

A Dream Come True

By Lydia McAnerney

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It is the dream of every non-profit organization to own its own building. For folk dance groups, the idea of a building with free span space, a sprung hardwood floor, a stage for the band and a place for dancers to congregate is even grander. In September 1999, this dream came true for Tapestry Folkdance Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, just short of 16 years after the organization's birth. The building is all that we ever dreamed and has pulled together the dance community in ways never before imagined.

In November 1998, faced with a huge increase in rent and a cut in available rental space where we had been for 11 years, the Tapestry Board of Directors faced a major decision. After leasing different spaces over the years, should the organization pursue another lease situation or bite the bullet and purchase a building? To remain at our venue was sure death for Tapestry. The situation was grave because a cut in time available to us also meant a sharp decrease in revenues. This would have made it impossible to pay the huge increase in rent. Our programs had grown over the years to require the concurrent use of two spaces during the weekend and some weeknights. We did look for rental space but did not find any place that would have been suitable. Our timeline was short; our choices few.

At the December 1998 Board of Directors meeting, Lisa Strong, then President of the Board, reported seeing a building while riding her bike to Tapestry. It had a domed roof, looked huge and was just going on the market. In fact, the real estate company was putting up the FOR SALE sign as she was riding by. She stopped and walked in for a brief tour. Later in the meeting, the Board of Directors voted to begin the process of purchasing the building. One month later, in mid-January 1999, we were in the midst of a capital campaign and for the next few months, purchase negotiations for the building, budget development and lots of other details.

When we began our capital campaign, we had some idea of how much it all would cost and wondered if it really was possible to raise close to \$200,000. To our surprise and delight, as soon as the campaign began, the contributions began pouring in. By the end of the fiscal year, June 1999, we had raised \$173,685. There were days when all the staff did was process checks. In December 1999, our grant request to the McKnight Foundation for \$123,000 was approved.

The statement from Rip Rapson, President of The McKnight Foundation aptly summarizes this new chapter in Tapestry's history: "The amazing outpouring of volunteer effort to create Tapestry's new home makes it an even more wonderful place to congregate, dance, learn, and celebrate. We are pleased to offer our support and wish you the very best."

[In the end], nearly \$350,000 has been raised in our capital campaign [including] the McKnight Foundation money, one donation of \$20,000 and over 385 donations of \$6,000 or less. In addition, we have a \$290,000 mortgage and had some smaller personal loans (now repaid) that tied us over until other contributions were raised. The entire project is a tribute to folk dancers in the Twin Cities and beyond. We couldn't have done any of it without their support.

During the late winter and spring months real estate negotiations were carried out, discussions with the City of Minneapolis for a parking variance occurred and plans for the new building and its cost were discussed with an architect and building contractor. During this whirlwind, regular programming continued, including International, Contra, Swing, English Country and Scandinavian dancing, and occasional special workshops were offered. A third part-time staff person, Mary Kay Schladweiler, was hired to focus on the programming while the other two part-time staff people directed the building related activities. Lydia McAnerney, External Relations Coordinator, guided us through parking variances and fund raising. Beth Hennessy, Executive Director, took care of budgets and loan applications. It's hard to believe all this took so much time, but there never seemed to be enough of it in one day to get everything done.

By mid-March, the purchase agreement was signed, the closing date loomed, and contributions continued to pour in. These included support from the local dance community as well as from dancers who had moved away or stopped dancing but remained loyal to Tapestry. On May 21, the purchase was complete; on May 22 we had an open house at the new building.

Demolition began that same day, and by May 23, the entire building was gutted. All the interior walls for 7 or 8 rooms, the electrical system and the suspended ceiling were removed. We had found out that, in order to meet the change of occupancy for the building, everything in the building had to be replaced to meet building codes.

Over the course of the renovations, May 22 to September 17, three paid contractors (all dancers), Tom Barnes, Jan Raven and Demi Miller, coordinated over 200 volunteers in the demolition and renovation of the space. Volunteers donated over 2000 hours to help with building and insulating walls, installing electrical systems, painting, and laying a sprung plywood floor (the under layer of the hardwood floor we hope to install in the next year) and other tasks. Volunteers also donated professional expertise. The architect, Bill Jacobsen (a Scandinavian dancer) donated more than 75% of his time. One of the electricians, Jim Garrity, donated over 50 hours. Len MacEachron, one of Tapestry's most loyal supporters who attends nearly all our Contra dances, is over 80 and donated over 300 hours of volunteer time. He worked nearly every day! It seemed that when we needed someone with expertise, they would appear from the dance community. We even had a lawyer from a prominent Minneapolis law firm donate her services for the real estate negotiations and purchase. When she left the firm, another professional helped guide our application through the proper channels to have a property tax exemption granted by the city.

Our first event in the new building was a wonderful Contra dance with Wild Asparagus on Friday, September 17th, just 10 months from the time we found out we needed to find a new home. (We received the final occupancy approval from the Fire Marshall at 2 p.m. that same afternoon)! The smiles on everyone's face during that and the subsequent events were proof that this had been a worthwhile endeavor.

To see the change in the dance community is a tribute to what owning a building has done for Tapestry. While the process took about three times as much money as we originally expected and more time and energy than one could imagine, it is something we'd do again (though not right away).

The Contra dance community has grown – over 225 people were at the last Contra dance when Pig's Eye Landing played. The International community has become closer knit and their support continues to be strongly demonstrated in many ways. The local community has shown its support through participation in events, assistance from the local neighborhood organization and press coverage.

The entire process of raising money and renovating the building created friendships across dance communities within Tapestry. It has raised the commitment to the building and to the organization. By including volunteers in the process all the way along, we built more than a building. It raised awareness and support about Tapestry in the local neighborhood and created a loyalty that will ensure a strong community for years to come. We would welcome any folk dancers to come see what a strong and committed community can do by visiting us at our new home in the Longfellow Community in south Minneapolis, Minnesota.