Construction of arts center waits on $70 million drive

By Michelle Wernimont

Plans for a new $5 million visual arts center have been approved by university administration, according to the Rev. Don Doll, S.J., chairman of the fine arts department.

However, construction of the facility will not begin until the Campaign for Creighton goal of $70 million is achieved, he said.

"The idea has been in every fundraising plan since the 1980s," Doll said.

"This year, it's an 'all or nothing' contract. If we receive the full campaign pledges, we'll begin construction.

"My greatest challenge has been to stay optimistic, because it gets pretty discouraging at times. I thought the building would be constructed by 1983, but we didn't have the funding."

Plans for the facility include several galleries, classrooms and dance studios, a theater and a student lounge. Doll said the purpose of the center is to improve the visibility and credibility of Creighton's visual arts.

"It will culturally enhance the university — it is a bold step in our commitment to the arts," he said.

Visual arts

Doll said the facility would probably be located east of 24th Street, though a final decision has not been made. Construction will probably take from nine months to one year, he said.

He stressed that the facility is a visual arts center, as contrasted with a performing arts center.

"A performing arts center includes music, dance and theater. A visual arts center includes those artforms, but also encompasses painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture and photography as well," he said.

Doll heads a task force that worked with an architect to plan the structure. The idea for the facility came from a study conducted two years ago with the Daly Construction Company of Omaha.

"The Jesuits have concentrated heavily on the arts through their teaching," Doll said. "Theater motivates one to reflect on issues such as human existence and purpose on earth. Consequently, we discussed how we might serve the student body better, as a means of enriching their lives through visual expression."

The new visual arts center will replace the Interim Performing Arts Center, located at 30th and Burt Streets.

"The Interim Performing Arts Center is basically a remodeled city maintenance garage, not a theater. We realized that we needed an elegant place to celebrate the arts, and then began plans for a permanent facility," Doll said.

Seats 250 people

The PAC contains 11,000 square feet and seats 250 people in its theater. The fine arts department acquired the building in June 1983 and presented the first performance there in October 1983.

"Completing such a transformation was a great challenge for us. With the help of several very dedicated people, we completed the transformation in five months," Doll said.

Mary Beth Nieto/Photographer