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## **SHELDON ANNOUNCES OPENING OF STEWARD FAMILY PLAZA** — Walkway and Plaza to Include Vertical Garden, Sculpture, Urban Green Space —

ST. LOUIS – The Sheldon is pleased to announce the Grand Opening of **Steward Family Plaza**, a plaza, walkway and vertical garden on the west side of The Sheldon, on **October 18, 2019**. The festivities will feature an 8:30 p.m. concert by jazz legend and Missouri native, saxophonist **David Sanborn**. Tickets for the concert (balcony seating only) are \$55 front balcony and \$45 rear balcony and are on sale now through MetroTix at 314-534-1111 or at [TheSheldon.org](http://TheSheldon.org).

“As the premier venue in St Louis for music and visual art, we are excited to utilize the outside of our building to present a new, unique and architecturally significant piece of art to the neighborhood and community,” says Anne Bannister, Sheldon Arts Foundation board chair. “As the vines grow up the vertical garden and the ground plants mature, we know that the intimate experience people appreciate about the art presented inside The Sheldon, will extend to their experience in the outside space.”

Designed by internationally acclaimed architect Benjamin Gilmartin, Steward Family Plaza connects The Sheldon with the Jack Galmiche Public Media Commons to the south and Washington Boulevard to the north, and will serve to welcome Sheldon attendees coming for concerts, art exhibits, education programs and community events. In the works since planning began in 2013, the plaza will make a strong artistic, architectural and environmental statement with a large vertical garden, and will communicate the vitality of Sheldon programs and The Sheldon’s place in St. Louis’ cultural landscape.

“With the design for Steward Family Plaza we have tried to create an inviting new public space where St. Louisans can hang out and freely enjoy The Sheldon’s world-class music and art,” says Ben Gilmartin. “Its vertical garden’s unique web-like steel structure creates a lyrical pattern which will be overgrown with a rich variety of horticultural textures and colors, ever-changing throughout the seasons.”

“Steward Family Plaza is intended to be a vital new public feature of The Sheldon campus, connecting visitors to The Sheldon’s front door,” says Matt Ferguson of Powers Bowersox, lead architects for the project. “Through landscape, lighting, architectural and graphics strategies, this project builds on and contributes to the momentum of other public initiatives in Grand Center.”

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## **Vertical Garden**

The centerpiece of the plaza is a three-story, 208-foot long vertical garden along the entire west wall of The Sheldon's Emerson Center building, designed by Andrew Colopy of Colbalt Office, in collaboration with Ben Gilmartin. The garden's sculptural wall is constructed from steel panels, laser-cut in an organic filigree pattern, with steel and fabrication generously donated by Kathy and Robert Williams, Jr. of Williams Patent Crusher. The project's landscape architect, DLANDstudio, Inc., in collaboration with Scott Woodbury, director of Shaw Nature Reserve (part of Missouri Botanical Garden), have designed the garden to flourish year-round, with native Missouri vines chosen specifically to survive St. Louis' hot summers and harsh winters.

The plants will grow up and onto the steel panels, creating an architectural sculpture and urban green space. LED lights are placed in over 200 connecting nodes to create a magical effect at night when the vertical garden is lit.

"The vertical garden is the result of close collaboration between designers and engineers, a one-of-a-kind structure only possible through computer-aided design and fabrication," says Colopy. "More importantly, it is a beautifully irregular array of steel and vegetation set in contradistinction to the building beyond — a new, greener side of The Sheldon."

## **Environmental Impact**

The garden was constructed using environmentally friendly design. Space saving and sustainable, the vertical garden and surrounding rain gardens and landscaping add green space to The Sheldon's urban environment. Bio-retention areas and bio-swales, made possible by a Project Clear grant from the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District, will divert storm water from the city sewer system. Vertical gardens (or green walls) have been shown to filter air pollutants and absorb CO<sup>2</sup>, improving the air quality of its surroundings. The use of native plants increases these benefits, with the additional outcomes of eliminating the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and providing efficient water usage — the garden in Steward Family Plaza is expected to divert almost half a million gallons of storm water per year. Green walls also help lower the "urban heat island" effect, and act as natural insulators, leading to decreased energy use to heat and cool the attached building.

Krista Bentson of DLANDstudio says, "The Sheldon plantings demonstrate that aesthetic desires can coexist with the functional; that a landscape using native plants and providing stormwater capture can also be modern and verdant."

"Even at the scale of a plaza there is potential for larger scale ecological impact," adds Susannah Drake, founding principal of DLANDstudio. "Our team worked closely with the Missouri Botanical Garden to select plantings attractive to Monarch butterflies and other pollinators to strengthen migration corridors through the central part of the United States."

Scott Woodbury of Missouri Botanical Garden adds, "The practice of native landscaping is still in its infancy and there is a need to help landscape planners, contractors and educators on how best native plants may be used. There is more to gardens than beauty. When interpreted well, landscapes that incorporate native plants inspire conversations about natural history, ecology and the role people have in supporting biodiversity."

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## Enhanced Signage

The plaza will include a new 10-foot tall sculptural sign on the north end of the plaza near The Sheldon's street level entrance, designed by Cobalt Office, in collaboration with Benjamin Gilmartin. The Sheldon sign is made from 510 individual layers of ¼ inch stainless steel, each fabricated directly from a digital model by waterjet cutting. When stacked, individual layers come together to give the appearance of volumetric, 3-sided letters that read, "The Sheldon." The improvements also include a promotional video screen facing Washington Boulevard in front of the glass bridge that connects the concert hall with the Emerson Center building.

## Gathering Spaces and Sculpture

In addition to public benches and grassy knolls for lounging or resting, the plaza will also include two named gathering areas — the Engelhardt Family Terrace made possible by the Engelhardt Family Foundation, and the Centene Gallery made possible by a grant from the Centene Charitable Foundation. A sculpture, "Steve Wondering if He Could Actually Walk," a work created in 2015 by Portuguese sculptors João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva, on permanent loan from the Gateway Foundation, will also be featured.

The design team for Steward Family Plaza was led by Benjamin Gilmartin, one of the top designers and architects in the country, with experience renovating Lincoln Center Plaza and the Museum of Modern Art, both in New York; Public Media Commons in St. Louis; and many other important projects around the world. Gilmartin assembled a team of experts including Andrew Colopy of Cobalt Office as Project Designer, Randy Burkett of Randy Burkett Lighting, Susannah Drake of DLANDstudio as landscape architect, and local architect Fred Powers of Powers Bowersox, all with impressive credentials on many similar projects. General contractor for the plaza is S. M. Wilson & Co.

"S. M. Wilson is pleased to have been a part of the team that brought this unique project to fruition," says Amy Berg, S. M. Wilson & Co. president. "Nothing like this exists in the region, or perhaps in the country. The St. Louis community is in store for a lovely experience when they visit The Sheldon and take in the new plaza."

## Steward Family Plaza Donors

Steward Family Plaza is made possible by generous leadership support from The Steward Family Foundation and World Wide Technology, Inc.; and Kathy and Robert M. Williams, Jr. and their children Elizabeth Ashley Williams and Robert M. Williams, III; Engelhardt Family Foundation; Wilfred and Ann Lee Konneker; Centene Charitable Foundation; Emerson; Sam and Marilyn Fox Foundation; Lotta and Jeff Fox; David and Barbara Gifford; William T. Kemper Foundation – Commerce Bank, Trustee; Kenneth and Nancy Kranzberg; Sally Levy; Richard and Patricia Marriott; MSD Project Clear; Michael and Noémi Neidorff; Mary Pillsbury Wainwright; Emily Rauh Pulitzer; Regional Arts Commission; and many other generous donors.

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**Resources:** (all courtesy of The Sheldon)

**Time lapse video of construction:** <https://app.oxblue.com/open/sheldonartsfoundation/plaza>

**Video clips:** <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xtaxrvbt0ymv9f3/AAAKBoQwPvQXcmfJ9YbCoG0Qa?dl=0>

**Construction/Installation photos:** [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/61v671cep5gae7i/AACxCEdJiy\\_Z\\_GBuTJcEhAJIa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/61v671cep5gae7i/AACxCEdJiy_Z_GBuTJcEhAJIa?dl=0)

**Renderings:** [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vkwnwynby31s2ta/AABTUR\\_obNuesPbd1e\\_1d5Xva?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vkwnwynby31s2ta/AABTUR_obNuesPbd1e_1d5Xva?dl=0)

## BY THE NUMBERS/FUN FACTS

### The Vertical Garden:

- Overall Dimensions: 34 feet, 4 inches x 208 feet, 4 inches
- The steel mesh frame is made from laser cut, ½ inch thick steel plates, tensioned to a double channel frame.
- Comprised of 1,858 segments, if you could break apart and line up each segment, they'd stretch 5,292 feet — just over a mile!
- 206 firefly lights are built into the mesh wall.
- The organic appearance of the mesh design is the product of a Catmull-Clark algorithm. The final design was enhanced by custom structural optimization algorithms coded for the mesh design.
- The mesh is a product of digital design and fabricated using digital laser cutting technology.
- The ½ inch thick steel mesh has an aspect ratio rivaling that of paper (length to thickness ratio of 5000:1), with approximately 90% of the steel plate removed by the laser cutting process.
- The comparatively “delicate” steel mesh is contrasted by aggregate tension forces that are massive, with up to 20-tons of force acting on the “outriggers” that support the mesh.
- The laser steel-cutting table used by Williams Patent Crusher is one of the largest in the United States, with a working width of 144 inches and an overall length of 100 feet.
- The laser uses 4,000 watts with a focus beam of .008 inches, reaching a temperature of 12,000 Kelvin.

### Size and Weight of Mesh Wall:

**Mesh (steel):** 53,454 cubic inches or 30.9 cubic feet  
15,523 pounds or 7.76 tons

**Columns (steel):** 80,253 cubic inches or 46.4 cubic feet  
23,305 pounds or 11.65 tons

**Frame (steel):** 161,272 cubic inches or 93.3 cubic feet  
46,833 pounds or 23.42 tons

**TOTAL:** 294,979 cubic inches or 170.6 cubic feet  
85,662 pounds or 42.83 tons

- The rain gardens/green infrastructure will capture almost half a million gallons of stormwater a year.
- The final planting will have more than 5,000 shrubs and grasses native to Missouri, with an ornamental kempt design in the rain gardens and vibrant flowering vines on the vertical garden.

### Sheldon Sign

- The Sheldon Sign is 10 feet, 8 ½ inches tall
- It is comprised of 510 layers of ¼ inch stainless steel.
- A total of 3,111 feet of waterjet profile cuts were made to create the sign.

### Groundscape

Concrete Paving: Approximately 9,000 square feet, project-wide

Landscape Area: Approximately 8,000 square feet, project-wide

## CONSTRUCTION PARTNERS

**Benjamin Gilmartin** has 25 years of experience with the design of internationally significant cultural projects and currently practices both as a partner of the New York firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) as well as independently on a limited number of projects under his own name. As Benjamin Gilmartin Architect, he has undertaken selective commissions including the connected projects of the Jack Galmiche Public Media Commons at Nine Network and Steward Family Plaza at the Sheldon Concert Hall, both in the heart of St. Louis' Grand Center Arts District. With DS+R, Gilmartin has led numerous projects in public space, arts and performance, exemplified in the transformation of Lincoln Center's public spaces and the reconstruction of Alice Tully Hall. Gilmartin was a long-time contributor to the architecture journal *Praxis*, he taught at the Cornell University College of Architecture and Planning, and he has lectured widely on the design of cultural spaces.

**Cobalt** is an architectural and research practice based in Houston, Texas, co-founded by partners Andrew Colopy and Robert Booth. Cobalt undertakes select projects to create public spaces and places for living, work, art and education. They frequently invite collaboration to extend their reach and enlighten their approach. Cobalt's research seeks innovation through advanced design and fabrication technology, with the aim to create projects of cultural significance that enhance a shared built environment.

**DLANDstudio** is an interdisciplinary design firm founded in 2005 by Susannah C. Drake, FASLA, AIA. DLANDstudio's unique design practice redefines the role of public space to incorporate infrastructural systems that capture and remediate stormwater, restore native ecologies, and mitigate climate-change. Their integrated methodology identifies broken systems and proposes alternative visions across scales, improving the resilience of communities and environments from the unit to the city. Their innovative and socially-accountable process is facilitated by significant public and private grant funding.

**Powers Bowersox Associates (PBA)** is an architecture, planning and interior design organization with an outstanding reputation for high quality design and personalized service. Their services include space programming, master planning, site and building evaluation studies, architecture and interior design. Over the past 35 years, PBA has earned a reputation for creating innovative design solutions that are long-lasting, responsive to owner needs, and economical to build and operate.

**Randy Burkett Lighting Design** maintains a studio environment that fosters creativity and innovation, while placing a premium on client satisfaction. Their professional team is diverse in both education and practice; with skills and knowledge in architectural and theatrical lighting, architecture, interior design, engineering, and manufacturing that are applied in the studio's daily practice. Ongoing leadership in sustainable design, energy conservation and innovative professional practice has positioned Randy Burkett Lighting Design as one of the profession's most respected practices. For more information, visit [www.rblldi.com](http://www.rblldi.com).

**Scott Woodbury** is the manager of the Whitmire Wildflower Garden at Shaw Nature Reserve, part of Missouri Botanical Garden, where he has been developing the garden for 27 years. He has worked at various public gardens including Old Westbury Gardens in New York, Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, Castello Di Uzzano in Italy and Tudor Place in Washington, D.C. He currently serves as advisor to the horticulture program of St. Louis Community College, Grow Native! and Wild Ones. Woodbury also volunteers for the Ozark Regional Land Trust and serves on the planning committees of the Partners for Native Landscaping annual conference and the Shaw Professional Landscaping Series held at Alberici.

**S. M. Wilson** is a full-service construction management, design/build and general contracting firm with headquarters in St. Louis. For nearly 100 years, S. M. Wilson has provided a complete range of services and has become one of the leading general construction and construction management firms in the St. Louis area. The employee-owned company is dedicated to going above and beyond expectations for their clients by putting people first. For more information visit [www.smwilson.com](http://www.smwilson.com).