PASA, AcA to merge

joined group will increase efficiency, official says

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Two Lafayette arts and entertainment powerhouses will soon become one.

The Daily Advertiser has learned that the Performing Arts Society of Acadiana (PASA) and the Acadiana Center for the Arts (AcA) will merge.

The Advertiser confirmed Wednesday. An announcement is expected next month.

A merger has been in the works for some time, according to AcA board member, Ed Abbé, who also served as board president for three years.

"It's all coming along smoothly," Abbé said. Part of it is a matter of efficiency, and it will eliminate some duplication of some things, including reducing costs and giving us a more efficient tool for fundraising.

Abbé listed the reasons for the merger.

"We can eliminate duplicate programs and do some joint fundraising."

Abbé said.

For the fiscal year that ended June 30, the AcA reported $1.2 million in net assets, according to an independent audit published on the Louisiana Legislative Auditor's website.

PASA, for the tax period ending June 30, 2011, reported income of $82,663 and $164,712 in assets, according to the Auditor's audit.

Vicki Christman, director of PASA, initially declined to comment about the merger but later expressed her support after a board of directors meeting Wednesday night.

"Prior to going into a board meeting, I was not in the position to be able to comment," she said. "We had some final business that we needed to take care of."

Christman called the merger process "smooth." PASA came from the ashes of The Fine Art Organization in March 1991 after the FAO went bankrupt. The AcA has its roots in the Acadiana Arts Council, which began in 1975.

Both regional groups are respected cultural arts organizations that attract national artists and performers. Their artistic missions overlap slightly.

Abbé, who called the two "natural fits," said the merger will be beneficial financially and professionally for both groups.

He said the programming at the agencies is similar and the plan would increase the efficiency of both organizations.

Abbé, a Lafayette attorney who also serves as a legal counsel for The Daily Advertiser, was instrumental in setting up the current leadership at the AcA as well as the construction of its new building located on Vermillion Street in downtown Lafayette.

"Since our programming is very compatible, we welcomed the opportunity to use a larger venue," Abbé said.

Christman said the merger will benefit both the agencies.

"It's going to expand program opportunities. It's going to allow us to be more effective with our patrons and our donors and our board in the community."

She declined to provide any information about leadership of the group after the merger.

"We are still working on all the details," she said.

Christman said the merger will not be completed until the end of the fiscal year for both agencies.

The Acadiana Center for the Arts in Acadiana's multi-faceted arts and cultural facility. It has five arts exhibitors, space for cultural and international touring exhibitions, arts education spaces and a 500-seat, acoustically pleasing theater for dance, music, theatrical and broadcast productions.

AcA has brought in world-renowned performers such as Lyle Lovett, Travis Tritt, Lou Holmes, and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. AcA is set to host the Mahalia Jackson Festival on May 30.

This season, AcA presented major recording stars: Annette Vega, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Shawn and Boz Scaggs, plus Broadway's "Dreamgirls" and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's "Molin Rouge - The Ballet."

"Most of their performances are at The Heyman Performing Arts Center."