

First Coast Cultural Center purchases building for future home

Donna Guzzo, president and CEO of First Coast Cultural Center has announced the purchase of the non-profit's new location. The two-story, 6,000-square-foot building is located at 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle in Ponte Vedra Beach and currently serves as the Ponte Vedra Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery Center location owned and operated by Daniel M. Calloway, M.D.

The property was purchased for \$2.2 million with a capital campaign currently in place called First Coast Cultural Center Cares About Culture, and a multiyear financial drive for \$3.7 million.

The center requires an immediate need of \$500,000 to remodel the existing medical venue and architectural buildout of the internal space. The property purchase was funded by individuals and funds from a former building sale.

According to Guzzo, Calloway will stay in the space through Nov. 23 to continue his practice.

Currently, First Coast Cultural Center is located at 3972 3rd St. South, Jacksonville Beach. The recent purchase is the center's second real estate acquisition since its opening more than 28 years ago at 50 Executive Way in Ponte Vedra Beach, which was originally the U.S. Post Office in Ponte Vedra for

many years.

"We are excited to expand our space to better serve the community with more programs, services, classes, events, studio space and rehearsal, exhibit and performance areas, among others," said Guzzo. "Our next steps include securing funds for customizing the new location. The goal is to make the most fiscally responsible decision which will benefit our members, children and adult students, children with disabilities, contributors, partners and the community. We are excited about the opportunity to expand access to the arts among all populations and diverse groups in Northeast Florida."

Guzzo initially became aware of the available real estate from her business and civic work with Tyler Saldutti, founder and CEO of Prime Realty Inc. in Jacksonville. Saldutti and Matthew Lehman from Prime Realty served as the commercial real estate agents and brokers on the property transaction. The closing was held on Aug. 23 at St. Johns Title in Ponte Vedra Beach with Guzzo; Dr. Carla Rodrigues, chair of



Donna Guzzo

the Board of Directors for First Coast Cultural Center and a local veterinarian; Kevin Russell, chief operating officer for Marks Gray, Lawyers for En-

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terprise, who was serving as treasurer on the center's board of directors at the time of closing; and John Keeley, the commercial lending officer for Community First Credit Union who helped Guzzo secure the building loan.

Mike Koppenhafer, owner of Fisher Koppenhafer, is named as architect on the project going forward.

"We are fortunate to have a building in the bustling and desirable Sawgrass area of Ponte Vedra Beach with proximity to shopping centers, numerous neighborhoods and minutes from leading medical facilities, retirement communities, renowned golf courses and more," said Guzzo. "Our service is geared to residents and visitors throughout St. Johns County and the Beaches area, including Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach and Atlantic Beach."

All interior and exterior areas of the new building will be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) approved and accessible. Visual arts and music classrooms will be designed to teach music therapy to children with disabilities, plus there will be a pottery room with multiple wheels and kilns, a culinary studio and expanded spaces for exhibits along with a gift shop, to name a few.

The center's Kick StART after school enrichment program and classes will continue to reach several Title I schools in the south of the county.

A free and open-to-the-public event with ribbon cutting and formal, grand opening to commemorate the official ownership is slated for 4:30 p.m. Dec. 14 with light refreshments, music and a fun photo booth. To RSVP for the event, contact Charlotte Chastain at cchastain@firstcoastculturalcenter.org.

"We needed a newly upgraded space that could be designed specifically for our purposes," said Guzzo. "The shopping center storefront and post office space served us well. However, we must grow to support the sophisticated market. Ponte Vedra Beach is a premier destination for tourism, and we're excited to offer a leading location for our visiting guests and our locals, plus many fine artists from the region. The community will be able to connect and engage with our artists in residence, experience the arts, take a class or

workshop with a master artist, enjoy exquisite events and enjoy the local surroundings. With more than 8,000 constituents, we look forward to having our own home where we can double and, in some instances, triple the number of programs we offer."

First Coast Cultural Center's fall and spring 2024 classes, programs and workshops are currently available for registration. Adult classes will include Gold Leaf Mini Painting Workshop; Seascapes and Landscapes Acrylic Painting; How to Watercolor; Abstract Human Painting; Watercolor with Six Tubes; Pen and Ink Drawing and Watercolor Painting; Sumi Painting and Drawing a Realistic Portrait from a Photo.

Additional classes and workshops will include Nature Journaling Outdoors with watercolor and mixed media, Experimental Photo Transfer Workshop, and Meditative Chakra Painting.

First Coast Cultural Center will continue to hold classes at 3972 Third St. South in Jacksonville Beach through the end of the year. Studio hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday, with after-hours appointments available.

Weekly drama classes will continue in Nocatee at Care Connect+, located inside the Flagler Health+ Village at 351 Town Center Plaza, Suite 205 in Ponte Vedra.



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