

New site has school singing a happy tune

Settlement Music School is set to open its new facility in Willow Grove, replacing the Jenkintown site.

BY DOM COSENTINO
 STAFF WRITER

For the past eight years, when it came to finding a new location, the Settlement Music School just couldn't hit the right note.

"It's been a very long process," said Robert Capanna, the school's executive director. "It's been very challenging for us."

The challenge for Settlement, the largest community music school in the country, was to replace its leased location in Jenkintown with a bigger one it actually owned elsewhere in Montgomery County.

There were two hiccups, however.

One was high property values, while the other was the school's preference for a location close to a mass transit facility, since many of its faculty members would be commuting from Center City Philadelphia.

"To be right on a train line," Capanna said, "is very important."

Eventually, Settlement settled on Upper Moreland, at 318 Davisville Road, not far from the

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Willow Grove Train Station. And next month, with the help of a \$3 million grant from the state's economic redevelopment program, the new facility will open its doors.

Settlement's new location is a 25,000-square-foot, three-story facility that includes 29 studios for individual voice and instrumental teaching, as well as group classes in music, dance, percussion and creative-arts therapy. There will also be a 320-seat recital hall.

"I think we got very lucky with this property because of the location and because it was real inexpensive to purchase," Capanna said.

Doug Rohanna, the director of communications for Gov. Edward Rendell, said the redevelopment grants, which went to a variety of projects with the governor making the final determination on the allocation of funds, depended on job creation and "the value the project will add to the community."

All grants had to be matched by the recipients.

"His main objective is to stimulate the economy," said Rohanna of Rendell. "I think there's a cultural aspect as well. (Settlement Music School) helps local businesses as well as providing a strong educational component."

This is a big year for Settlement, with the school celebrating 100 years since its founding. It now has six locations — the other five are in Philadelphia — and it serves about 15,000 students in its various programs. The late movie star Mario Lanza, members of the rap group The Roots and former Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo are among those to have received instruction there.

Capanna, the school's executive director, said the project's total price, including land acquisition and construction, was \$8 million, with Settlement having raised the other \$5 million.

He estimated that 80 percent of the students at the Jenkintown facility hail from Montgomery County, but that overall — at all six locations — about half of Settlement's students are from Philadelphia.

"We expect," Capanna said, "that by moving that location north, more into Montgomery County, that we will pick up some additional students from the surrounding communities."

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