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MIWSFPA awarded for its architecture

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Brock University students and staff aren't the only ones who love the look and feel of the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts.

Niagara Region recognized the school with an Adaptive Re-Use Award during the 2015 Niagara Community Design Awards on Friday.

The MIWSFPA was completed in 2015, a \$45.5-million redevelopment of the former Canada Hair Cloth Building, an iconic structure in downtown St. Catharines which has been transformed and expanded to include a 35,000-square-foot addition.

"It is arguably one of the most beautifully designed buildings that captures the heritage of what it once was," said St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik. "It's the juxtaposition between the modern and the heritage combined in one footprint."

The facility is the result of nearly a decade of hard work and commitment from hundreds of people.

"The Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts is a legacy project and demonstrates the transformative capacity of imaginative approaches to architecture in the service of post-secondary education," said MIWSFPA director Derek Knight. "Such commitment is a demonstration of the value the University places in conserving both the fabric of a magisterial 19th-century industrial structure and repurposing it as part of the revitalization of our core city."

The building wouldn't have been possible without a \$26.1-million investment from the Government of Ontario, and numerous corporate and private donors.

Designed by the renowned Toronto firm Diamond Schmitt Architects and **built by Bird Construction**, the project was a joint venture with the City of St. Catharines to create a multi-use arts complex to connect the talent of Brock students with the needs of the community. The

result is a 95,000-square-foot education facility showcasing the history of the original space combined with modern architecture and learning technology.

University President Jack Lightstone said the MIWSFPA has been a huge hit with students and faculty.

“This amazing downtown school happened because committed and generous people made it happen. As a result, we have all witnessed a dramatic change in our downtown core that is like very few transitions we will ever again see in our lifetimes,” Lightstone said.

“For Brock, it provides another purpose-built facility serving the very specialized needs of the University and for Niagara, it is a landmark of what a university and a city government can achieve in close working partnership.”

The Region said the project was noted for its integration with the community from its name to the linkages with the nearby performing arts centre, as well as creating a new landmark within the city and blending heritage elements with new construction.

The school is named for the late Marilyn I. Walker, a fabric artist, Brock supporter and St. Catharines arts advocate.

“The award reflects the vision of Marilyn I. Walker, Jack Lightstone and Dr. Rosemary Hale,” Sendzik said. “It acts as a catalysit for where we are going as a community.” He said the blend of old and new celebrates St. Catharines manufacturing history and its future as an arts and culture hub.

“Brock University has made an extraordinary commitment to the next generations of students; not only is this important for sustaining our own community but for the vitality and interest this will generate beyond the Niagara Region,” Knight said.
