



# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 12, 2018

Beth McClure, Director of Marketing & Communications  
bmcclore@COCAstl.org, 314.561.4868

## **COCA UNVEILS PLANS FOR \$28 MILLION CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

*Renovation underway; Expansion to begin this summer*

**ST. LOUIS, Mar. 12, 2018**— COCA-Center of Creative Arts has begun work on a \$28 million renovation and construction project to transform the community arts organization's University City campus.

On March 12, 2018, the University City council approved the expansion project, which will extend COCA's current building to the east. Work on the first phase—renovations to COCA's landmark Erich Mendelsohn-designed main building—is underway; groundbreaking for the expansion phase is scheduled for this summer, and it is set to open in early 2020.

"I want to thank the University City Council and Mayor Shelley Welsch for their belief in our project," said COCA Executive Director, Kelly Pollock. "Our historic University City home has been key to our identity and the community we have been serving for more than 30 years. We sit at a crossroads for the region and remaining in this location was important for our future."

Designed by a partnership between Christner Inc. and Axi:Ome, COCA's new east wing will include a state-of-the-art, 450-seat theater; new studio space; a community commons area; and a safe and accessible location for families to drop-off and pick-up students. Renovations to the existing building include transforming COCA's current theatre into a sky-lit performance lab, two new dance studios, a renovated art and design studio, and teaching kitchen.

The \$28 million project will be funded through the Create our Future Campaign, a \$40 million, multi-year fundraising effort launched in early 2015. It is the largest in the organization's history. The additional \$12 million will fund COCA's endowment and reserves. As of March 2018, the campaign had secured more than \$36 million.

The new east wing will be named in honor of John and Alison Ferring, who led the campaign with a \$5 million first gift. The new state-of-the-art theatre will be named in honor of the Berges Family Foundation, which issued a challenge and matched \$5 million in gifts made to the campaign last summer. The Centene Charitable Foundation provided a \$3 million lead corporate gift.

Cheryl Holman chairs the campaign steering committee, with honorary chairs Alison and John Ferring. Members of the committee include Lisa Boyce, Bill Carson, Carolyn Gold, Tom Hillman, Jesse Hunter, Kristin Johnson, Lee Kaplan, N.S. "Jim" Knight, Ned Lemkemeier, Melissa Merlin, Dave Peacock and Donald Suggs.

"This expansion will allow COCA to serve more students from throughout the St. Louis community and ensure that we remain a part of what makes St. Louis a great place to work, live, and raise a family, for years to come," said Jesse Hunter, COCA Board President.

COCA will remain open throughout construction, with some performances moved off-site. Key to the expansion is replacing COCA's parking lot, accomplished through a partnership with Washington University, which is building a shared parking garage adjacent to its 560 Music School Building. Through a long-term lease with the University, COCA's families and visitors will have access to this secure, covered lot, directly across the street. It is set to open in June.

###

### **About COCA**

Founded in 1986, COCA is the fourth largest multidisciplinary community arts center in the country, one of only 16 schools in the nation accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools (ACCPAS), and a national leader in innovative arts education. With a mission to enrich lives and build community through the arts, COCA serves 50,000 people of all ages and skill levels, from enthusiastic amateurs to emerging professionals—all taught by a faculty of distinguished arts educators. We provide meaningful arts experiences in our own studios, gallery and theatres as well as in schools, community centers and corporate settings in order to build a vibrant St. Louis that is creative, connected and inclusive. Visit [www.cocastl.org](http://www.cocastl.org) to learn more.

### **About Christner Inc.**

Christner is a collaborative design firm bringing innovation, research and insight to the practice of architecture. The firm serves distinct markets that demand sophisticated planning and design solutions: healthcare, science and technology, education, and corporate. They also seek opportunities to expand their creative reach through the design of libraries, museums, conservatories and other special commissions. Its staff includes architects, planners, MBA's, urban designers, landscape architects, interior and graphic designers. Each discipline contributes rich experience and perspective – brought together through skilled process leadership, structured methods, and leading-edge technologies. With 50 years in practice, Christner is poised to discover tomorrow's solutions.

### **About Axi:Ome**

Axi:Ome was formed in 2001 in Providence Rhode Island, primarily as an architectural research practice evolving from the public media projects of Sung Ho Kim. Heather Woofert joined in 2003 with eight years in full time architectural practice. Since then, Sung Ho and Heather balance teaching at Washington University with design practice, working with a variety of partners to help shape innovative design solutions. Sung Ho and Heather are involved in all phases of Axi:Ome's work in a desire for the projects to operate in a continuous dialogue at multiple scales, experimenting with shared ideas and concerns. Their work focuses on the concept that a building's spatial form and innovation are inextricably woven to one another and that architecture's progressive future lies in speculation, imagination, research and resolution of the intellectual development of design process.