

Open House

SCOTT TALK

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'...The Mady Centre will showcase our own.
We have talented artists in our community.
This will be their home.'

Jeff Lehman, Mayor of Barrie



UP on the Roof

with Reinhart Weber

Barrie's Mady Centre is now open. All eyes now turn to Midland. With occupancy scheduled for spring 2012, *Scott Talk's* John Bleasby took a tour through the Midland Cultural Centre site, guided by Reinhart Weber, whose family foundation not only pledged \$7.5 million in funding, but whose individual initiative has made this facility possible.



Running a full block on Elizabeth Street at King, the Midland Cultural Centre contains three distinct spaces for the creative arts

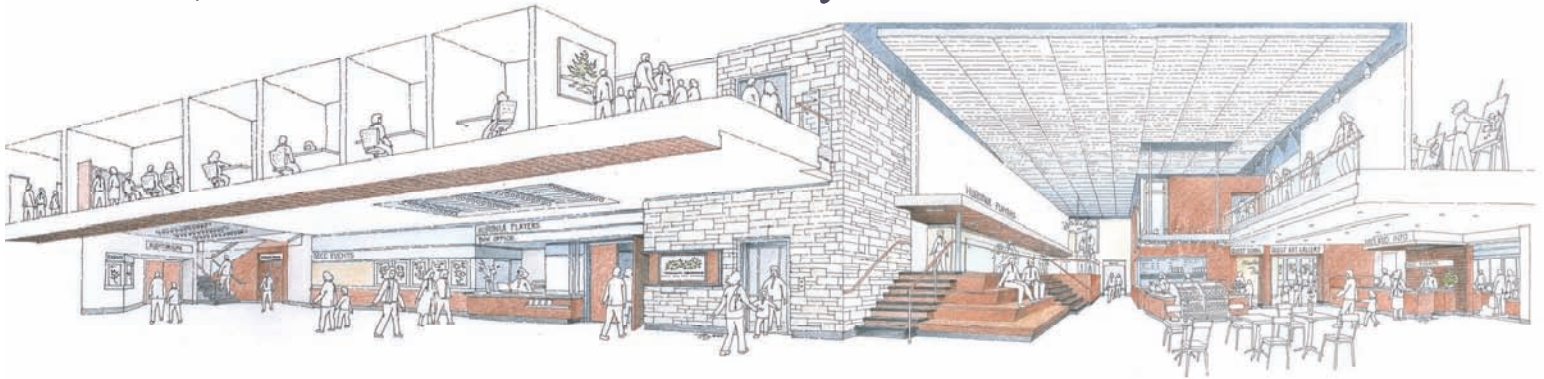
“**W**ould you like to go up to the roof?”

Sure, I thought, why not? Having been escorted through all rooms and spaces on the main and second floors of this busy construction site at the corner of King and Elizabeth Streets, I had expected the tour to be complete. Reinhart Weber has led me up and down stairs, around corners into never-ending spectacular spaces with the energy of a man half his age. Now Reinhart wanted me to see the roof.

“This is a very complex building” explained Reinhart. “Look at the mechanical.” Indeed, this was not your typical moonscape rooftop. There were perhaps a dozen heating and air conditioning units, massive ones, with gas pipes and arterial vents leading this way and that. Given Reinhart’s engineering background, he is as excited about the roof as any other part of the structure. Actively involved in the day-to-day progress at the site, he has his own white supervisor’s hardhat marked on the front with the initials ‘RW’ in marker pen. “There are so many decisions that come up during a project this big, this complex. Most of those involve money in some way. So I’m here!”

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The immense impact the MCC will have on the Town of Midland is hard to comprehend. I ask Reinhart if he is truly aware of the enormity of his foundation's gift to the Town and the impact it will have on the creative arts in the area. "Well, that's the whole idea." he says with a smile.



Top: The main foyer opens to a café & the overlooks from the Quest Gallery on the right and offices on the upper level left. The entrance to The Huronia Players Theatre is up the stairs in the centre, and the entrance to The Rotary Hall to the far left. (shown in cross-section)

Above: Massive heating and air conditioning units on the roof will control the interior environment without any noise.

Right: Reinhart Weber stands in what will be the long, glass-walled passageway that links all three creative spaces.

We are joined on the roof by architect Howard Rideout, who explains the mechanical layout. "We have kept these mechanical aspects out of the interior of the building. And although no units sit over top the performance areas themselves, nevertheless they must be isolated and insulated, both up top here and underneath inside the roof." And upon closer inspection, one can see that all the units are sitting on pads that will eliminate any noise or vibration passing below. "And over here," continues Reinhart, pointing out a blank, south-facing wall, "this is where the solar panels will go. They will be vertical panels, not angled. It's new technology. These panels will provide our hot water."

The new MCC in Midland is clearly a remarkable facility from top to bottom. Rideout estimates the interior area at 30,000 square feet. While it takes up the length of a city block, not until one is inside the various performance and gallery spaces themselves does one truly sense the enormity and openness. For example, sidewalks areas at certain points around the building will be widened to as much as to 18 feet. When combined with the glass-walled interior promenade and foyer linking the Quest Gallery, the Huronia Players Theatre and the Rotary Hall event centre, the outdoors flows into the building in the form of light and the visuals of passing pedestrian traffic, which at the same time can see the activity inside.

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“This facility will be owned by the Town of Midland” explains Reinhart “but will not be run by the Town.”

The building will be totally closed-in by late October, permitting the interior finishing to properly begin, an interior that will feature an abundance of natural wood and stone. The outside façade is basically complete, a combination of attractive rough-hewn block and flat stucco surfaces, plus lots and lots of glass on main and upper floors. Kitty-corner is the beautiful, turn-of-the-last-century municipal library, thus creating a ‘Culture Corner’ in the heart of the Town.

It takes little imagination to appreciate the flow of space inside the new MCC. The main foyer soars up 30 feet, encompassing a café, box office, reception area and a small elevated performance space “perhaps for a string quartet during a reception or intermission” suggests Reinhart. Wide staircases sweep up to the upper level where, glass framed balconies overlook the main common space from The Quest Gallery’s second floor. Quest itself will boast two art instruction rooms, two large high-ceiling galleries (one for local artists, one for travelling shows or permanent exhibits), a gift shop and office space. I am awed by the scale.

The 125 seat Huronia Players Theatre, is a vast open hall at the moment, lit only a single light bulb in the corner, but one can already see the raked seating base, the aerial catwalk, or ‘tension grid’, installed above, and the huge stage area with plenty of wing and crossover space provided. Walking through a wide passageway stage-left I find the roll-on, roll-off set storage and construction areas, a large green room, two large dressing rooms, and the costume storage room. On the second floor level behind the stage is a same-size rehearsal space. The Huronia Players, the future long term tenants, are justified in smiling from ear to ear as they enter their 50th anniversary season.

Equally impressive is the multi-use Rotary Hall’. Including the balcony, there is available seating for 300 in auditorium format for performances and lectures, or 150 on the main floor in a dinner banquet format, with a raised sectional stage that can expand

The Weber Foundation

The Weber Foundation is a private foundation established by Reinhart Weber and his family. The Foundation has contributed millions of dollars to the North Simcoe region through gifts to numerous social agencies, support groups, children's programs, hospitals and community institutions. The Foundation recently donated more than \$2,000,000 for the construction of a transition home with 20 housing units for families and individuals transitioning from homelessness or deprivation to more conventional housing. The pledge of \$7,500,000 to the Cultural Centre is the largest single donation in the history of Simcoe County.

into the hall 10 to 20 feet for bands or performances, permitting adaptation for use by groups of all types. Behind all this is a large commercial kitchen. “This facility will be owned by the Town of Midland” explains Reinhart “but will not be *run* by the Town. We have formed our own governing body, the Midland Cultural Centre Inc., which has leased the facility from the Town and in turn has elected a board of directors that will oversee the facility’s operation.” As the MCC’s website outlines: “The concept is that this will be a facility operated for and by the citizens of the area. Citizens will become involved as volunteers, audiences, teachers, students and participants.” Indeed, the cash infusions that have made the MCC possible have come entirely outside governments at any level. In addition to the \$7.5 funding from the Weber Foundation, sponsors include the local Rotary, banks, plus several local suppliers.

Star Trek’s Captain Kirk famously said: “Space: The final frontier.” And the requirement for ‘space’ is always an issue with live performance spaces. Well, Captain, the Midland Cultural Centre is all about *space*. It’s beautiful and inspiring. Jaws will drop when the first patrons pass through the doors next spring. The MCC officially opens in late May 2012 with The Huronia Players’ production of the Thornton Wilder classic *Our Town*. “It’s such an appropriate first show, don’t you think.” observes Reinhart. I couldn’t agree more!

All photos by John Bleasby
All renderings courtesy of Howard Rideout, Architect

To read more about the Midland Cultural Centre, and to become a ‘Friend of the MCC’, please visit:
<http://midlandculturalcentre.com/index.php>