

STOCKTON COLLEGE

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY



Stockton College to Lead Atlantic City's Historic Dante Hall of the Performing Arts

Stockton Affiliated Services, Inc., St. Michael's Church Reach Lease Agreement; Vital Step in Development of Arts District for Atlantic City

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, June 08, 2011

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Atlantic City, NJ- Successfully completing a long-envisioned collaboration, the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey's non-profit corporation and St. Michael's Church of Atlantic City reached a lease agreement yesterday, enabling Stockton to operate the historic Dante Hall of the Performing Arts here.

The agreement, signed by Stockton Affiliated Services, Inc., (SASI) and St. Michael's, goes into effect immediately and will run until May 31, 2014. The agreement is seen by the College, area civic and business leaders and the community as a key first step in developing an Arts District in Atlantic City.

"Stockton is delighted to have played a role in helping to re-establish Dante Hall as a crown jewel for an Arts District in Atlantic City," Stockton President Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., said. "This is the type of public-private-community engagement partnership that will benefit our students, the region and its people. I look forward to the College providing its internal resources, support and knowledge of the performing arts to help Dante Hall thrive."

The lease is a nominal \$100 per month or \$1,200 annually. SASI, a New Jersey non-profit corporation, will administer the building including scheduling, programming and marketing. It will also provide outreach to community groups wishing to utilize the facility.

Adjoining historic St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church on Mississippi Avenue, Dante Hall has been a neighborhood landmark in the Ducktown section of Atlantic City since it opened in 1924 as an opera hall.

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Neighborhood businessman Frank Formica grew up in the upstairs apartment of the family's Formica Brothers Bakery on the 2400 block of Arctic Avenue, which is physically connected to Dante Hall. He is currently a member of the Dante Hall Board of Directors and played a pivotal role in the collaboration. Formica said he was ecstatic for the future prospects of the Hall and an Arts District in the surrounding neighborhood.

Formica contacted Stockton officials several years ago about resurrecting the intimate 250-seat performance venue.

"All of the Stockton officials have been receptive and understanding of what a revitalized Dante Hall could mean to the area, with President Saatkamp being at the forefront. Also, Alex Marino (Director of Stockton's Carnegie Center in Atlantic City) has worked extremely hard to help make this happen," he said.

Father Jeffrey Cesarone, Pastor of St. Michael's, was pleased to hear the lease had been executed.

"This collaboration promises to be of great benefit to both the parish and the community," he said. "We anticipate a very bright future for the development of our neighborhood and an increased invigoration of St. Michael's Parish."

According to President Saatkamp, Dante Hall is a good fit for Stockton's educational mission and strategic plan, which calls for ongoing community partnerships and civic engagement. "Additionally, this fits with Governor Christie's vision of Atlantic City's evolution to a destination resort," he said. "The casinos obviously are crucial to the future success of the City, but so are educational and cultural resources, which Dante Hall will certainly augment."

Formica said some of his earliest memories of the building involve playing basketball there as a child.

"When President Kennedy started a physical fitness initiative in the 1960s, a basketball court was fashioned there. Among the neighborhood kids who played there was Chris Ford, who went on to win three NBA championships as a player and a coach for the Boston Celtics."

According to Formica, Atlantic City served as a trial venue for Broadway shows in the 1920s. When Dante Hall opened, it was one of perhaps a dozen small theatres that staged pre-Broadway productions. Formica also stated that today, Dante Hall's potential is unlimited—for student productions, community theatre, music shows and the like.

"Stockton's experience in the Performing Arts will certainly serve us well as programming is developed for Dante Hall," said President Saatkamp. "We are excited about the future of this historic venue and the surrounding neighborhood."

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