

Focus on local arts

Performing Arts Center moving ahead

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Staff Writer

Barbara Mittermaier thinks the county's performing arts facilities are sub-par. To remedy that, Mittermaier, the president of Performing Arts Lake Sumter, and a group of like-minded cohorts have embarked on a project to raise \$12 million for the construction of a new 2,000-seat performing arts center on the campus of Lake Sumter Community College.

And they're almost there. Performing Arts Lake Sumter say they are just one small step away from having the \$12 million, which a state grant will match, for the construction of the \$24 million center.

"I'm delighted that it appears to be moving forward," Mittermaier said. "We've been at this for so long."

That one small step is the county, which looks poised to pass an extra cent on the bed tax to fund performing arts. However, the county commissioners have not yet decided where the \$550,000 a

year windfall from the tax will go.

"Eleven different groups want money out of that tax," County Tourism and Business Relations Director Greg Mihalic said.

County commissioners are waiting for a recommendation from the tourism development council to dole out that money. However, PALS members are confident they will at least get the share they are looking for as the TDC previously recommended \$300,000 per year for 10 years to go to the arts center, if matched by \$3 million from the county commission.

"I can't believe the county would turn away the opportunity to have a performing arts center," Mittermaier said. "Why would they not want to fund something on a one time ask?"

Even if the county doesn't come forward, Mittermaier said PALS will trudge along until it requires the necessary money to build the center.

"We are working until we get the funding," she said. "We are not going to dump eight years down the tube."

Besides for the county, PALS have received donations from Leesburg for \$3 million, Tavares for \$75,000 and private donations for more than \$5 million. Mittermaier added a number of donors have said they will chip in once the county

makes a commitment.

For now, PALS isn't waiting to go ahead with its plans. It is hiring an architect to begin designing the center, and there are already signs heralding its coming along U.S. 441 on the LSCC campus.



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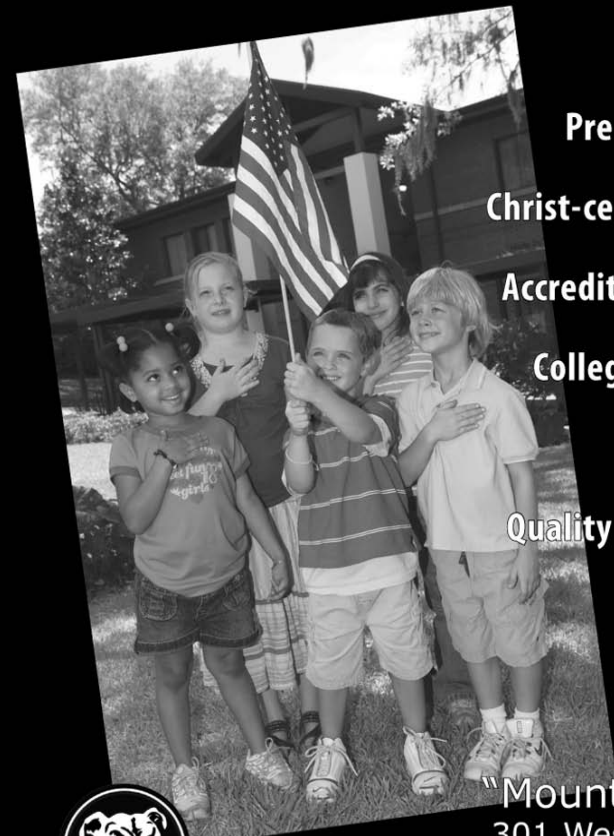
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