

# Arts Centre fundraising off to good start

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The campaign to raise \$5 million for the Camrose performing arts centre is off to a great start.

Augustana Campus dean Dr. Allen Berger announced at the performing arts centre groundbreaking June 7 that, thanks to a number of gifts and the extraordinary generosity of the Mayer and Christenson families, the amount raised for the facility is already getting close to \$1 million.

The Mayers have been philanthropic leaders in the community since they arrived here from Manitoba in 1963.

In 2011 Norm Mayer and his wife, Betty, were recognized with the Community Builders award by the Battle River Community Foundation.

The Christenson family has deep ties to Camrose, going back to Andrew Christenson, an early settler. Lloyd Christenson was involved in numerous construction projects in town, including the relocation of Founders' Hall, and work on the University's science classroom building. Joyce, Lloyd's wife, served as an Augustana board member at the time of the Augustana merger with the University of Alberta.

The Mayers are strong believers in the benefits Augustana and the performing arts centre will bring to the community.

"The donation we are making is just trying to continue in that vein," said Norm. "James (Mayer) is going to work for the next 50 years now to try and pay it (the commitment) off."

Norm was one of the major players in the merger of Augustana and the University of Alberta when he was mayor.

"I pushed that as hard as I could when I was mayor because I have always been a firm believer that a small university like Augustana is important to rural students. They can get comfortable with the smaller atmosphere that is here then move on to the bigger surroundings of the university in Edmonton or Calgary or wherever."

The Mayers were major supporters of the multi-use facility at Rudy Swanson Park.

"We have for years supported sports and recreation, but there has never been a major facility for the arts and culture," said Norm.

James Mayer said he is proud to be part of the performing arts centre, which he feels will fill a big need in the community.

"You hear from the young people about not having the facilities available, and if the facilities are not there they won't be sticking around."

James expressed on behalf of other family members how proud he is of Norm and Betty for their unselfish willingness to give back to the community.

"They give of their time, talent and treasure to make Camrose a better community," he said. "That is not something that happens by accident."

Greg Christenson said Christenson Developments, of which he is president, and the Christenson family is always looking for ways to contribute to Augustana and Camrose.

"We have been involved with institutions like Norquest and MacEwan and other schools in Edmonton, but Camrose is very close to our family heart, not just on the Christenson side but on the Nelson side. My aunt, Doris, is a prominent citizen here, and we have had the pleasure to build here in more recent years. We enjoy Camrose and we think it is a great community. We think the performing arts centre is a great initiative between the City of Camrose and the University of Alberta."

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The Christenson's have had discussions with the University regarding naming of the foyer leading to the performing arts centre's main auditorium.

"We want to set something up that will help tell the story of my grandparents on the Christenson side and the Nelson side, as well as Luther League, the Lutheran church institution where young people met and fell in love," said Greg. "We want it to be sort of prototypical of the community and the families that have moved here, regardless of their ethnic or religious background."

Mayor Marshall Chalmers said the performing arts centre project and partnerships is exactly what the City of Camrose is all about: generous people working together for the good of the community.

"I would like to offer my sincere appreciation, on behalf of City council and all Camrosians, to the incredible donors who have come forward in support of the project – not only with their dollars but also with their exceptional community spirit."

