

CT Main Street Success Stories

Handel Performing Arts Center University of Hartford

*Gateway to the Upper
Albany Main Street
Neighborhood*



Located at the intersection of Westbourne Parkway and Albany Avenue, the very gateway to the Upper Albany Main Street district, the site of the new Performing Arts Center is a former car dealership designed in 1929 by Albert Kahn, one of America's leading industrial architects. Kahn was a believer in "humanizing" the industrial environment for the worker, and the site was designed with more windows than solid walls.

The nationally recognized firm of Smith Edwards Architects of Hartford was the lead architect for the project. They collaborated with Howard Performance Architecture of New Orleans, designers of some of the country's top performing arts centers. Marrying the best of the old, the original Kahn design, with the best of the new, technically and technologically superb educational space for the performing arts, the center represents a significant investment in the city of Hartford.

The new Mort and Irma Handel Performing Arts Center, which opened for classes in September 2008, **provides a 55,000 square foot, state-of-the-art dance and theatre facility for 600 students. This new center boasts 5 dance studios, 4 theatre rehearsal studios, 3 vocal studios, and 2 black box theaters, as well as faculty offices, a community room, a branch of People's United Bank and the Backstage Café.**

At Connecticut Main Street Center we help inspire great Connecticut downtowns, Main Street by Main Street. We serve as the champion and leading resource for vibrant and sustainable Main Streets as foundations for healthy communities.

From the beginning, the Handel Performing Arts Center has positively impacted the Upper Albany and Blue Hills neighborhoods in North Hartford. In addition to the over 600 students, faculty, staff and visitors that come to the center, **the Center's two retail establishments have created 6 new private sector jobs. During construction of the Center, 40% of the construction contracts were awarded to small, minority-owned, or women-owned businesses, and more than 20% of the hours worked on the project were worked by Hartford residents.**

Funding for the \$21 million first phase of the project has come from federal, state, and city government; individual donors; and corporations and foundations. Mort and Irma Handel have shared the University's vision for the project from the beginning. Their \$1.5 million commitment – the largest gift from individual donors to the Performing Arts Center – is just the latest chapter in their long history of support for the University.

Walter Harrison, the visionary President of University of Hartford, has said, *"I see our project as a shining example of how universities can be economic engines. I hope this project will provide a bookend to the Artists Collective further down Albany, and serve as a catalyst for a thriving arts district, complete with shops, restaurants and other locations of interest."*

