

New Satellite City

Columbia Plans Facilities For Vast Culture Program

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The plan announced last month for a summer symphony festival at Columbia, Md., is just one phase of a far-ranging cultural program earmarked for the new town in Howard County.

Although still very much in the talking stages, Columbia's developers expect that their 105,000-population city will include (in addition to the National Symphony summer tent):

- A 600-700-seat theater, where both Arena Stage of Washington and Center Stage of Baltimore as well as off-Broadway productions may be represented.

- A music school, probably a branch of Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory.

- An art school, probably a subsidiary of the Maryland Institute in Baltimore.

- A 2500-seat, year-round concert hall.

- A dance center, combining a school and professional performance unit.

- A modern library, relying heavily on information retrieval and computerized information storage.

- A crafts center, stressing Allegheny culture and involving a Festival of the Alleghenies in 1968.

- A Family Life Institute, part of whose function will be to stimulate creative activity within the family, such as chamber music and choral singing.

No Center

Most of the institutions will be built on a leaseback basis in Columbia's Town Center, in the heart of the 13,700-acre development. But it will not be a culture center, according to Wallace Hamilton, director of institutional planning and development.

"We are opposed to culture centers," he said. "We conceive of culture as a pervasive influence that has no center. We do not want culture compartmentalized."

The philosophy behind Columbia's cultural concept is basic to its approach to the entire new town. It is an approach shared by the backers of another new town, Reston, in Fairfax County, which celebrates its official opening with an all-day cultural program Dec. 4.

As Hamilton puts it, Columbia's aim is "to expand the individual's freedom of choice, not to run people's lives for them. It is in the enlargement of options that a better life can be lived.

"... We're just priming the pump and hoping that with a rich enough mix an indigenous cultural life will grow."

Tricky Business

Priming the human mind is a tricky business, however, and the Columbia people are real estate men, not cultural experts. So they've called in expert help—people like Stanley Cavell, philosophy professor at Harvard; Milton Lyon of Actor's Equity Foundation; Hyman Faine, of the American Guild of Musical Artists; Hugh Hardy, a New York architect; and Esther Jackson, director of education of the New York Shakespeare Festival.

All met at Princeton last summer to plot a cultural life for Columbia when it opens around early 1968. On Dec. 9 a group of Baltimore and Washington cultural leaders will meet to start putting thoughts and words into action.

Reston, too, has turned to the expert to guide its hand in the cultural field. The Reston Community Fund, a non-profit corporation set up to finance cultural activities, has among its board of directors Robert Porterfield, director of the Barter Theater (which hopes to have a northern Virginia branch at Reston); Leslie Cheek, director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, T. Marshall Hahn, president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute;

and Michael Straight, former editor of New Republic.

Reston's cultural plans are less ambitious than Columbia's, principally because of its nearness to Washington. But it will have an art gallery (opening this weekend), a large theater, a museum, extension course in the arts, and a major library.

Another difference between Reston and Columbia is that all construction at the former—from town house to museum—will be financed, supervised and controlled by the developer. At Columbia, construction will be subcontracted. Institutions like the Symphony amphitheater and the music school will be paid for on a lease basis by the groups using the facilities.