

Aventura celebrates \$7 million arts and cultural center

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Courtesy of the Aventura Arts & Cultural Center.

A rendering of the Aventura Arts & Cultural Center as seen from the parking lot.

The city of Aventura is set to have its own performing arts center where residents will be able to enjoy plays, musicals and concerts once it opens this summer.

Aventura Mayor Susan Gottlieb said the city appears ready to open the Aventura Arts & Cultural Center on budget and without incurring any new debt.

"I think it offers an important amenity for our community, Aventura has it all," she said.

The city hosted a "topping off" ceremony Wednesday afternoon for the facility on 3385 NE 188th St. during which the final beam was placed on top of the building, completing the structure.

The 325-seat center cost \$7 million to build, with \$4.9 million provided by Miami-Dade County. The rest was covered by city funds, according to Aventura City Manager Eric Soroka.

Construction crews broke ground on the project in April, and the theater is expected to begin operating in June 2010, with the first full season of shows beginning after the official grand opening on Oct. 23.

Aventura will pay the Broward Center for the Performing Arts \$12,000 a month to manage the center. Kelley Shanley, the president and CEO of the Broward Center, said he thought Aventura was an ideal place for a new performing arts venue.

"There are people here who support the arts, who are interested in arts and cultural activities," he said. "There will be a good broad base of support."

The center is located adjacent to the charter school run by the city, the Aventura City of Excellence School. Shanley said that touring groups performing at the center will give presentations for students and that the center will be a resource for teachers. The center will also host a performing arts camp for students this summer.

"It's not just giving the students access to art," he said. "It's using art in the education process to enhance the curriculum and the learning process."

City leaders have been hoping to build a performing arts center in Aventura for more than a decade. Initially, the city tried to partner with the county to build a center and a library, but was

never able to get full support from the county, according to Aventura City Commissioner Bob Diamond.

The commissioners and Soroka decided that the city could complete the project on its own about five years ago, and selected the plot of city owned land currently being used based in part on a study Diamond had completed for then-mayor Arthur Snyder.

“This to me, this is the culmination of many years of effort,” Diamond said.

The actor, producer, comedian and Broadway style singer Avi Hoffman will open the center with performances of his one man shows, *Too Jewish?* and *Too Jewish, Too!* in the second and third week of July. Hoffman said that the center would have to tailor to small acts because of its relatively small seating capacity of 325, but that it should do well because Aventura residents have always supported shows in other venues across South Florida.

A committee of Aventura residents, selected by the commission, will help advise the Broward Center on how to best run the Aventura Arts & Cultural Center and what acts should perform.

Lenore Toby Simmons is a member of that committee and has long been an active part of the South Florida performing arts scene. She thinks the center will be an important addition to the city.

“It will bring an element here that people have been asking for, to be able to walk down the street, maybe from your apartment and see a show, or have your children go to summer camp,” she said. “It completes Aventura.”