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Marilyn Walker donates \$15 million to Brock University



Gift results in the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts

A collective gasp, followed by cheers and a thunderous and prolonged standing ovation, greeted an announcement last week that philanthropist and fibre artist Marilyn Walker was personally donating \$15 million to Brock University's School of Fine and Performing Arts.

Hundreds of curious guests packed the Sean O'Sullivan Theatre on Nov. 5 to hear details of what the University described only as a 'transformational announcement.' Brock President Jack Lightstone generated laughter from the audience when he said "you have shown a great deal of trust by showing up today."

Lightstone requested a dramatic drum roll prior to stating the value of the gift, the largest ever received by Brock University or made in the Niagara region. The gift is particularly remarkable as it is made in a climate marked by economic uncertainty and waning support for the arts.

Brock has renamed its school the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, with a facility likely to be built in downtown St. Catharines. The renaming is in tribute to the donor's reputation as an internationally recognized fibre artist, teacher, author and philanthropist. Walker is also an active supporter of the arts and arts education across Canada, and at Brock University in particular.

At this year's Fall Convocation, Walker received an honorary doctorate in recognition of her many achievements.

"Institutions are like people – they need to be fed in order to grow and sustain their vibrancy," said Walker in her address last week. "Brock is no different."

She added that a community is incomplete without a vibrant cultural component.

"It is through participating in cultural events that we enjoy the benefits of what I like to call intellectual therapy," said Walker. "Arts, heritage, and culture give a community its character and vibrancy. They make a community an attractive place to live, work, and play."

The entire \$15 million will be endowed in perpetuity to support building the school's programs, enhancing its facilities and positioning it to be one of the best in North America, if not the world. The school is committed to top-quality learning and research and toward the creation of a world-class arts facility.

The gift will build intellectual capacity in a permanent home, enhance the student experience, support the cultural renaissance of Niagara, strengthen Brock's role in revitalizing Niagara's economy, and develop at least eight research chairs over time.

Continues on page 2.



Hundreds of people packed the Sean O'Sullivan Theatre Nov. 6 to hear the transformational announcement regarding the \$15-million donation and the newly named Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts.

Continued from page 1.

As a fibre artist Walker is a pioneer, both in terms of technique and in teaching others about the history of quilts and how they have emerged as an important consideration in the art world.

Throughout the 1980s and '90s, Walker lectured and taught at guilds across Canada and the U.S. She curated the first Canadian Contemporary Quilt competition and her achievements have been recognized with many awards, including the Canadian Historical Association Award of Merit for her book, *Ontario's Heritage Quilts*.

Walker is also a community leader and committed arts advocate whose thoughtful leadership and heartfelt dedication has created positive change

in Niagara. She is a devoted volunteer and supporter of local arts and was awarded a Mayor's Patron of the Arts Award in 2007 by the City of St. Catharines for her noteworthy contributions.

Walker has worked tirelessly for many years on behalf of the St. Catharines chapter of the Canadian Federation of University Women, and has been enormously important in sustaining the St. Catharines Area Arts Council, Bethlehem Place and Women's Place. She also played an instrumental role in the revitalization of the Rodman Hall Arts Centre.

"Marilyn Walker has been instrumental in the cultural revitalization of the Niagara region," said Lightstone. "Her commitment to improve the quality of life at the

school, in the community and across the region is inspiring. The Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts will attract the very best to Brock, create positive economic impact for St. Catharines and Niagara, and serve as a tribute to a great Canadian artist and arts advocate. We are deeply appreciative of her support and thoughtful consideration."

Rosemary Hale, Dean, Faculty of Humanities, said that "students in theatre, music, movement, fine art, and multimedia across Canada will have a home here that ranks among the best in the world. This gift will allow the School of Fine and Performing Arts, in the Faculty of Humanities, to build intellectual capacity in a permanent home."

Second-year movement students performed a flocking exercise to entertain guests prior to the announcement, and soloist Heather Thomas, a recent graduate from the School, performed a piece by Mozart during the hour-long ceremony.

The Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts was formed in 2002 at Brock University as an interdisciplinary centre for creative and scholarly activities relating to the arts. The School is made up of the Departments of Dramatic Arts, Music, Visual Arts, and the Centre for Studies in Arts and Culture.

The faculty is comprised of highly respected professionals who are experienced teachers and remain active in their disciplines, bringing relevant and up-to-date instruction to their students.

Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts

Faculty of Humanities Brock University

