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Gift to Kennedy Center sets record

Author: *The Associated Press*

Article Text:

WASHINGTON -- A \$100 million gift to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the largest in its history, will help build an education center and a new eight-acre plaza to improve access to the center from downtown Washington.

The plaza, to be built over several freeways that now cut the Kennedy Center off from downtown, also will contain a new museum of performing arts. The project is expected to be completed over the next decade.

The gift from the **Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation** is the first major donation to go toward the \$650 million project.

Earlier this year the **foundation** withdrew an offer of \$38 million to the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History. Smithsonian staff had complained that **Reynolds** would have too much power over a 10,000-square-foot exhibit to have been called "Spirit of America."

In announcing the latest gift, **Reynolds** called the Kennedy Center a living memorial to President Kennedy -- a man, she said, who "believed that the arts are the highest achievements of the individual and an enduring source of national greatness."

A businesswoman, **Reynolds** started a financial services company, then sold it to a bank and set up a charitable **foundation** valued at \$500 million.

"The Kennedy Center Plaza Project will forever change the landscape of Washington D.C. and of the arts in America," said James A. Johnson, chairman of the center, in a statement, "and it takes a donor with courage and foresight to make the initial major donation for a project of this large a scale."

Last December, the **Reynolds foundation** gave the Kennedy Center \$10 million to finance a 10-year series of programs. The first was a series of performances by the Russia's Bolshoi Ballet and Opera. This year they included a concert version of Oscar Hammerstein's "Carmen Jones."

The Kennedy Center includes an opera house, concert hall, and theaters for drama and film.

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