



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jim Hendricks
Director of Marketing & Public Relations
(229) 439-8400
jim.hendricks@albanymuseum.com

ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART RECEIVES DONATION OF BELK BUILDING FOR DOWNTOWN MOVE

Museum Begins Process of Long-Awaited Relocation to Former Belk Building

[For Release June 27, 2019 – Albany, GA] — After months of discussions and negotiations, the Albany Museum of Art is poised to relocate into the former Belk Department Store in downtown Albany.

The Robert N. Brooks Sr. family has agreed to donate the properties at 128 and 146 W. Broad Ave. to the Albany Museum of Art. The Board of Trustees made the decision to accept the gift, which will more than double the amount of space the Albany Museum of Art has at its current location at 311 Meadowlark Drive.

The project is expected to cost \$10 million. Closing on the downtown property is expected to be completed by Wednesday.

The announcement was made at the Summer Exhibitions Reception, where the AMA held a retirement celebration for Executive Director Paula Williams.

"I'm absolutely thrilled that this is going to happen," said Williams, who leaves the executive director position Sunday, June 30. "This move downtown will open up tremendous new opportunities for the AMA to grow. We will have more galleries and more public space. We work every day to build a stronger community through art, and this relocation will give us more space and greater opportunities to do that. We appreciate the generosity of the Brooks family in making this possible."

The AMA Board revisited relocation to downtown after hurricane-force winds on the night of Jan 2, 2017 breached the roof of the Museum.

"The Museum was not looking to move downtown until the storm hit," said R. Ripley Bell Jr., who on Sunday is ending his second year as president of the AMA Board of Trustees. "The process has been

going on for two years, and we've had another storm (Hurricane Michael in October 2018) hit in the meantime. Thanks to the generosity of the Bob Brooks family, the move is now possible."

Brooks said he had the future of Albany in mind with his family's donation of the downtown properties. "I just want to leave Albany better than I found it," he said.

Bell, who will remain on the Board of Trustees, said the move downtown will benefit both the community and the Museum. "The Board of Trustees thinks the Museum will be a vital asset to the redevelopment of downtown Albany and that relocating downtown will help us reach a broader audience," he said.

A big advantage will be the additional space the new location will provide. The former dance studio at the corner of Washington Street and Broad Avenue will be torn down and replaced with an outdoor sculpture garden, but the former Belk Department Store building will still provide more than 53,000 square feet of space. The current AMA building has 25,000 square feet.

"There will be more space for exhibitions and more space for events," Bell said. "We're also looking forward to maintaining our good relationship with educational institutions."

The expectation is that visitation will increase because of the proximity to other popular Albany attractions and higher visibility with tourists who are visiting. It also will make it easier for schools to include the AMA on their field trips.

Attractions within walking distance of the Broad Avenue location include the Flint RiverQuarium, Pretoria Fields Craft Brewery, the Albany Civic Center, Veterans Park Amphitheatre, Ray Charles Plaza, Turtle Park, the Albany Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Albany Municipal Auditorium and the new Flint restaurant. Also close by are Thronateeska Heritage Center and the Albany Civil Rights Institute.

In addition, the AMA's presence already is being felt downtown with the creation last year of an annual fall chalk art and craft beer street festival—*AMA ChalkFest*. Set for Oct 5, 2019 on the 100 block of Pine Avenue, *AMA ChalkFest* will be conducted annually on the first Saturday of October.

"Being located downtown will afford us many more opportunities for school tours and visitors to our community," Williams said. "Located in close proximity to the Flint RiverQuarium and Thronateeska Heritage Center, it'll be easier for bus tours to take in all the attractions without having to re-board the bus and travel several miles. It also is an opportunity for the Museum to participate in more collaborations between the local organizations.

"Also, tourists, business travelers and family visitors from out of town usually drop by the Visitors Bureau or Chamber of Commerce downtown for information. We'll no longer be out of sight, out of mind. Just around the corner from both the CVB and the Chamber, the AMA will be easier to find and visiting will be much more convenient."

The additional space will allow the AMA to expand its already robust programs for children and adults.

"Our children's area will be expanded for art classes and camps, and we'll have more ways kids can be interactive when they visit the Museum," Williams said. "Hopefully, we'll inspire even more of tomorrow's artists and leaders. We'll also have better facilities for teen and adults workshops.

"We will have more space for special community events, such as the biannual Family Day that we conduct with Albany Recreation and Parks, *Courageous Conversations* and *The Color of Justice*. We'll also have plenty of options for those looking for an elegant backdrop for a wedding rehearsal or

dinner, or for space for a workshop, conference or social event like a family reunion or office Christmas party.”

The Museum also will be able to bring back its permanent collection. Quick response by AMA staff, Trustees, volunteers and conservators prevented any of the works of art in the building from being destroyed by the 2017 storms. All artwork was taken to safe locations, where the works were conserved. The AMA’s permanent collection has been stored at safe off-site locations since the storm.

AMA staff, working with Thronateeska and the RiverQuarium, conducted programming at those locations while repairs were made to the Museum building in 2017. The first floor of the AMA reopened on Aug 24, 2017 with exhibitions in the three downstairs galleries. The Museum has maintained a full schedule of exhibitions, events and programming since the reopening.

One need of the AMA that the public does not see every day is additional space for storage and preparation that the downtown location will provide.

“We will have the additional storage space we need for artwork, which has certain environmental requirements,” Williams said. “Having extra space for tasks such as preparing moveable walls and pedestals for shows will help a great deal.”

A timeline for the move downtown has not been established, but visible changes to the location should start soon. “Hopefully, by the end of the summer we’ll have the first phase done, the demolishing of the former dance studio,” Bell said.

CURRENT AMA EXHIBITIONS

- *Figure Forward*, works by Jill Frank, William Downs and Jaime Bull, is in the Haley Gallery through Oct 12, 2019;
- *Educators as Artists*, a juried college faculty exhibition, is in the East Gallery through Oct 12, 2019;
- *Fragments of a Violent World*, nano photography by Michael Oliveri, is in the West Gallery through Oct 12, 2019;
- *Inspiring Wellness Through the Arts*, works by Jose Tongol, is in the Hodges Regional Sales Gallery.

ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

The Albany Museum of Art, located in Albany, Georgia, adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open 10 am through 5 pm Tuesdays through Fridays and noon until 5 pm on Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com or call 229.439.8400.

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