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STEWART FAMILY PLAZA AT THE SHELDON NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

— Walkway and Plaza Includes Vertical Garden, Sculpture, Urban Green Space —

ST. LOUIS – The Sheldon Arts Foundation Board of Directors, donors, staff and supporters celebrated the Grand Opening of **Steward Family Plaza**, a plaza, walkway and vertical garden on the west side of The Sheldon, on Friday night, October 18 with a ribbon cutting ceremony, cocktail party and concert by jazz legend and Missouri native, saxophonist David Sanborn.

Designed by internationally acclaimed architect Benjamin Gilmartin with Cobalt Office, 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.

Features of the public space, now open to the public, day or night, include:

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 Gilmartin, Andrew Colopy of Colbalt Office, and collaborating engineers Algis Lencus and Michael Ludvik from M. Ludvik Engineering. 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 “firefly” effect at night when the vertical garden is lit.

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 CO², 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.

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Enhanced Signage

The plaza also includes a new 10-foot tall sculptural sign, designed by Gilmartin and Colopy. 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 includes 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, is also 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 design collaborator Andrew Colopy of Cobalt Office, Michael Ludvik and Algis Lensus of M. Ludvik Engineering, Randy Burkett of Randy Burkett Lighting, Susannah Drake of DLANDstudio as landscape architect, and local executive architect Fred Powers of Powers Bowersox, all with impressive credentials on many similar projects. General contractor for the plaza is S. M. Wilson & Co.

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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Image Caption: Ribbon Cutting at Steward Family Plaza at the Sheldon Concert Hall and Art Galleries in St. Louis, October 18, 2019. Pictured from left to right, donors Mary Steward, David Steward Jr., Thelma Steward and David Steward; Sheldon board chair Anne Bannister, retired Sheldon executive director Paul Reuter, Sheldon executive director Peter Palermo. Photo by Ray Marklin.

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

Renderings: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vkwnwynby31s2ta/AABTUR_obNuesPbd1e_1d5Xva?dl=0