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## NEWS LOCAL

### School's 'vision' gets dramatic boost



By Peter Hendra, Kingston Whig-Standard  
Thursday, April 7, 2016 9:48:26 EDT PM



Canadian businessman and philanthropist Aubrey Dan announces on Thursday that he and his wife Marla are donating \$5 million to the drama and music program at Queen's University. (Hannah Lawson/For The Whig-Standard)

The recently amalgamated drama and music department at Queen's University received a \$5 million donation Thursday, and, in turn a new name.

The new Dan School of Drama and Music is named after the family of Aubrey and Marla Dan, whose daughter graduated from the school a couple of years ago and is now working for the Ambassador Theatre Group in London, England.

"It's a sufficient sum to make a difference," explained Aubrey Dan, a businessman and the founder of Dancap Productions, Inc., a Tony Award-winning commercial theatre company that has a hand in productions of Jersey Boys, The Drowsy Chaperone, West Side Story and A Streetcar Named Desire.

"You have to look at the critical mass of what you need as an investment, not just as a short-term need, but for the long-term needs for the department."

Dan was initially approached about donating half a million dollars, but that "wasn't enough to move the needle," he said.

Of the total, \$4.5 million will be endowed, while the remaining \$500,000 will be used for immediate needs, explained Craig Walker, head of the school that merged last spring.

Aside from the Isabel Bader Centre for Performing Arts itself, "we've never had a donation of this kind," Walker said.

While Walker would someday like to see a new building for the school of drama and music constructed -- it's currently housed in the Theological Hall on campus (even though the theology department no longer exists) -- that wasn't part of the yearlong discussion with the Dans.

"I proposed a vision that integrated a whole lot of different things," Walker explained.

"We had to increase our library collection, we had to establish state-of-the-art recording facilities [at The Isabel]. Bringing in professionals was a very important part, sometimes as visitors for single occasions, but sometimes for longer stays, up to and including teaching courses for us. That integration with the outside was a very important part for us."

And dance will be taught for the first time at the university starting in the fall, Walker said.

Also unveiled were plans for the school to establish new degrees, including a bachelor of music theatre (in partnership with St. Lawrence College), arts management graduate diploma, master of arts in arts leadership, and MAs and PhDs in drama and music.

The benefactors liked the way the Queen's school of drama had taught their daughter skills she used off-stage, on the production side of things, rather than onstage.

The donation will enhance those opportunities, and, ideally, make the Dan School of Drama and Music a pre-eminent destination for students and teachers alike.

"So it's not just a gift," Aubrey Dan said, "it's our involvement in helping transform the vision."

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