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Old Town School of Folk Music seeds endowment through sale of Armitage building

Iconic school planning for future of performances and teaching music and dance

CHICAGO — The Old Town School of Folk Music is marking the beginning of a new chapter by supporting the school’s future with an endowment fund seeded by the sale of its building at 909 West Armitage. Today the school announced it is placing the building on the market.

In alignment with its five-year strategic plan for diversifying programs and reaching new audiences, the Old Town School Board of Directors voted to begin the process of selling the Armitage building and direct all proceeds to seed an endowment fund. Classes will continue without interruption at the Armitage campus until the building is sold and a closing date set, likely sometime in mid-2019. Most classes will then relocate to the Lincoln Square Campus that will meet class and performance needs. The School also plans to seek partner locations in the Armitage neighborhood to accommodate offering its popular early-childhood program, Wiggleworms®.

“The Armitage building’s legacy will remain deeply honored in the future with the establishment of an endowment that we are calling the Armitage Fund,” said Board Chairman Kish Khemani. “The building has a rich history of music making and music makers. It will now help ensure the long-term success of Old Town School classes and programs.”

As the nation’s largest nonprofit community arts school, each year the Old Town School serves more than 13,000 students and welcomes in more than 189,000 attendees to its classes, lessons, camps, school partnerships, concerts, festivals, workshops and events.

Old Town School’s Executive Director Bau Graves said taking steps to sell the Armitage building has been discussed many times over the last several years. “Now is the time,” he said, “based on the strength of the real estate market and the school’s desire to seed an endowment that will help support the school operations in the future.

“Since its beginning, Old Town School has been defined by people coming together to teach and learn and appreciate music. The Armitage building provided a good home for music makers, teachers and students. Now its legacy will help provide for future generations,” Graves
said. “We’ve remained true to our philosophy that music, dance and creative expression is for everyone. Musicians of all ages and abilities, from various cultures, traditions and walks of life come together to create music and learn from one another.”

The school’s first home in 1957 was at 333 North Avenue. Needing more space from growth and popularity of classes, it opened the Armitage building 1968. In 1998, Old Town School expanded its programs by building and developing the much larger Lincoln Square facility that includes robust and acoustically rich performance spaces. The new Lincoln Avenue campus dramatically raised the school’s profile, garnering national praise and recognition as the finest facility in North America for the study and presentation of folk and traditional music forms.

Old Town School of Folk Music is the largest community school of the arts in the country. Since the beginning, it has provided Chicago and surrounding neighborhoods with extraordinary classroom offerings, concerts, outreach to communities where music and arts education is lacking and inspiration for generations of Chicago artists and musicians.

The school’s strategic plan includes a bold, new direction including offering programs that reach new audiences. Recent offerings include Music Moves Chicago, an arts and wellness program on the south and west sides of the city, plus new programs with a digital production and contemporary music and movement focus. The school will establish new partnerships and collaborations that take music education and performance even deeper into the interdisciplinary arts-filled Chicago community.

Chicago’s Old Town School of Folk Music is the largest community school of the arts in the U.S. and a non-profit organization committed to celebrating American music and global cultures. Founded in 1957, the Old Town School of Folk Music provides a wide range of music, dance, and arts courses to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Whatever one’s interest, the Old Town School provides broad access to more than 700 accredited weekly class offerings, private lessons and over 400 concerts and community events per year. More information is available at oldtownschool.org.

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