



FILE PHOTO

Construction is well under way of Dieppe's Chocolate River Music Conservatory. The building is being erected adjacent to city hall.

## Riverview's loss, Dieppe's gain

Loss of Chocolate River Conservatory of Music left a sour note for Riverview residents in 2004

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Fishermen like to exaggerate and talk about the "big one that got away."

When it comes to the Town of Riverview, they do not have to exaggerate when they talk about the big one that got away in 2004. To add to their frustration, it was netted shortly afterwards by the City of Dieppe.

The big fish in this case was the Chocolate River Conservatory of Music.

The first of its kind in New Brunswick, the conservatory officially found a permanent home in Dieppe on June 24, 2004 when Mayor Yvon Lapierre announced it would be established in a new building in the city's downtown, to be constructed beside the current Dieppe City Hall.

The mayor told a news conference that the new Conservatoire de musique Chocolate River Conservatory of Music would be the centrepiece in an arts and culture complex in Dieppe's downtown core. It would be like a "beacon" to attract businesses and other development to the municipality, he said.

Turning to the two developers Juergen Weiland, who will be the facility's managing director, and his wife Melody Dobson, its artistic director, Lapierre said "We welcome you to Dieppe. Thank you for the confidence you have shown in our city. You will not regret this decision."

And the Dieppe mayor was on the mark in his promise, because any regrets would likely come from the other side of the Petitcodiac River.

The announcement was initially anticipated for Riverview (Dobson's hometown) to be located on her family's property at the corner of Findlay Boulevard and Whitepine Road.

The proposal was for the conservatory to be erected as a centrepiece of a \$2 million project. It would be complemented by two adjacent buildings, which would be leased out to businesses, with the revenues used to fund the conservatory.

But the project hit the skids earlier in the year, when the developers became frustrated over the raft of conditions imposed by area residents on the rezoning that they sought for the property.

Included among some of the businesses restricted from going into the two adjacent buildings were a youth centre, grocery store, supply store, parking lot or parking garage. Also, all three buildings would be restricted to two storeys, could not have overhead lighting that would face the yards of the residents behind the facility and a buffer zone of trees four metres (13 feet) deep would have to be in place at the back of the property.

Weiland declared that it would be unfeasible to proceed with the project there, in light of all the restrictions, and that they would henceforth look at building the facility in Moncton or Dieppe.

However, the developers flirted briefly with returning to the Riverview option about three weeks later, saying the changes they would need to the restrictions might not be as substantial as originally thought and they might be willing to make another rezoning application.

But the door had already been opened for the other two communities to make a pitch for the plum facility and Dieppe came through with an offer too good to refuse. Weiland said the city proposed putting it in the middle of a downtown development plan with a strong cultural component.

This made it the "perfect fit" for the music conservatory, he said.

The conservatory, whose construction cost is estimated at about \$750,000, will be located adjacent to the current Dieppe City Hall. Once the new city hall is constructed, the old building will become a cultural centre — a home to various artists and cultural organizations.

The fire station next to the cur-

rent city hall will be converted into a 250-seat concert hall within the next two years. The hall will be designed to provide an ideal venue for both classical concerts and community arts events.

The Chocolate River Conservatory of Music will share access to the concert hall, while the conservatory will likely assume the facility's management. The conservatory, cultural centre and the concert hall will be linked by an atrium, which will serve as the main entrance and lobby for all three facilities, and which will also double as an art gallery.

Meanwhile, work on the conservatory is moving along well, with the facility expected to be ready to open sometime this month, says Normand Leger, communications director for the City of Dieppe. He said the walls have gone up and the final interior work is under way.

Leger said construction is also under way for the atrium connecting the conservatory to the city hall. Although their building will not be completed until next month, he said the conservatory has begun music courses in a house on Gauvin Road that had been purchased by the city.

The program at the conservatory is designed to accommodate students of all ages and levels of ability. He said each student will be encouraged to meet his or her individual potential.

He said it will create opportunities for all students to perform regularly, participate in bands, choirs and ensembles, and supplement private music lessons with group instruction workshops, "master classes" and summer camps.

The conservatory is also providing expert training programs for piano, jazz piano, accordion, violin, Celtic fiddle, guitar, harp, cello, voice, music theatre, French horn, to name a few.

A staff of top-quality instructors are already in place at the conservatory.

The sound of music will resonate from the tri-communities and the rest of the province from Le Conservatoire de musique Chocolate River Conservatory of Music in Dieppe for many years to come.

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HF - Development