

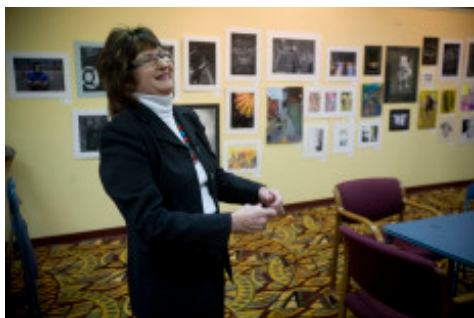
## New River Valley Fine Arts Center gets \$500,000 grant

The center has already secured the remaining \$770,000 needed to begin a \$1.2 million building project.

By Amy Matzke-Fawcett | The Roanoke Times



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Judy Ison, director of the Fine Arts Center for the New River Valley in Pulaski, is elated after learning that the organization had been awarded a \$500,000 grant that will go toward renovating the Rutherford Building, the center's new home.

PULASKI -- When she heard Friday that the Fine Arts Center for the New River Valley has been awarded a \$500,000 grant, director Judy Ison shrieked with joy.

The grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission will go toward a \$1.2 million renovation of the Rutherford Building, a vacant car dealership in downtown Pulaski the group is converting into the center's new home.

"We're just so excited about this," Ison said. "All the pieces are coming together."

When finished, the building will offer an education wing, two art galleries, a digital lab, a library, a gift shop and studios for pottery, stained glass, painting and more.

"This will go a long way toward the project," said Gary Hancock, president of the center's board of directors. "We can now start to see the project become a reality."

A decision about the center's grant application wasn't expected until February, making Friday's news even more exciting, board members said.

The remainder of the project will be paid with about \$300,000 in private donations and a low-interest USDA rural development loan for about \$470,000, said Debbie Brown, the center's capital campaign director.

"The plans are ready to go. We just needed the money," Brown said.

The building at Fifth Street and Washington Avenue was donated to the center in January 2006, even though a tenant was still inside it.

In August 2008, the business moved out and the board of directors voted to make the building the center's new home.

Work is tentatively scheduled to be completed by late 2011, Brown said.

The project is part of ongoing renovations to that area of town, including a new pharmacy, that is turning formerly dilapidated and empty buildings into viable businesses, Pulaski Mayor Jeff Worrell said.

"I'm thrilled for the town and for the Fine Arts Center," Worrell said. "That project is a key piece of the revitalization of downtown."

It's unclear if the center will keep possession of its current space at 21 W. Main St. once it moves into the new building, Hancock said.

"We're very interested in the life and future of Main Street, and we want to contribute to development here," he said.

The center also owns another space on West Fourth Street, which it will retain for dance classes and other events, Hancock said.

The grants were announced Thursday afternoon by Gov. Tim Kaine's office.