

## Vacant Vibe building to undergo \$1 million-plus facelift



### Downtown Peterborough property will also be home to a music museum space

Date: 2009-05-01

By Paul Rellinger

A downtown Peterborough eyesore is on the cusp of becoming a jewel.

The vacant Vibe building at 286 George St. N. will re-open as The Venue in September 2010, following an estimated \$1 million-plus in renovations.

But the buzz doesn't stop there. As part of that renovation, building owner Michael Skinner is committing floor space for a music museum initiative, which may involve the Canadian Music Hall of Fame.

Established in 1978, the Canadian Music Hall of Fame annually honours Canadian music artists that have attained commercial success while having a positive impact on the country's music scene, at home and around the world. But more pertinent to this initiative, it doesn't have a physical home, existing solely as a website entity where inductee biographies are available to read.

"It makes so much sense to have it here in Peterborough, what with the city's rich music heritage," enthuses City Councillor Dean Pappas, who has maintained regular contact with hall representatives and has discussed the plan formally with local officials, City planning director Malcolm Hunt and GPA EDC CEO Andy Mitchell among them.

"What form the hall's involvement will take locally remains to be seen. It could be the home of its full museum, it could be a satellite museum to a main museum developed elsewhere or it could be home to traveling exhibits. The important thing is something is going to happen there and it's going to be very exciting when it does.

"What's so good is a museum component fits so well with the Central Area Master Plan, particularly its emphasis on the core as a cultural centre. The ball's really in Mike's (Mr. Skinner's) court right now but the museum aspect is going to fly in some form."

Coun. Pappas explains the idea of approaching the hall of fame was born out of a Peterborough This Week inquiry concerning the highway sign designation of Peterborough as Musicville, Ontario. He

says when he subsequently heard the hall doesn't have a physical home, one thing led to another, including the search for a possible local home for the hall. Enter Mr. Skinner, the president of Operitel who is also president of Kawartha Entertainment Group Inc. That consortium already owns and operates The Rooster, The Second Floor Lounge and, more recently, the Historic Red Dog Pub and Tavern, and has owned the Vibe building since June 2008.

"This (a music museum) is absolutely a 100 per cent fit with what we want to do with that property," enthuses Mr. Skinner, who says even without the hall of fame on board, it's his intention that The Venue be home to a museum of local music artifacts and memorabilia. That, he notes, will fit in perfectly with a new music history tour of Peterborough being developed by city lawyer Bruce Fitzpatrick, whose past walking tours of downtown Peterborough landmarks were recently honoured with an award from the Peterborough Historical Society. His walks, notes Mr. Skinner, will start at the Vibe building.

"As a venue, I have a pretty clear vision of what I want to see done there. We're still in the preliminary stages but we're looking at a venue that holds 700 to 900 people, allowing us to bring in top bands (\$40,000 to \$50,000 price range).

"Our target audience would be 35 per cent local, 65 per cent from out of the city, Kingston across to Scarborough. Working with hotels and restaurant, we would offer ticket packages where you come for a show, have dinner and stay overnight. A lot of people travel now to Toronto for shows from east of the city. We want to turn them around."

"There's definitely a void here when it comes to a venue like this. You've got the Red Dog, which holds a few hundred, and the Memorial Centre, which seats 3,000 to 4,000. Showplace caters to a different crowd. We're looking at complementing what Showplace does, not compete with it. And this will be a multi-use facility where not only concerts will be staged but anything really, like fashion shows, so the venue will be fairly configurable."

The plan now is for work on the building to begin in earnest this summer.

"Everyone I've talked has clearly seen the value this brings to the downtown core," says Mr. Skinner, who notes one band already approached about playing The Venue is Great Big Sea.

"It's a real positive on so many levels. The upside is huge."