



Chipola College Students Will Learn More Of The Technical Side Of Theater

By **KATE McCARDELL**
 FLORIDAN STAFF WRITER

Chipola College Theater Director Charles Sirmon is excited.

In the next few years, Sirmon will be able to teach his students more of the technical side of theater, with state-of-the-art equipment an expected feature of the school's current big project, the Chipola College Center for the Arts.

"I think it's fantastic," said Sirmon.

The project recently moved further, with the selection of Tallahassee-based construction firm Allstate/Southland chosen by the college board of trustees to design and build the \$16 million center.

According to Chipola's Project and Contracts Administrator Louy Harris, groundbreaking on the 56,000 square foot center is set for this November.

The center will house all of the college's fine and performing arts programs, as we as serve as community space for art exhibitions.

Sirmon, who will soon begin his tenth season with the program, said lobby space at the new center will be vastly different from the current theater building, which was built in 1958.

The lack of space, said Sirmon, hardly handles the large musical productions for which the college is widely known, or the popular

children's shows.

"It should have a lobby that not only serves the public before, during and after shows, but will also be a lobby that can be turned into an art gallery," said Sirmon. "The reception area when you walk into this grand space will be a very nice area for the community."

The theater will have about 650 seats, with about one quarter of the seats on a balcony, he said.

Sirmon said the current theater doesn't have enough lobby space or restrooms to accommodate the crowd. He said backstage isn't much different, offering no walking space behind stage and only one backstage bathroom for each sex.

"This place has served us well over the last ten years and more. People would be amazed at what we've accomplished in that little space. We'll be sad to leave it, but very happy to move to the new one," said Sirmon.

The new center will afford theater participants room to build scenes inside, a stark contrast to their current situation of having to work around the outdoor weather.

Instead of theater students having to walk behind scene sets to get to the

other side of the stage, they'll actually have room backstage to stroll.

They'll also have more room to dress, said Sirmon.

"Right now, the dressing room has space for probably eight actors, so people have to dress in the cafeteria or SGA office. The scene storage space is also serving as a dressing room," said Sirmon.

Where students must use a hand crank to move scenes now, scenes at the future theater will be moved via a working pulley system, said Sirmon.

What Sirmon seems most excited about is the state-of-the-art rigging and lighting, which he plans to utilize in expanding his students' education of technical production.

He said he looks forward to using more advanced lighting in future shows.

The center will also feature "black box" theater for theater students and audiences of 100 or less, teaching studios, a recital hall, recording studios and offices.

The college holds three annual college theater productions and is home to four annual artist series events and other performances for thousands of area school children.

