Newest arts center draws a crowd

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LAFAYETTE — Art patrons came out by the hundreds Saturday night for the opening of the new Acadia Center for the Arts on Buchanan Street in downtown Lafayette, with Gov. Kathleen Blanco as a special guest.

The center is an example of true collaboration between the city, the state and the community, said Todd Mouton, director of Louisiana Crossroads for the Acadia Arts Council.

"The city bought the building and the state paid for the renovations," Mouton said. Future plans for the center include building a 350-seat multi-use theater. Mouton said, and the center is seeking donations and corporate sponsors to pay operating expenses.

Blanco praised the effort.

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Arts

"We know that a community that values the arts demonstrates quality of life," Blanco said, and that can help bring in new residents.

The building houses two galleries on the ground floor, with offices, a kitchen and studios, along with a theater on the second floor.

As he admired artwork in the main gallery downstairs, Chris Horn, who was visiting from Atlanta, said he found it to be an inviting space.

"A lot of times, gallery space doesn't feel welcoming," he said. "This is a big space, but it makes you feel welcome. It must be really exciting for the community.

As she waited for guests to come inside, sculptor Junji Saitadani said she was thrilled to have been accepted for the center's initial show "Batangas," a TR Lafayette fine arts graduate who teaches art at several public schools through a collaborative program between the Arts Council and the Lafayette School District.

Many of the artists on display are TR Lafayette graduates, including Shanna Major, a New Beria native. Major's works included an almost life-size wire horse on rocks that is covered with beads, jewelry and small artifacts. Three of George Rodrigue's paintings also are on display — works showing three of Louisiana's most notorious governors: Huey Long, Earl Long and Edwin Edwards.

She listened to speeches before the center opened to door to guests, Acadia Arts Council building steering committee member Randy Harris was beaming with pride.

"This is a historic day for Lafayette and the Acadia region," he said, "to focus on its culture in the performing and visual arts."