

“This – is – our – moment”
COFAC Dean William T. ‘Billy’ Clow
Center for Performing Arts Groundbreaking Remarks – Oct. 7, 2022

Not a stretch to say I have lived and breathed this project for ten years. Many have waited even longer. Loraine Epperson was a part of the initial dream of a performance hall in 1972. My mentor, President emeritus Al Goldfarb re-envisioned this moment 20 years ago.

And the state of Illinois agreed.

And agreed,

and agreed again.

Governor Pritzker agreed too, and then went one step further. He has made it happen. (Pause)

In 710ish days (I told ya I live this)

We will gather here again to be part of a grand opening this region has not experienced in a long time. A bushel of folks will be thanked that day. Many folks have been thanked today. Probably some we’ve missed too. I want to give thanks to a few folks as well. So many have had some part in this process.

Presidents Goldfarb, Thomas, Abraham, and especially President Huang, who put his trust in me and a few others when we said this can be done. Previous Dean Paul Kreider, and then Provost Ken Hawkinson and Sharon Evans, and Buzz Hoon. Mitch Hirsch and team from Pelli Clarke Pelli, Charles Smith and Eric and all the folks at Cannon Design. Scott Coker, Troy Rhoads, who has been dogged in ensuring we get here, and all our facilities maintenance folks who do more with less, better than any I’ve ever seen. Brad Bainter and our University Foundation, Darcie Shinberger and her staff who can turn on a dime, Loraine and Kenny and Tate and Sharon, Herb and Nancy, and all the folks who have committed their personal time and treasure waiting for this moment . . .
Some of whom cannot be with us today.

Ted and Jeanette, who will march with me, side by side, into the breach and see this project through.

And especially the folks in our office, past and present, who have put up with an, at times, raving madman these past ten years and unfailingly supported this dream, my family, and so many others too numerous to name; my deepest respect and thanks.

The Center for Performing Arts is, as Dr. Huang mentioned, “iconic.” Designed by architects Pelli Clarke Pelli with Cannon Design as our lead architects, this building will be A LEED Silver Certified building. Optimized Energy Performance, low water reduction, electrically efficient with operational systems that will work together to keep costs down while being conscious of the environment around us. Modern lighting and sound performance, adjustable acoustics for performance, and so much more. River City Construction has joined us as the contractor who will make our wildest dreams come to life. If you really want, I will get Eric from Cannon Design and Joel from River City Construction, and we can geek out all day on the details. It matters.

It matters that our students have facilities to train and learn in that are worthy of their immense talent. That our spectacular faculty can teach and create in spaces that long for a sense of timeless artistry. It matters that we can bring outside professionals into our community and our region and welcome everyone to experience something new or challenging or even difficult because, yes, life can be tricky, and art mimics life.

However, what matters most is not as tangible. It is not the concrete and steel and incredible technology. What matters most are our students. And everyone gathered here today. And the folks outside this fence line who aren't here with us. Because the CPA is more than just a building, it is our art, our learning, and mostly our soul.

The Center for Performing Arts represents the heart of our region.

Arts matter. Look around and tell me searching for meaning isn't only needed but necessary. Spaces like the CPA are spiritual grounds. Places where audiences and artists alike can search for ideas and inspiration and, yes, meaning. The Arts provide us outlets for connection, understanding, and of course, entertainment.

710ish days from now, with champagne and balloons and fanfare, we will begin a new dream. Performances and productions will come and go. One day here and the next gone. And yet each play, each concert, and each performance, they all live on. They live in the ether and in the hearts of those that were a part of them

and in the walls built on this ground. Today we begin a journey that knows no end. A building designed to inspire artists and audiences alike. Laugh, cry or get angry; art should leave you anything but meh. I believe to my core, that we have to be the best because no one is coming to the cornfields for less. The Center for Performing Arts and the College of Fine Arts and Communication are ready for the next 125 years.

Thank you, Governor Pritzker, President Huang, and all for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.