



Photo courtesy of Rochester Contemporary Art Center

RoCo bought the building at 137 East Ave. for \$365,000 from Singer Real Estate, its landlord of 12 years.

RoCo art center acquires property in the East End

The organization buys its current location, launches capital effort

By SALLY PARKER

Rochester Contemporary Art Center has bought the building it occupies in the heart of the East End cultural district.

The center also is launching the public phase of what RoCo executive director Bleu Cease calls Rochester's smallest capital campaign; the Future Fund aims to raise \$550,000 by 2017. Roughly \$325,000 has been received or pledged.

"We've really grown a lot in the last two years, and this is going to lock in that growth," Cease said. "It will release pressure on our budget and direct our expenses in a better direction."

Cease was expected to announce the building purchase at the center's 22nd annual Members Exhibition on Thursday.

RoCo bought the building at 137 East Ave. for \$365,000 from Singer Real Estate, its landlord of 12 years. The fund goal of \$550,000 will allow the organization to replace the roof, install a new HVAC system and pay off the mortgage within five years.

"That's huge for us. That's a big deal," Cease said. "We're going to have unique expenses—ownership involves that—but we're not going to go back to \$3,400 rent monthly."

The organization took into account a view in non-profit circles that building ownership should not be pursued for its own sake, Cease said.

"We did consider that and thought long and hard if it was really necessary. The first goal here is not ownership. ... Permanence and stability (are) really the goal. We determined we didn't want to move and were able to negotiate a good deal," he said.

RoCo's monthly mortgage payment of \$1,387.94 is less than half of its previous rent. Cease is eager to redirect the difference into programming.

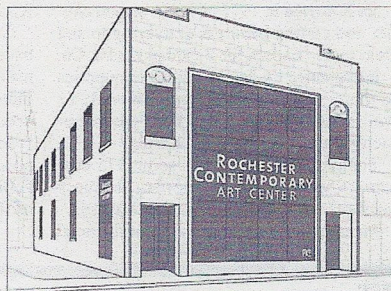
"It's going to allow us to do so many other things and direct our budget where it should be," he said.

The campaign offers donors a variety

of ways to contribute, including covering the mortgage payment for specific months down to the penny.

"It's so conservative, fiscally speaking. ... Our budget is really straightforward and clear, and when I've been able to spell that out to people, they've been able to get it," Cease said.

Funds raised also will allow the growing center to hire more staff. Currently Cease and an assistant are on the payroll;



students serve as unpaid interns.

In recent years, RoCo has established events that have solidified its role in the local arts community. Its Makers & Mentors show features the work of well-known artists from Rochester, including Wendell Castle, Nancy Jurs and Robert Marx, and their former students.

More than 3,000 artists from around the world participated in the fifth annual 6X6 exhibition in June; the show is RoCo's biggest fundraiser. RoCo also manages First Friday, a citywide gallery night it launched in 2007; nearly three dozen galleries around Rochester now hold open houses on the first Friday night of the month.

RoCo began in 1977 as Pyramid Arts Center, a cooperative, grassroots operation led by Tony Petracca. It occupied storefronts and warehouse space in Village Gate and on St. Paul Street and Monroe Avenue before moving to East Avenue in 2001. Its name changed to Rochester Contemporary that year; "Art Center" was added in 2007.

"We have a number of members who've been paying their membership dues for 25 years," Cease said. "For a medium-size non-profit that's a good, long run, and we have a really strong, loyal base."

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