

# Arts centre project swings into action

**DAILYNEWS**  
staff

A small gathering got in the swinging mood Saturday as the official conversion of the arts centre began.

\$1.3 million will be spent on the tendered project which will create the basic 'shell' for the arts centre. Hegge Construction of Dawson Creek is doing this work.

Taking turns swinging the 12-pound sledge hammer were Federal science and technology minister Frank Oberle, North Peace MLA Tony Brummet, Mayor Pat Walsh, and the man most of the money came from, provincial Minister of Finance Mel Couvelier.

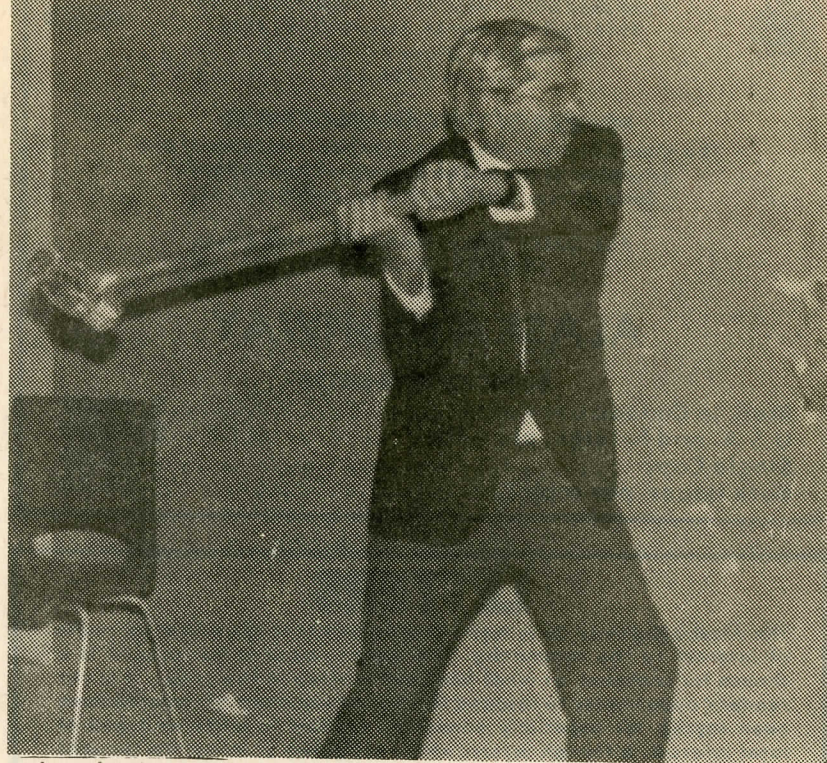
Couvelier really rolled up his sleeves for the job, handing his coat to his colleagues before hammering the wall a few times.

Linda Scarfo added a few final symbolic swings to get the project rolling.

Walsh paid tribute to Brian Palmer, who was also present, who as former mayor pushed for the start of the project. "That took a lot of guts."

Construction will begin this week with seven or eight workers starting to strip the interior of the former Bay building of fittings and remove some inside walls in preparation for the roof to be raised for the theatre, and other things.

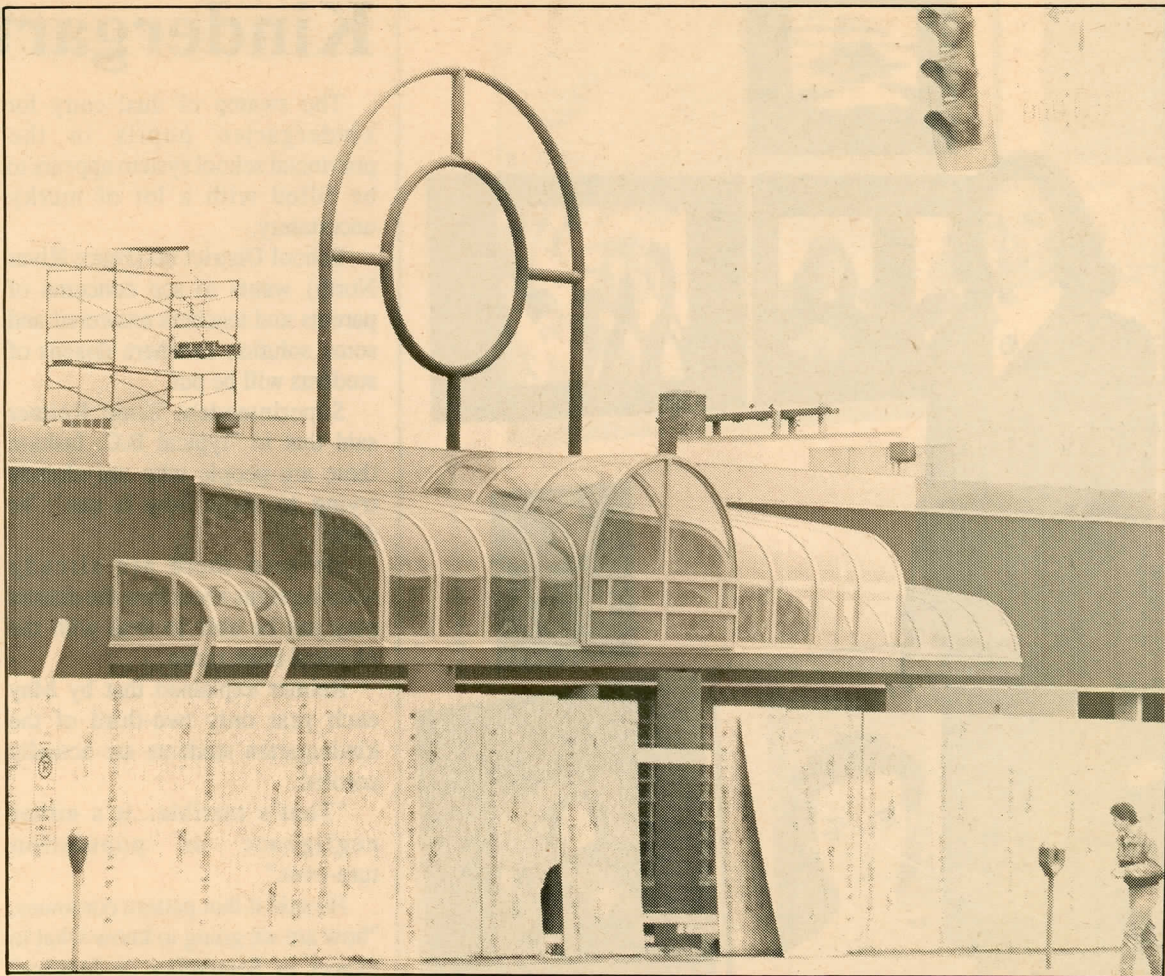
Brummet gave a familiar talk about improving the communities tourist and convention amenities. He was confident the arts centre would be a big asset in attracting conventions, 95 per cent of which are less than 500 people.



*photo by Dave Nagy*

**FRANK OBERLE**, Member of Parliament and federal science minister, winds with up the big hammer to help start arts centre project Saturday.





**The growing structure which is the Arts Centre emerges from behind the fenced-off area**



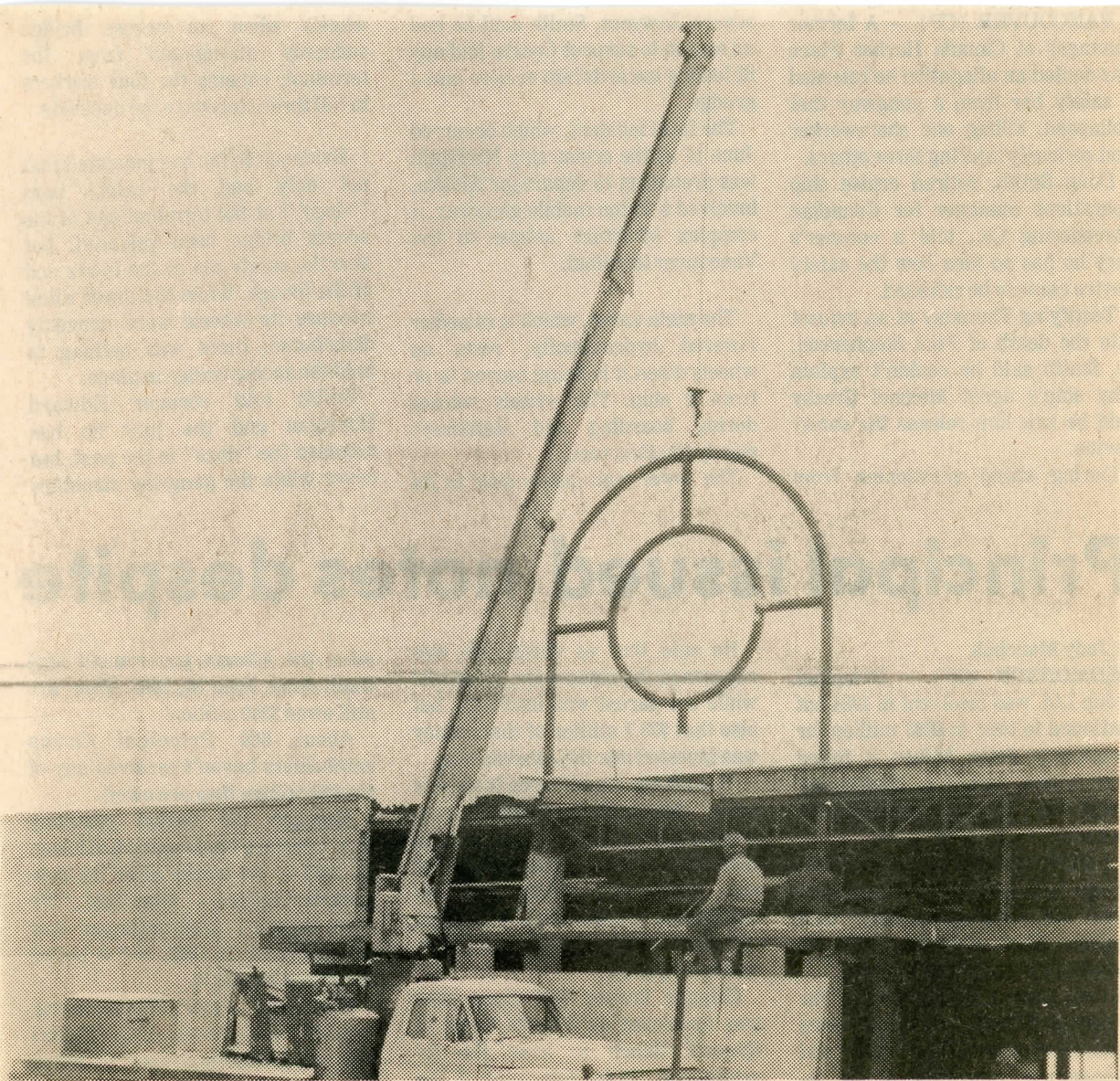


Photo by Scott Crowson  
Workers spent many hours on Sunday afternoon lowering the main entrance facade into place at the Arts Centre, under construction at the corner

of 100th Avenue and 100th Street. The stylish entrance is on the north side of the building. The exterior shell of the structure should be completed by the end of December.



# Just Before Stage going well

The Arts Centre is finally under construction, and the performing arts in Fort St. John are watching that southwest corner with anticipation. The extended back wall and open roof are the start, at long last, of a real theatre for amateur and professional performing arts. But that theatre won't be ready for at least a year.

The "Before Stage" in the old Bay building is gone, replaced by the "Just Before Stage" in the old Pat's Home Furnishings building next to the Arts Centre. There a crew has been working all summer to set up the performing space. This crew, funded by an employment grant, has almost completed the stage and risers with seating capacity for approximately 100 people. They have also been working on dressing rooms, not to mention practical details such as fire walls and washrooms.

The building is already in use for Improvisation evenings. Sponsored by Stage North, these are drop-in sessions of theatre games and improvisations, held every second Thursday. Anyone interested in participating can call 787-1027.

Also underway are rehearsals for More Musical Moments, a follow-up to the successful dinner theatre of last year which raised funds for the Arts Centre. More Musical Moments is designed around the songs of Gilbert and Sullivan and will be held Nov. 19 with all profits going to the Arts Centre.

Stage North is also rehearsing a children's Christmas play, The Mouse Who Didn't Believe in Santa.

In the future, the "Just Before Stage" will be used for small dance shows and music and theatre festivals. In addition to the stage space, the building also has a large carpeted room, complete with piano, which can be used for teas, fashion shows, rummage sales, meetings, furniture displays, choir or piano rehearsal space and many other things.

The "Just Before Stage" is being administered by the North Peace Friends of the Theatre, a group formed to promote performing arts in Fort St. John, especially in

relation to theatre space.

Friends of the Theatre is renting the building under very good terms but still has a significant financial obligation, and is therefore encouraging multi-use of the facility in order to continue to provide a space for Fort St. John's performing arts groups. Anyone who would like to rent the "Just Before Stage" building, or would just like to know more about the Friends of the Theatre, can call the Artspace at 785-1988.

Submitted article

# Expo Legacy project praised

## Daily News staff

The Expo Legacy was the subject of a number of meetings last Thursday, one of which involved a government representative who can recommend grant monies be given to the project.

Tara Douglas, Regional Co-ordinator for the Museum and Galleries Assistance Programme for the Department of Communications, was on a 10-day tour of the western provinces looking at possible funding projects. She was given the grand tour of the old Bay building on Thursday while the situation of the proposed art gallery was described to her.

At an Expo Legacy meeting last night Douglas commended the "very creditable" efforts of the group working for the overall cultural centre.

Douglas was impressed with the amount of funds that were raised in such a short period of time, saying the half-million dollar commitment made last year by the department of communications was "virtually unheard of" for a community this size.

Douglas thought the use intended for the building was sound but suggested a functional study be done for the art gallery. The study, she said, could determine things like what focus a public gallery should take, what programs they could incorporate, how much space it

would need, how much money it would take and where those funds could be found.

Grants from Douglas's office could pay up to 50 per cent of the study costs and, according to Expo Legacy Committee chairman Sue Popesku, the government would probably look more kindly on providing grants to the project if the study was done.

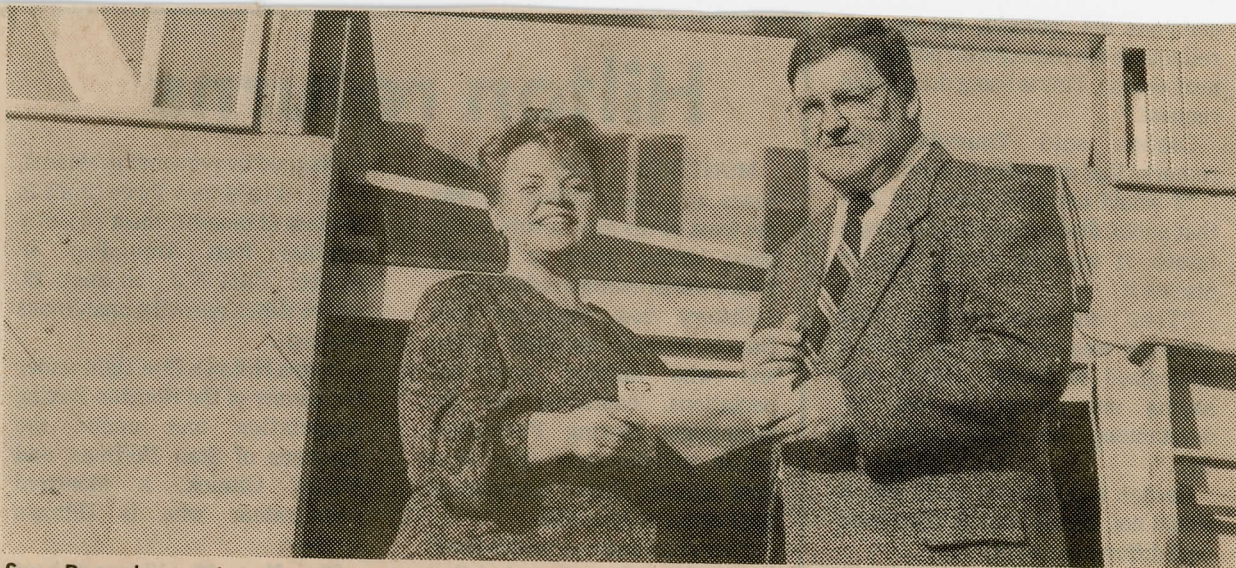
Douglas's office can also provide grants up to 50 per cent for the costs of equipment for environment control, storage of art pieces, security or lighting — items that would not normally be incorporated in a building. The art gallery will be needing a vapor barrier to keep the right humidity, special heating ducts, special security doors for receiving large pieces of artwork, special lighting and storage for its permanent collection, among other things.

Popesku says Douglas's office is just one of many avenues of funding the Committee is exploring.

Facilities chairman Vonnie Dixon will be meeting with an environmental control expert and the architects later this month to go over gallery standards and designs.

Meanwhile, working drawings for the overall project are to be prepared by the start of May. Tenders will be let short after this, and construction is to commence by June 1.

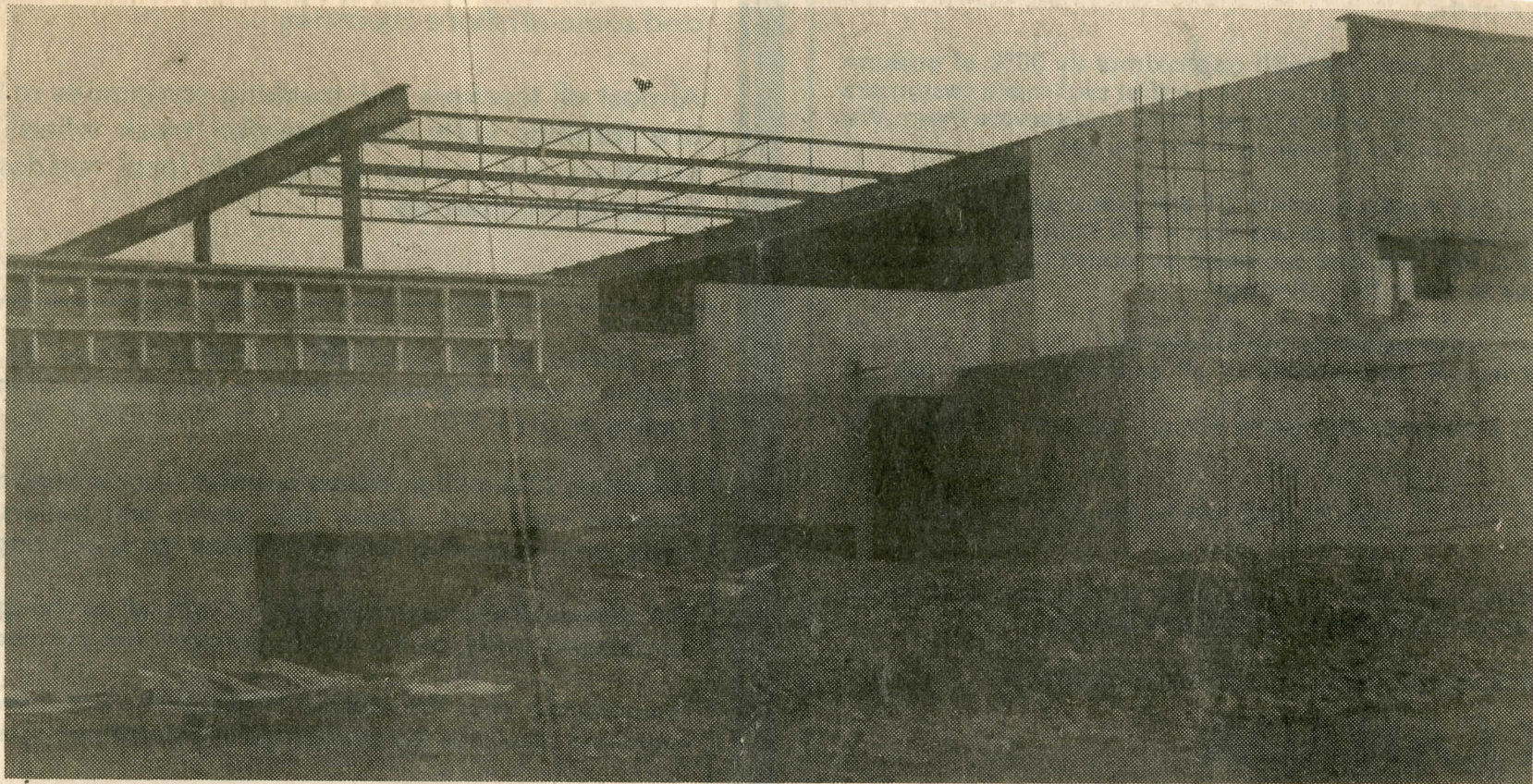




Sue Popesku and Ted Maissoneuve, together again. Ted was presenting Sue with a cheque for \$10,000 from Canfor for the new Art Centre (the airy structure seen in the background). While they were traipsing around the construction site

they decided to cheque out the new stage, almost breaking into an impromptu rendition of something or other. Slowly but surely the funds are coming in and the new Centre is going up.





*Photo by Wendy Coomber*

*It hardly looks it now, but early next year this pile of bricks and debris will begin to resemble our new art centre. This part, in particular, will be the theatre. The design hasn't changed, but the colours have. The architects have decided on a "calmer exterior" and are changing it from blue and peach to a red and gray outside*

*face. They feel it will evoke a warm, rich image, more fitting for an arts building. The change will also help them save a little money on the paint, that they'll put towards other areas of the building. Phase 1, the completion of the shell, is supposed to be finished by the end of December.*



# Arts Centre steel arrives mid-month

The south end of the new Arts Centre will take on a dramatic change when the steel arrives in mid-October for the renovation project in the heart of Fort St. John. According to Hegge Construction, the Arts Centre contract is on time

and on budget.

The current work on the Centre includes extending the south quarter of the building to accommodate a stage with basement storage, scent shop and costume change rooms for a 400-seat theatre; raising the interior street roof for natural lighting

through glass siding; installing all doors and windows; and finishing the cladding on the building.

The colour of the building is red with silver and gray highlights. The warm colour scheme is designed to carry throughout the building.

In December, when the current contract is complete, the building will look complete but will actually be far from finished. Contributions are still required to install the interior walls, lights, carpet and finishings.

Fundraising is continuing with only part of the local business and community fundraising goals achieved. Additional funding from outside sources look promising but no commitments have been made to date for the remaining \$1.6 million required to entirely complete the building. The North Peace Cultural Society invites contributions to the Arts Centre project to be dropped off at the Artspace.

Submitted article



# Council supports project

By **WENDY COOMBER**

Daily News staff

What some thought should have been an easy motion for the aldermen to make turned into a heated hour-long debate over the Expo Legacy project.

But council finally voted to support in principle a letter for more funding for the project.

Mayor Pat Walsh asked council to pass a motion supporting a letter he had written at Sue Popesku's behest to Municipal Affairs Minister Rita Johnson. The letter asked for access to money granted under the downtown revitalization plan.

The grant could mean \$30-thousand for awnings and facades for the building.

## **GOOD LUCK**

Alderman Peter Vandergugten wished the committee luck in their efforts but voted against when the rest of council voted to support the project in principle.



Bodnar, the downtown revitalization committee chairman, was upset that no one else had seen the letter, although Walsh told him that he had put a copy of the letter in his basket. The letter was written in haste, said Walsh, because Popesku was leaving for Victoria at once.

The building committee for the new arts centre introduced their architect, Ron Howard of Howard/Yano Architects, to city council last night to explain the phases the building will undergo and how much it will cost.

Alderman Dave Bodnar expressed a number of concerns he had about the project, mainly regarding the funding and how they could proceed without all the funding in place.

John Herron told council they had enough money to finish Phase I. Hopefully by the time Phase I was finished, they would have enough money to wrap up Phase II, he said.

"We're doing it in phases so no one gets hurt financially," said Herron.

Popesku said that she knew of many people who were waiting to see construction begin on the building before they would contribute any money. She said she was quite confident that all of the money they needed would be raised before this time next year.

Vonnie Dixon said the building committee didn't want to wait for inflation to eat into the building funds they already had, which they would be doing if they waited for all the money to be in place before proceeding.

Bodnar thought that a number of questions needed to be asked regarding this grant and whether other businesses could access it.

"I think we'd be foolish to go ahead with this when we don't know enough about it," he said.



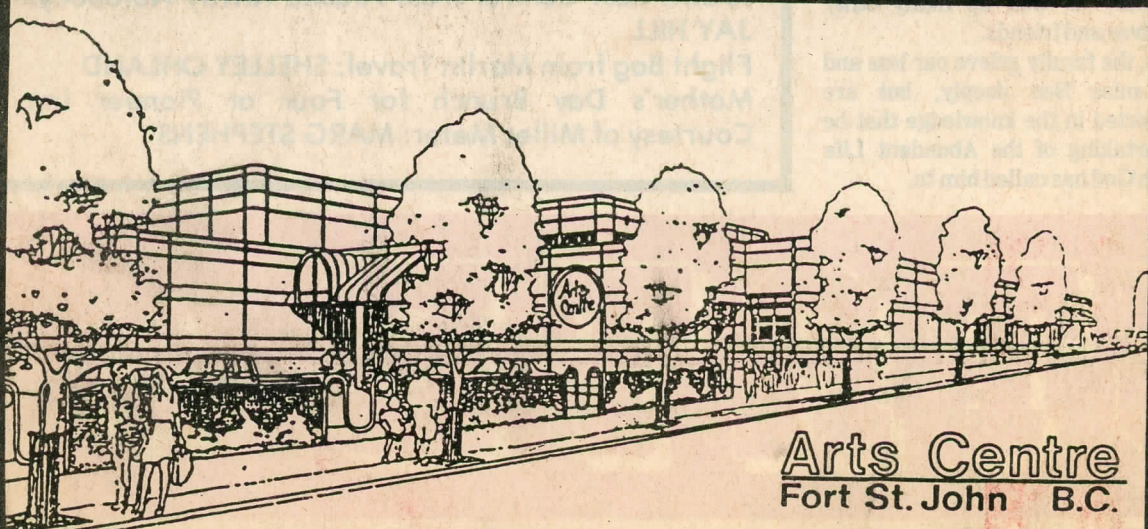
**PUBLIC MEETING**  
**The "NUTS & BOLTS"**  
**About**

**THE ARTS COMPLEX**

**Information on Tenders**  
**See Working Drawings &**  
**Design**  
**Find out the**  
**Facts and Figures**

**HOWARD / YANO, ARCHITECTS,**  
**and**  
**BUILDING COMMITTEE**  
**will be present**  
**MONDAY, MAY 2 — 7:30 P.M.**  
**PIONEER INN**  
**FORT ST. JOHN, B.C.**

**No Host Bar Available from 7:00 P.M.**



**Arts Centre**  
**Fort St. John B.C.**





*EXPO LEGACY building committee gathered with architect after recent Nut 'n Bolts night held to explain the project.*

*Tenders have been advertised and should be awarded soon.*