College of The Arts Hits a High Note

"This is the moment an entire college dreamed for, hoped for, planned for, and desperately needed for more than 40 years," says USF College of The Arts Dean Ron Jones.

A new Music Building, an All-Steinway initiative, impending renovations and expansions.

USF's College of Arts is on a meteoric rise. In March, the college will open its new, state-of-the-art Music Building, one of the most acoustically significant buildings in higher learning.

"With one bold stroke we will move into the rarified atmosphere of the most elite music institutions around the world," Jones says. "Everyone from our students and faculty to our Tampa and Florida communities will benefit in a dramatic and tangible way."

Nearly $50 million in state funding allowed for the construction of the new Music Building, but it was the generous support of private donors that transformed the dream of a good facility into the reality of one of the best in the nation.

Dr. Ed and Lewis Barnes gifted $600,000 to the project. One of the founding fathers of the USF College of Medicine, Lewis Barnes dreamed of being a violinist as a child. He hopes the new building will help aspiring musicians realize their future in music.

"Good music is like good medicine that benefits all mankind," he says.

"When music comes into our lives it leaves footprints in our hearts and souls."

Priorly last year, USF President Judy Genshaft announced the university’s commitment to becoming an All-Steinway School, joining the elite roster of colleges and universities whose students and faculty practice, compose, and perform exclusively on Steinway pianos. The initiative’s latest boost in the fall with a $100,000 anonymous gift through the USF: Unstoppable campaign—a gift that adds a Steinway Concert Grand piano to the collection.

"This is a transformational year for the college," says Jones, detailing other plans, including new space for the Art program and renovations to the Contemporary Art museum. The college is also home to the schools of Architecture & Community Design, Art & Art History, Music, Theatre & Dance, and the Institute for Research in Art, including Graphicstudio and the Contemporary Art Museum.

"None of this would be possible without the support of many, many people, including Lee and Victor Leavengood, who have generously supported the college over the years with more than $700,000 in gifts, and Jane Bangert McNeil and her husband, Rory, who recently gave $300,000 to the college."

Their gift, made in memory of Jane’s mother, a former USF theatre student, establishes an endowment that will help senior theatre students launch their own professional careers.

"These plans are a promise of what the future will hold for the College of the Arts. They are a commitment to passion and excellence in every aspect of the student experience," Jones says.

"They will help us redefine who we are as a School of Music and as a College of the Arts, and to reach unprecedented levels of national and international recognition."