

Lead architect Mark Timbes says the Peace Center's outdoor TD Stage, in the background, is expected to be ready for performances by late August. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

'DREAM PROJECT' NEARS ITS END

Peace Center transformed by $21.5M renovation project

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Mark Timbes beams as he gazes around at the expansive new lobby of Greenville's Peace Center.

As lead architect of the center's $21.5 million renovation plan, Timbes over the past 14 months has enjoyed a front-row seat to the changes brought about by a small army of construction workers who have sought to transform his vision on paper into a towering reality.

His verdict: "It's fantastic."

The Peace Center's extensive 20th anniversary makeover is almost complete.

The concert hall's redesigned lobby has doubled in size. A new dynamic glass facade and front plaza have enhanced the arts venue's welcoming appeal, Timbes says.

Now, the renovation plan rushes toward its grand finale: a major facelift for the TD Stage, the outdoor amphitheater on the Peace Center's lower campus next to the Reedy River.

Overlooking the amphitheater, meanwhile, will be Genevieve's, a new patron's lounge and performance space connected to the Peace Center lobby.

"This is a wonderful project with a real commitment to quality that reaches down into little details," says Timbes, who led the architecture team for the Columbia-based Garvin Design Group. "What's most rewarding is to come here during a show and seeing the lobby being used. It really comes alive when people are here."

More shows

As the Peace Center gets ready to announce its full 2012-2013 performing arts season next week, the renovations to the TD Stage and the addition of Genevieve's are expected to significantly boost the number of shows to be presented year-round.

"There's no question that there'll be more performances," says Peace Center president Megan Riegel. "It's an exciting opportunity."

The TD Stage's new roof and sound and lighting system will make it a desirable new venue in Greenville for top-name popular singers, Riegel says.

"We're putting in a quarter of a million dollars just in

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DOWNTOWN

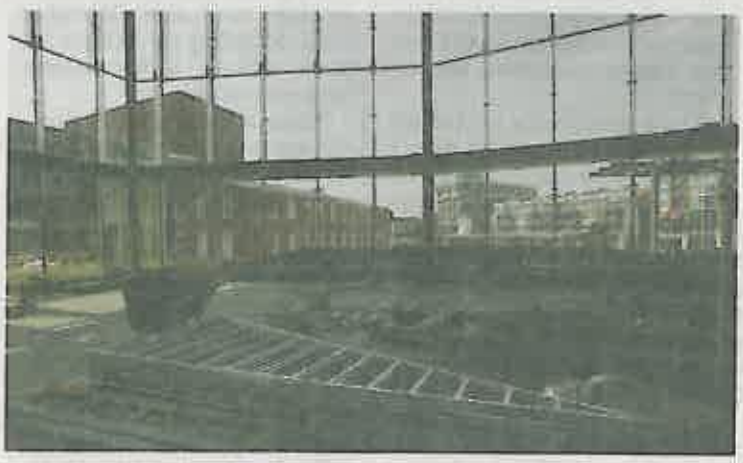
RENOVATION OVERVIEW

Cost: $21.5 million
Due to be completed: Late August
Length of construction: 16 months
Lobby space in Concert Hall: Doubled
New indoor venue: Genevieve's
Extensively renovated: Peace Center's front Graham Plaza and TD Stage next to the Reedy River
Major recording artist opening TD Stage: Mid-September

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PEACE CENTER UPDATE

Hear lead architect Mark Timbes describe the $21.5 million Peace Center renovations, due to be completed by late August.



Genevieve's, a new patrons lounge, is part of the Peace Center's $21.5 million renovation project. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

PEACE

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sound and lights," Riegel says. "For the first time, it's a real performing venue."

Adds Timbes: "The TD Stage will have a canvas-type roof, translucent at night, so it glows."

The renovated TD Stage will open in September with a concert featuring a major recording artist — to be announced next Saturday.

The audience area for the TD Stage will feature both stone seat walls — similar to those in Falls Park — as well as lawn areas for those who want to bring folding chairs and blankets.

"There will be a variety of seating options," Timbes says.

After renovations, the audience capacity is expected to increase from 1,200 to 1,400 seats, Timbes says.

A new outdoor staircase is being built from the Peace Center's front plaza down to the lower campus along the Reedy River. An outdoor elevator is being installed to take patrons from one level to the next.

Genevieve's, meanwhile, will be a small glass-enclosed room near the ground-floor lobby that can be used in conjunction with performances in the concert hall or host small performances itself.

It will have a capacity of about 120.

"We can do cabaret shows particularly," Riegel says. "Genevieve's will be open before a show, at intermission and after a show. Patrons will be able to get a nice drink and a light bite to eat."

The ground-to-ceiling glass walls enclosing Genevieve's will provide grand views of the Reedy River and downtown Greenville.

Tom Baer, CEO of Triangle Construction, has pledged to have the bulk of Peace Center renovations completed by the end of August.

Mission No. 1

In 2006, when Timbes first became involved in the early planning stages of the renovation project, he was informed about Priority No. 1:

"Fix our lobby," he says.

For a long time, patrons had complained about inadequate lobby space. During intermission, particularly at sold-out shows, patrons in the lobby often found themselves shoulder to shoulder with each other, elbows jostling.

"You were walking between walls of people," Timbes says.

"The biggest need was for more lobby space," Riegel says.

A study that compared the Peace Center to 42 other performing arts centers across the country found that Greenville's landmark arts venue came up short.

"We realized that the square-footage allotment for the Peace Center was one of the lowest, with two or three square feet per person during a sold-out show, where the average was in the seven- or eight-foot range," Timbes says.

When the Peace Center was first built two decades ago, the social aspect of attending a show was not high on the agenda, Timbes says. Space at that time was not set aside for a permanent bar and an area for performers to sell merchandise — or room for a pre-concert quartet to perform.

"If you go back 20 years, that idea of expansive social space was just coming into being," Timbes says.

The lobby congestion has been significantly relieved by the renovations.

A welcoming look

The Peace Center's new glass facade provides broader views of downtown and the Reedy River and also gives the venue a more welcoming look. People walking by can now see inside, and that makes all the difference, Timbes says.

"Even if you're not coming to the show, you see all the activity and feel drawn to what's going on inside," Timbes says. "You feel a part of that experience. It doesn't feel so insulated."

"We had said from the beginning that we wanted to bring the inside out and the outside in," Riegel says. "We wanted a transparency between the two, like it was all one big community space."

The renovated Graham Plaza on Main and Broad streets dispensed with a fire lane and landscape barriers that tended to shut out people rather than draw them in. The park-like front plaza now serves as a more attractive gathering place — whether before concerts or for downtown strollers during the day, Timbes says.

"The Peace Center felt like it was time to be a little more extroverted rather than introverted," Timbes says.

The wraparound glass lobbies showcase the Peace Center's original brick frame, adding a modern embellishment to its traditional design.

"We wanted to honor the architecture of the warehouse industrial mill town aesthetic," Timbes says.

Renovations began in May 2011, employing about 150 workers at the peak, Baer says. The construction project was estimated to provide a $26 million economic boost to the local economy.

Baer says the construction plan has gone smoothly, although workers had to learn how to work with unique materials, such as the structural glass system, which came from England.

"There have been some challenges, like using products from overseas that haven't been used in Greenville before, so there's been a learning curve," Baer says.

Riegel says the construction plan has remained mostly on budget. Fundraising for the project was completed several weeks ago.

"The fundraising has been so successful because the community embraces the Peace Center," Riegel says.

The Peace family, the major supporter of the Peace Center's construction in 1990, donated $5 million toward its 20th anniversary renovations.

Economic engine

The Peace Center is considered a major economic engine for downtown Greenville, boosting business to hotels and restaurants, bringing an estimated $22 million to the Upstate and supporting more than 500 jobs.

The Peace Center was one of the first major projects in the revitalization of downtown Greenville two decades ago, helping to spur other developments such as retail, hotels and restaurants.

"Obviously the Peace Center is a near and dear institution in Greenville," Timbes says. "It's part of what started the renaissance of Main Street 20 years ago. That renaissance is still going on today."

More than 250,000 patrons enjoy Peace Center performances every year. World-class entertainers — from cellist Yo-Yo Ma to singer Tony Bennett — have appeared in recent years as have the popular touring shows of blockbuster Broadway musicals — from "Wicked" to the recent "Lion King."

Arts education also is a chief focus of the Peace Center, with 70,000 students, teachers and parents attending shows every year.

In addition to Peace Center-sponsored performances, the center provides a venue for several independent local ensembles, from the Greenville Chorale to the Greenville County Youth Orchestra and Carolina Youth Symphony.

Riegel says the response to the renovations has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The public reaction has been really good," Riegel says. "We've had 65,000 people come through our venue in the last four weeks (for "The Lion King") and they have elbow room and they can get to the bar for a drink and visit with friends and family because they have room both inside the lobby and on the plaza. It has completely exceeded ex-



Construction is set to be completed soon on the Peace Center's outdoor TD Stage. Overlooking the stage will be Genevieve's, a new patrons lounge. PHOTOS BY HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF



The Peace Center's renovation project is wrapping up with major updates to the outdoor stage and seating.