

State Street Building Brings Santa Barbara Arts Groups Under One Roof

By Kevin McFadden, Noozhawk Contributor

ARTS & CULTURE CENTER



Steven Sharpe, executive director of Opera Santa Barbara, says the new Arts & Culture Center at 1330 State St., a project of the Hutton Foundation, has helped generate synergy among Santa Barbara arts organizations. (Lara Cooper / Noozhawk photo)

In a twist of fate, the Hutton Foundation turns a 25-year dream of collaboration into a reality

When Barbara Burger became marketing director of the [Santa Barbara Symphony](#) in 1984, she had the novel idea of bringing all of Santa Barbara's arts groups together for a monthly meeting to discuss collaborative opportunities. After some discussion with the heads of a few arts organizations around town, the first official meeting of Artcom was held in November of that year, in a small public conference room on the second floor of a bank building at 1330 State St.

In an ironic twist of fate, 25 years later, that same building was purchased by the nonprofit [Hutton Foundation](#) for the purpose of housing all of the major Santa Barbara arts organizations, including the Symphony, which is still headed by the woman who was there at the beginning.

"Little did we know what we were giving birth to at the time, which was a whole coordinating of the arts," Burger said. "And we certainly didn't know that this would ever actually become an arts building."

The building, previously a [Washington Mutual](#) loan center, was purchased by the Hutton Foundation in October 2008. It was renovated during the next several months, and space was added to accommodate all of the arts groups that soon would call the new Arts & Culture Center home.

The happy new tenants began moving in this past June, and last month, the last open office was filled by the [Music Academy of the West](#) — making the arts family complete.

For Burger, it marks the culmination of a 25-year dream, and she couldn't be happier with the result.

"It's just a pleasure coming to work these days," Burger said of her new digs. "The building is beautifully restored. It's comfortable, it's aesthetically pleasing and it's a perfect location — right across from the [Arlington \(Theatre\)](#), and only a block and a half away from [The Granada](#)."

The Granada offices are on the first floor of the building, making for quick and easy communication among the arts groups and the theater heads during the planning stages of an event. That type of organic synergy has been one of the major benefits of having all of the arts organizations working out of the same location, and it has not gone unnoticed by several of the building's tenants.

Tim Schwartz, executive director of the [Santa Barbara Education Foundation](#), one of the only nonperforming arts nonprofit organizations in the building, recognizes the massive potential for a meshing of arts and education.

"Collaboration is the key theme," Schwartz said. "The needs in this community are so significant that they are bigger than any one organization can address alone. Working with the other groups in the building, we have been able to bring them in principally to many of our after-school programs, and the result has been fantastic."

One of the Santa Barbara Education Foundation's upcoming events that exemplifies that spirit of collaboration is the H.O.P.E. Awards, which stands for "Honoring Outstanding Public Education." The event is scheduled for Dec. 8 at The Granada.

The highlight of the event will be a benefit concert performed by [Michael McDonald](#). There also will be a daylong instrument drive in front of the theater, where Santa Barbara residents are urged to drop off old instruments curbside. The instruments will be used by local students who can't afford to buy one.

During two of McDonald's more famous numbers, student musicians from local high school chorus groups will perform side by side with the famed entertainer.

Steven Sharpe, general director of [Opera Santa Barbara](#), shares his colleagues' sense of optimism about the new environs.

"Everyone in the building is feeling a lot more supported these days," Sharpe said. "And we've just barely touched the surface of mining the potential of the building's synergy."

Last month, Sharpe said he had the pleasure of presenting the [Stephen Schwartz](#) opera *Séance On a Wet Afternoon*, which was perhaps Opera Santa Barbara's largest production to date, and it received fabulous reviews. The entire building felt the trickle-down effect from the energy given off by Sharpe and his staff.

"It was a really big deal that we pulled off *Séance*," Sharpe said. "I think everyone in the building was really proud to be a part of it."

The real catalyst in the process of bringing the fragmented arts factions together was the Hutton Foundation, which specializes in helping Santa Barbara nonprofits achieve the highest possible levels of efficiency and performance.

Pam Hamlin, executive director of the Hutton Foundation, says the building was a natural choice to galvanize local arts groups.

"This building makes our 14th building project," Hamlin said. "As we have done more of these, it has become more and more apparent that there are several advantages to housing similar nonprofits together from the standpoint of greater communication. The city really got behind this idea in particular."

Some of the other organizations housed at 1330 State St. are the [Santa Barbara Dance Alliance](#), the [Santa Barbara Choral Society](#) and the [Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra](#).

In the end, the Hutton Foundation was able to finish what Burger started in the very same building more than a quarter-century ago: uniting Santa Barbara arts.

"Everybody has always wanted this idea, but everyone was scattered throughout the city in these little tiny offices," Burger said. "The Hutton Foundation deserves a lot of credit for getting all the arts to move into one building."

— *Kevin McFadden is a [Noozhawk](#) contributor.*