

Performing Arts Groups Banking on New Aura of Collaboration

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Hutton Foundation purchase of former WaMu bank building brings community together at 1330 State St.



For Tom Parker, left, president of the Hutton Foundation, and Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra general manager Daniel Kepl, there's a bigger picture to having many of the community's performing arts organizations housed in one building. In addition to the collaborative possibilities, two of Santa Barbara's marquee venues — the Arlington and Granada theaters — are steps away from the new arts headquarters at 1330 State St. (Lara Cooper / Noozhawk photo)

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The downturn in the economy has been rough on everyone, but at least for some local nonprofits it's had an upside.

Thanks to a "tremendous deal" entered into by the [Hutton Foundation](#) and local landowner Ruth Bell, the building at 1330 State St. will soon be the hub of local nonprofit arts organizations, including [The Granada](#), [Opera Santa Barbara](#), the [Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra](#) and the [Santa Barbara Dance Alliance](#), just to name a few. About a dozen organizations are set to relocate to the 14,000-square-foot building, which was occupied by [Washington Mutual](#) until October. According to Hutton Foundation Executive Director Pamela Hamlin, not all discussions with potential future tenants are complete yet; the foundation will know who's moving in by mid-March.

"They just walked out," said Hutton Foundation president Tom Parker, who closed the deal with Bell in mid-November in just over a week with \$3 million in cash.

Originally, the plan was to host senior services organizations in the building, but the [city of Santa Barbara](#) had other plans.

"They put me in a corner," Parker joked. Instead, the [City Council](#) suggested that the building be used for local nonprofit arts organizations.

For Daniel Kepl, general manager of the Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra, it's all good news.

"It's not just a better situation for us, it's a better situation for the arts in general, because we're going to all be in the same room," he said. "It's a chance for all of us to get to know each other."

The building's interior is being remodeled to accommodate the organizations, with the addition of offices and state-of-the-art electronic and telephone hookups. There will be a second-floor conference room, and there is already a break room and a balcony that looks out onto the Granada and [Arlington](#) theaters.

For Steven Sharpe, Opera Santa Barbara's general director, the synergy has already begun. With a recent doubling of staff to four from two in his cramped office on West Padre Street, everyone was "tripping over each other."

"I knew we had to get into new office," he said. After looking at some different sites one day, a friend suggested he call Pamela Hamlin, to see whether she knew of any available space.

"I called her cold to ask her what spaces she knew were available, and she turned around and said, 'I think I have one for you,'" he said.

Sharpe said there are already plans to share information and technology between organizations.

"We're considering using the same box-office software that The Granada theater uses," he said. "What that means is that we're going to be able to have real-time ticket sales that we've never been able to have before. It's going to be made so much easier because of the fact that the staff that's going to be managing the software is going to be downstairs, essentially."

Other ideas include opening up a high-end print shop that the organizations could share to publish mailing and marketing materials, as opposed to each organization using its own printers and copiers. They might also become more efficient by using shared staff in back-office Web development and accounting.

"We're really looking into what can be shared," Sharpe said.

On top of the newfound efficiency and resource collaboration, the organizations will be reducing rent costs — a big part of the outlay for many nonprofit organizations. The rents will be about a third of the market rate.

The new Santa Barbara Arts and Culture Center is scheduled to have its grand opening in June.

"Once we start talking to each other who knows what's going to happen," said Kepl.

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