the symphony, the opera, the Everson Museum. We’ve been working to pull these together in meaningful ways. This collaboration represents the kind of conversation that is so important to both education and community.”

A leased property on East Genesee Street will serve as a new home for the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company and the Community Folk Art Center, both of which play key roles in the mission of the Department of African American Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, Cantor says. “All types of performances—musical, dramatic, visual, and some that may fall outside of traditional Western classification—have historically played a crucial role in the development of African American culture,” she says. “It is essential to incorporate them into the University’s academic curriculum and to share them with the community.”

Irwin L. Davis, president and CEO of the Metropolitan

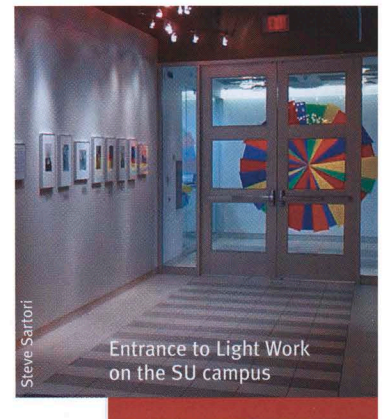


Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in the Carrier Dome

Steve Sartori

they are imagining new possibilities,” Cantor says. “The freedom of an academic setting, whether on or off campus, can provide a powerful context for safe exchange, allowing artistic expression to reveal some of the ills of our time. It gives students room to think, discuss, criticize, experiment, and change their minds—and, in the process, develop problem-solving skills.”

The Chancellor’s vision for SU took on a more tangible shape in mid-December, when the University unveiled a detailed plan to establish a presence in downtown Syracuse and enhance its community connections, particularly in the arts. The plan encompasses purchasing 11 downtown properties and leasing another, including the site of a former furniture warehouse and two adjacent parking lots on West Fayette Street. The School of Architecture and design disci-



Entrance to Light Work on the SU campus

Steve Sartori



Syracuse Stage

Steve Sartori

The University will provide office space, equipment, and materials for the community geographer, as well as administrative support, but it is hoped that the salary for the position will be paid with funds raised from local foundations. The Rosamond Gifford Foundation has agreed to fund the position for the first year. "While the person in this position will be an SU staff member, he or she will truly work for, and be accountable to, the community," Mitchell says.

Mitchell believes the University's mapping resources are beneficial when used at the neighborhood level to analyze needs and assets. "By providing an objective depiction of a wide range of social and economic data, maps can be used as the departure point for community-wide decision making," he says. "From a broader perspective, the appointment of a community geographer is a means of building our community's capacity for self-improvement."

The South Side Entrepreneurial Development Initiative was launched in August by the Martin J. Whitman School of Management's Department of Entrepreneurship and Emerging Enterprises (EEE) and the Falcone Entrepreneurship Center. Based on an initial three-year commitment, the program is an effort to become meaningfully engaged in a community that is suffering as a result of the region's economic decline. "SU has to define itself as an engine of economic development," says EEE director Michael Morris, the Witting Chair in Entrepreneurship. "Syracuse is a community with severe economic challenges, and the University has to step up to the plate."

Sixty students from the Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Learning Community and five management faculty members have been working throughout the academic year to support small businesses on Syracuse's South Side. The students are challenged to help these firms grow by offering help in such areas as marketing, business plan development, customer service, inventory management, web site design, and funding presentations. The businesses include a newsstand, a soul food restaurant, an African import business, and a shop that rebuilds old computers.

"Our vision is that at the end of three years, there will be a group of 50 core entrepreneurial firms supported by an organized infrastructure," Morris says. "We seek to foster an environment that maps a clear path for ongoing development and serves to recapture the pride of the South Side community."

—Amy Speach Shires and Cyndi Moritz

Development Association of Syracuse and Central New York Inc., says the Chancellor has emphasized the importance of linking the University and downtown from his first meeting with her. On behalf of Syracuse's business leaders, he expresses excitement about the increased University presence in downtown, and the commitment it represents. "The Chancellor's bold action to establish a presence downtown is a historic step," he says. "Downtown is a reflection of our region's economic health. The vibrancy of downtown is important not only to the central business district banker and his employees. It is also important to the University, which wants to bring alumni, parents, and prospective students to the city, and to key suburban employers like Lockheed Martin and Welch Allyn that are seeking to attract talented high-tech employees. As Chancellor Cantor has said, this is just the beginning of good things to come. That is why the region's business leadership is so excited with her early initiative."

In addition to an increased physical presence in Syracuse, the University is committed to developing stronger relationships with the city's arts community. "We're in dialogue with community arts organizations to understand their missions and explore areas for collaboration," Cantor says. "How can the rich portfolio of local arts organizations be integrated with the arts of Syracuse University to support

Partnering for Progress

CHANCELLOR NANCY CANTOR'S PLAN to increase collaboration between the University and the Syracuse community includes the creation of an SU staff position for a community geographer, as well as a program aimed at developing businesses on the city's South Side. Cantor indicates that the two initiatives represent a broad commitment on the part of the University. "We want to position our public engagement and collaborative partnerships in a strategic and focused way at the very center of all our missions at Syracuse University," she says.

The geographer, based in the geography department of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Maxwell School, will use the University's geographic technology to identify and evaluate problems and assist with projects that can benefit from geographic analysis. The position is modeled upon the success of the Syracuse Hunger Project, in which SU students and geography faculty worked with community members to map areas in which low-income families were in need of food and to match those areas with local food pantries. "The availability of sophisticated geographic technology at the University offers Syracuse a new model for organizing community decision making, not only in the area of human needs, but also in many other important and complex community topics, including public health and economic development," says Professor Don Mitchell, geography department chair.

local artists and provide the University with new opportunities for discovery and creative work?" To help answer that question, a new initiative, the Downtown Arts Wheel, was created to bring together University representatives, leaders in the City of Syracuse, and several community collaborators in a concentrated effort to enhance the network of downtown cultural facilities. Representatives from the mayor's office, the Metropolitan Development Association, the Syracuse City School District, the Cultural Resources Council of Syracuse and Onondaga County (CRC), the Everson Museum of Art, and the Gifford Foundation are joining with the University to explore opportunities for sharing resources and supporting development of the arts in Syracuse. "The Downtown Arts Wheel celebrates the collaboration between the University and the Syracuse community, and the vibrant arts community that exists," Cantor says. "It gives us the means to work with cultural and community leaders to solve problems, share resources, and create new opportunities for collaboration."

"Through the arts wheel, we are looking for ways we can have a two-way exchange that is meaningful," says CRC director Leo Crandall. "Anything we can do to ensure that the exchange is real and authentic, the better the partnership will be, and the better we'll be able to identify collaborative opportunities that benefit both SU and the community." Crandall credits the Chancellor for recognizing Syracuse's potential as a vibrant cultural environment. "I feel really strongly that this is a great community with tons to offer," he says. "Nancy Cantor's recognition of that and her willingness to embrace new possibilities, along with her notion that there is value in exploring the soul and discovering the spirit of a community within its cultural groups, are really leading the way for us to create exciting opportunities."

City as Campus: Art and Architecture Downtown

School of Architecture Dean Mark Robbins G'81 is enthusiastic about plans to enhance the University's downtown

presence, which he believes will yield significant benefits for both SU and the City of Syracuse. "What we are doing is very standard practice—not only for universities, but also for cities, as they begin to grow and flex," he says. "What is unique is the emphasis on the arts as a catalyst." Robbins refers to such institutions as Columbia and New York University, which have increased their community presence by purchasing and developing properties at their perimeters. He also points to cultural revivals in the Chelsea, Soho, and Tribeca sections of New York City, which hinged, in part, on the renovation of former warehouse spaces. "I think it reflects a change in the University's attitude toward the relationship between SU and downtown, which has been



Art education class at the Bernice M. Wright Child Development Laboratory School on South Campus

spurred by the Chancellor's vision," Robbins says. "We are moving toward a removal of barriers between the academic world and the world that most of us inhabit."

Robbins believes the downtown move is particularly appropriate for the architecture school, which will occupy the renovated West Fayette Street building for two to three



Armory Square area, downtown Syracuse



School of Architecture class

Steve Sartori

years while Slocum Hall is renovated. “Architecture intersects with our daily life at literally every turn,” he says. “The earlier students can begin to learn about interacting with people who may be neighbors or clients, the better. Our obligation is to educate students as broadly as possible in a liberal arts tradition, in a history of ideas. When our students graduate and design buildings, those buildings will have more profound links to the city and the community—links that are based on an innovative, inventive understanding of the realities of culture and society.”

The building, now referred to as “The Warehouse,” is a 1920s concrete structure adjoining the city’s Armory Square district, one of the most vital, pedestrian-oriented areas of downtown Syracuse. The renovation project is consistent with the mission of the School of Architecture’s Upstate Institute, a newly created design think tank that will focus on rejuvenating the upstate New York region. Nationally prominent architects will be invited to collaborate. When renovated, The Warehouse will include design studios, classrooms, and faculty and administrative offices. As the project evolves, a street-level bookstore and café overlooking Onondaga Creek and gallery space are envisioned. “The building provides the ideal flexible space required for studio and gallery space,” Robbins says. “The industrial loft space mirrors the professional environment that architecture and design students will one day work in. The setting provides a unique, creative laboratory for our students—the future architects of our cities and neighborhoods.” The new facility will also encourage interdisciplinary work with VPA design students, who will have studios in the building.

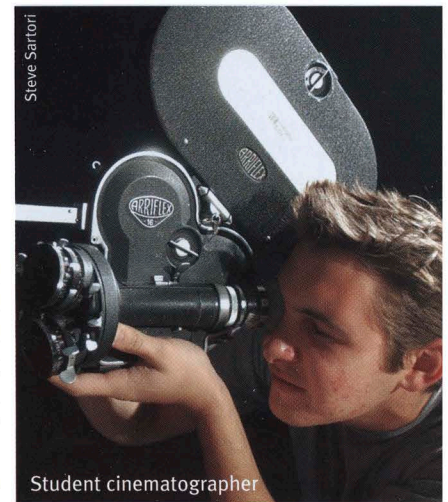
Robbins acknowledges that several logistical considerations are inherent in this undertaking, but affirms that careful thought has been given to such issues as security, transportation, and making this a seamless transition for students. A shuttle-bus service from Main Campus will be in operation, class schedules will be adjusted to allow for travel time, and security will be provided for the building and parking lot. “There are definite challenges,” Robbins says. “But the benefits in terms of curricular enrichment are worth all the very real issues, which we will resolve. We have an exciting opportunity to make a real difference in the education of our students and their development as architects—and as citizens.”

Long-range plans for The Warehouse include a permanent home for the Upstate Institute, as well as residences for visiting artists and architects. “What is most important to me about the downtown space is that the University’s presence in the Syracuse community is now tangible, not simply symbolic,” says VPA Dean Carole Brzozowski ’81. “We can use this opportunity to collaborate with other arts organizations—as we have done in the past—but with the advantage of a physical presence.” Brzozowski is working with CRC director Leo Crandall to identify community partners who will share space within the facility. “I view our presence downtown as a chance to further develop mutually beneficial relationships with local arts organizations,” Brzozowski says.

“These groups often provide our students with critical practical learning experiences, and if we can offer additional space for meetings, exhibitions, and rehearsals, the arts community as a whole can only grow stronger.”

Plans for the East Genesee Street properties are still being formulated, but Brzozowski indicates that drama and music students will have a strong presence there. She believes the college’s partnership with Syracuse Stage will help serve as a model for collaborations with other downtown arts organizations, including the Everson Museum. “The Everson has an excellent arts education component with a vision to grow that is inhibited by pressing space needs,” Brzozowski says. “Syracuse University has a program in arts education that draws on the expertise of the College of Visual and Performing Arts and the School of Education. Together, we’re exploring possibilities for providing arts opportunities for children in high-risk neighborhoods in the City of Syracuse.”

Through its downtown investments, the University is helping to revitalize life in downtown Syracuse, which, in turn, further enhances the SU experience. “Some people may ask why we are taking it upon ourselves to reinvigorate downtown,” Cantor says. “But we need to understand that we can’t separate our future as a university from the future of our community. Syracuse is poised as a city to make better things happen, and I view us as a strong partner in the effort to enrich, advance, and secure the cultural resources of this community. By establishing connections with the community’s cultural life and investing in its intellectual vibrancy, we help create a learning environment for students that embraces the opportunities the city has to offer, including active participation in its challenges and future growth.”



Steve Sartori

Student cinematographer