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## From the President

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# Architecturally Significant, Technologically Superb

My vision for a performing arts center for the University of Hartford—which culminated this winter when we completed the first phase of the most successful capital fundraising campaign in the University’s history—was born eight years ago, when I first visited the buildings of what was then the former Thomas Cadillac Dealership.

Judge Robert Killian, a regent of the University and a trustee of The Hartt School, and one of the most astute observers of the University and the Hartford region, suggested I take a look at the site as an option to an on-campus location for a much-needed addition to the overcrowded Hartt School.

So, I visited the empty buildings one day in early spring with Norman Young ’84, executive director of facilities, and Malcolm Morrison, dean of The Hartt School. Doug Thomas, then the

owner of the site and now a trustee of Hartt, welcomed me. Standing before the doorway of the former Cadillac showroom, he told us that these buildings had been designed by the noted architect Albert Kahn.

“*The Albert Kahn?*” I asked.

“Yes,” Doug replied. “General Motors hired him to design the ‘automobile dealership of the future,’ and this site was chosen because it was next to railroad tracks and could serve as a hub for Cadillac distribution throughout New England.”

I had no idea that Albert Kahn had designed buildings for General Motors. I have subsequently learned not only that he had done so, but also that he was perhaps best known for bringing natural light into industrial spaces.

What I did know about him at that time was this: Albert Kahn had designed a dozen or so of the best-known buildings at the University of Michigan, where I had served as vice president for the previous nine years. Now I had a chance to link my former institution with my current one and develop an Albert Kahn-designed building for the University of Hartford.

Much has changed in the eight years since that first visit. We have designed a first-rate renovation of the Kahn buildings that



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— Walter Harrison, President

will retain his distinctive architectural signatures—leaded windows bringing light into the building, wonderfully expressive brickwork, and large interior spaces undivided by structural walls.

We have married the best of the old, the original Kahn design, with the best of the new, technically and technologically superb educational space for the performing arts. In The Hartt School, this University has one of the world's greatest conservatories. Now it will have space that reflects that status. The Performing Arts Center represents a significant investment in the future of Hartt and of the University's place among the great arts education centers in the United States.

The center represents a significant investment in the city of Hartford and its neighborhoods too. It will provide a spectacular gateway to the city for people arriving by car from Route 44 and points west, and when paired with The Artists Collective, the creation of the late Hartt School faculty member Jackie McLean and his wife, Dollie, the center will frame a wonderful four-block stretch of Albany Avenue that should become an emerging arts and commercial area.

More importantly, the Performing Arts Center will bring the arts to the neighborhood as well as provide a top-notch facility for our college-age students. This will result in new and exciting connections for both groups. The Hartt School Community Division will hold both dance and music classes there, and children and adults from throughout the Hartford area will benefit from this new facility.

This spring we will break ground and begin construction of the first phase of the center, which includes the largest and most central building on the site. The cost of this phase is about \$22 million. The next phase, which will include the two other buildings on the property, will begin as soon as we have raised the additional \$10 million or so to make that possible. If the construction remains on schedule (and I expect it will), we will begin offering classes in the center in the fall of 2008.

The main entrance to the Performing Arts Center will face Westbourne Parkway. Shown at left is a second entrance that will be accessed from Granby Street.



Gov. M. Jodi Rell (front row, third from right) and Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele (far right) pose with President Harrison (far left), students and faculty of University High School of Science and Engineering, and their principal, Elizabeth Colli (third from left). The students were recognized as the future of Connecticut during Gov. Rell's presentation of the 2007 state budget, which stresses the importance of education.

Funding this center is a real stretch for the University, but it is a vital one for The Hartt School. While we have the funds to undertake the first phase of construction, we still need gifts and donations of any size so that we can finish this wonderful facility.

Governor Rell and the Connecticut General Assembly leadership understood the importance of this project when they approved a \$4 million bonding issue to support it this winter. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the MassMutual Foundation for Hartford, Inc., and many other foundations and corporations understood the vision when they provided early and continued support for the project. Many, many individual donors have understood and embraced the importance of this center, and their enthusiasm for the project has served as an important catalyst throughout this campaign.

Chief among those donors have been Mort and Irma Handel, for whom the Performing Arts Center combines two longtime devotions: The Hartt School and the Hartford community. It is their vision and drive that have given this project its start and are propelling it toward its wonderful conclusion.

And to think, it all began with Albert Kahn and a president whose career spans two campuses that will now boast Kahn's signature buildings.

Walter Harrison

