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MSU to offer education, music classes in Detroit

Louis Aguilar and Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

Michigan State University is launching another addition to its growing Detroit presence, this time setting up an extension of its Colleges of Music and Education in an empty and striking historic building in the city's cultural center. The East Lansing-based Big Ten school signed a seven-year, \$490,000 annual lease to move into a sloping Spanish-tile roofed building on Woodward Avenue designed by famed architect Albert Kahn. The 22,000-square-foot building beside Wayne State University's Bonstelle Theatre has been vacant for nearly 25 years. It's expected to open this fall as a hub of teaching, learning and recruiting for the state's largest university.



The move is expected to attract the kind of demographic that city boosters desperately crave: Young, educated and creative.

"We are always looking for ways to increase our presence in southeast Michigan and a new location in the cultural corridor on Woodward provides a space that will be very accessible to the people of Detroit," said Kent Cassella, MSU director of media communications.

The College of Education will host classes for fifth-year students teaching in Detroit schools, Cassella said. The building also would provide meeting space for students participating in summer fellowship programs in Detroit schools as well as for educational programs for high school students.

The move marks a significant expansion of the Community Music School, the outreach arm of the College of Music, which has traditionally brought music education and music therapy to those of all ages and abilities within the Greater Lansing community since its founding in 1993.

Metro Detroiters will have access to early childhood education, a jazz orchestra and New Horizons, a band for adults age 50 and older where individuals can learn to play instruments, according to MSU.

Admissions, development and government affairs offices would all be set up in the city, Cassella said.

It's unclear how many students, faculty and staff will ultimately use the building. But MSU's presence is expected to boost the number of young professionals and students converging in the Midtown area.

While there have been failed businesses such as Zaccaro's Market, housing foreclosures and deferred projects in the area, small retailers continue to set up shop and the rental market has remained strong throughout, according to several area developers.

"Things are tough right now, but there's still always something going on," said Robert Slattery, owner of Midtown Development. "We sold three units in the last week and half" in the Willys Overland Loft on Cass Avenue, he said.

Besides the Bonstelle, the new MSU outlet is just down the street from the Max M. Fisher Music Center, home of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Detroit School for the Arts, and within blocks of other cultural icons such as the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Historical Museum, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and the Science Center.

The building is also near the Detroit Medical Center, where MSU has taken over the former Hutzel Hospital for part of its College of Osteopathic Medicine. The Detroit campus will enroll its first class of 50 students this year.

Earlier this year, MSU's College of Education moved into a portion of the building that houses the nonprofit Youthville Detroit in the New Center area. Faculty and staff are operating a resource center there that's aimed at increasing the number of high-performing schools and funded by the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation.

"We are looking ... for opportunities to create new partnerships and solidify our long-term presence (in Detroit)," Casella said.

MSU's move to the Detroit Medical Center originally met resistance from Wayne State University's medical school - the DMC's longtime teaching partner -- over concerns their students would be crowded out of clinical opportunities.

But Wayne State's dean of the College of Education, Paula C. Wood, acknowledged that reaching out to the urban areas is important in preparing MSU teachers for significant challenges.

Wood, whose school works extensively with the Detroit schools, said she supported the arrival of another educational program increasing engagement with the district. Until every need is served, "We can always use more support of the students of Detroit," she added.

The Woodward building was formerly a printing press plant and previously owned by the American Red Cross. Developer Adam Nyman bought it four years ago and oversaw a \$2 million renovation in 2006.

"We had to basically strip it to its core to save it," Nyman said, who owns Professional Property Management in Troy. "It's beautiful now."

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