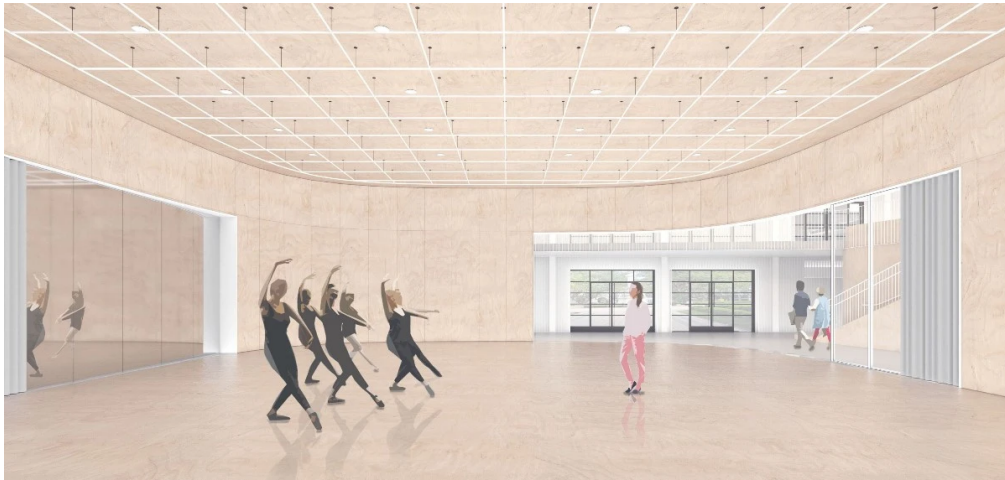


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Chapman University: Old packing house will become new dance center with \$5 million grant



Walls with no square corners will be a hallmark of a large teaching and performance studio in Chapman University's new Sandi Simon Center for Dance. (Courtesy of Chapman University)

By **LOU PONSI** |

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A \$5 million grant from one of Chapman University's most generous donors will allow the university to transform the 100-year old Villa Park Orchards Association Packing House into the [Sandi Simon Center for Dance](#), a 33,000 square foot complex which will serve Chapman's 150 dance majors and host performances for the community.

Located at 350 N. Cypress St. in Orange, the center is scheduled to be completed by next summer and be in use for the fall 2022 semester.



The \$5 million was donated by philanthropists Ron and Sandi Simon, who have gifted millions to the university over the years through their Simon Foundations.

In 2019, the Simon Foundations donated \$9 million to provide scholarships for underserved students to complete Chapman's Physician Assistant Studies Program.

"Ron and Sandi have just been extraordinarily generous to Chapman over the years," said Sheryl Bourgeois, the university's executive vice president and chief advancement officer. "They've just been active in so many areas. They are deeply passionate about arts as well as education in general."

A connection to the area's citrus growing past, the repurposed building will have an upper and lower level. The lower level will house classrooms, a small studio for one-on-one instruction, conference room faculty studio, offices and a training room for rehabilitation and treatment. Upstairs will have five studios, all larger than 2,400 square feet, with sprung floors, mirrors, performance lighting and state-of-the-art AV equipment. The upper level will also have a performance studio for smaller events and a student lounge.



The historic Villa Park Orchards Association Packing House will be renovated and turned into a new home for Chapman University's dance program. (Courtesy of Chapman University)

Currently, students use the Partridge Dance Center, which is two blocks south of the packing house. The Partridge facility is expected to be folded into the proposed expansion of the university's Hilbert Museum of California Art.

“We’ve got great curriculum, great faculty and incredible students,” said Juliana Pederson, who chairs Chapman’s School of Dance. “What we don’t have right now is a facility that matches the excellence of everything else. It did when we were a smaller department – it’s just too small for us now.”

With the number of dance majors increasing from 100 to 150 over the past five years, the School of Dance has simply outgrown its current location, Pederson said. “(The students) are really excited,” she said.

“This space will allow us to have room to breathe,” Pederson said. “All the studios will be as large as the largest studio that we currently have.”

The renovation will preserve the historical integrity of the packing house, and many features are being repurposed and will work well in the center, particularly the openness of the structure and its clerestory windows, said Collette Creppell, Chapman’s vice president of campus planning and design.

“Such elements are history’s gifts to the next occupants and an ideal backdrop for the upcoming chapter in the life of a beloved space,” Creppell said.

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