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## Center melds D.C. business, art interests

Developer helps revitalize community with arts and recreation complex east of the Anacostia River. **Story by PATRICK RUCKER, Page 20**

# NONPROFITS

## Setting the cornerstone

Developer brings arts center to Southeast

BY PATRICK RUCKER  
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When developer William C. Smith and Co. bought a patch of the District's blighted 8th ward, the firm knew that it needed to do more than build houses.

It needed to help build a community.

Last spring, a cornerstone of that new community was laid with the opening of The ARC.

The \$27 million complex, officially called Town Hall Education, Arts and Recreation Center, includes a dance studio, a 350-seat theater, a gymnasium and a health clinic.

The facility is the first of its kind east of the Anacostia River. It also proves that good things can happen when a business serves its enlightened self-interest.

"We had the energy and the need

### UNDER ONE ROOF

■ Most children pay a small fee to participate in the heavily subsidized arts programs at The ARC.  
■ The ARC is home to, among others, a Boys and Girls Club and Washington Middle School for Girls.

was there," said Skip McMahon, a former executive with Smith and Co. who now runs the developer's nonprofit arm, Building Bridges Across the River.

The firm also knew that its homes would sell well if they were in a livable neighborhood.

"At the bottom line, a community with a recreation and cultural arts center is more sustainable. That's good business," McMahon said.

The facility was conceived soon after Smith and Co. bought a chunk of a mostly abandoned housing complex called Parklands in the early 1990s.

The developer decided to build a gymnasium among the new town houses and apartments, but those modest plans soon expanded. Be-



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Instructor Stacey Price, left, leads students in a ballet class Saturday at The ARC in Southeast Washington. The classes are run in cooperation with the Washington Ballet.

fore long, arts agencies like the Washington Ballet and the Levine School of Music wanted to get on board.

Hundreds of young people have attended classic ballet, jazz and hip-hop dance classes in a program run by the Washington Ballet. More have learned how to play an instrument with instructors from the Levine School.

The hours between 3 and 6 p.m.

used to be called "crime time" in the neighborhood that surrounds the ARC, said Peter Jablow, president of the Levine School.

Now young people can spend after-school hours at a place that offers a full range of services.

"We are in the business of music education, but also of bringing music to the disadvantaged," said Jablow.

Getting young people off the

streets and into an enrichment program is no small feat, he said, and he gives full credit to Smith and Co. for creating the program.

The founder, William C. Smith, "is a very rare developer," said Jablow. "He went into Anacostia — an area that no developer wanted a piece of — and he redeveloped it. That's gutsy and it takes a big heart."

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