

As I stumble between the ditches of an unfinished sidewalk to approach the giant entry arch of this towering building under construction in front of me, I feel neither cautious nor hesitant. Instead, I curiously lift open the plastic drape shielding the colossal doorway to peer inside the heart of creativity and imagination. I boldly take my first step and enter the new realm of the Victoria Gardens Cultural Center in Rancho Cucamonga.

As theater, library, and Celebration Hall the Cultural Center is not just a group of newly plastered walls, but the inventor of dreams, the master of excitement, and the caretaker of knowledge. It is the future home of both illusion and reality, in which they can combine and switch places, in which fact becomes fiction, and in which dreams come to life. The setting is no longer inside the city limits of Rancho Cucamonga, but in Paris, New York, and Saigon. People and houses can fly, animals can learn to talk and a 16 year old girl can become the character of Peter Pan. Once inside the freshly painted walls of purple, gold, red, and green, multitudes of people – from the young to the old, from the businessmen to the stay-at-home moms, and from the teenage jocks to the musical theater supporters – will gather in one room, in one theater, together to cry of sadness, laugh for joy, and gasp in amazement. It is significant to the creation of our dreams and fantasies, as well as the well-being of our minds and hearts.

Stepping past the plastic drape I cross the threshold into the foyer of the theater. Although the temperature is chilly, and the wind rushes through the empty halls and vacant windows, it is not cold. The cheery and inviting array of colors that fits into the comfortable downtown setting of the lobby architecture warms the body and soul. The scent of freshly coated paint is fragrancd throughout the entire project, and walking from room to room fashions an almost dreamy effect as feet arouse the stagnant dust on the floor to produce moving white

clouds. I float on this cloud out of the welcoming atrium into the hidden and mystical quarters of the mechanics of imagination...the theater stage.

Rows of empty seats, mezzanines, lights, equipment, and booths suitable for Lincoln make up the house of the theater. And by gazing up – or down from the mezzanine – the foundation of creativity and inspiration is in progress. The stage is busy with surprises in every corner: a trap door dead center, disappearing in darkness to the basement; heavy, concealing curtains waiting to be put into place; massive amounts of rope and metal bars hanging in the wings, ready to support the setting of a future vision. The smell of wooden beams and the buzzing of construction lights do not lessen the feeling of awe and the revelation that this performance box will soon be shining under hues of various colored lights, filled to capacity with appreciative and hearty fans, and full of the music and sounds of motivation, education, and beauty. Dancing ballerinas flash in my mind across the stage, along with funny looking teachers, a tragedy from Shakespeare, a concert by an oldies band, and children gathered together to learn and appreciate the wonders of the theater. In the blink of an eye they are gone, but the memory of hope and expectation weighs anxiously in my mind.

The Cultural Center is not just a vacant building, a busy construction site, or a source of noise from tools and hard work. It is an enormous playground for our hearts and minds, the future home of celebrations, homework help, and Community Theater. It is a dream in progress. A dream that, even when we wake up, will still be there and remembered.

- Submitted by: Shelly - St. Lucys High School