



September 10, 2024



Ground Broken for New Surack – Sweetwater Music Industry Building at Purdue Fort Wayne

Tuesday's groundbreaking ceremony on the campus of Purdue University Fort Wayne was capped off with some big news. The university's \$25 million, 26,000-square-foot facility that's scheduled to open in time for the fall 2026 semester will be called the Surack – Sweetwater Music Industry Building. The name was chosen to recognize the crucial support Chuck and Lisa Surack have provided to the project—and to acknowledge their essential role in the PFW School of Music's growth since it welcomed its first students six years ago.

Chuck is the founder and CEO of Surack Enterprises, and was the CEO of **Sweetwater**, which he founded in 1979. Prior to Tuesday's ceremony, he described why he and Lisa have supported the music school for so long, specifically its most recent initiative.

"This project is incredibly important because it's a major investment in the future of music education in our community," Surack said. "The new state-of-the-art facility will nurture and develop musicians, create new opportunities for learning and creativity, and support the growth of the music scene in Fort Wayne."

From the moment PFW first opened the doors of its current facility on the Sweetwater corporate campus in 2018, interest in the university's popular music, music industry, and music technology programs has soared. Enrollment that first year was 33. At the start of this academic year, it's 147, and 22 of the students are also double majors within the three programs.

While not totally unexpected, this growth became the driving force behind a vision to bring a significantly larger, more advanced music industry building to PFW's Main Campus. High interest in these programs also led to the creation of the **Gold Top Music Group**, which is believed to be the only record label in the country to involve students on a weekly basis in and out of the classroom. It will also be moving to the new facility.

"We are fortunate to be creating a music industry incubator like no other in the country," said John O'Connell, dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts. "In a unique way, the high-level resources we will be providing to our students will help take interests many of them began pursuing at home during the pandemic to the next level. What we're doing is giving them an opportunity to turn this passion into a career through training and experiences comparable to what's happening in the business today."

When completed, the new music industry building's amenities will include three recording studios and control rooms, 10 edit suites, an audio lab, rehearsal spaces, a large classroom, seven offices, and a conference room.

The bigger of the two rehearsal spaces will be more than 3,000 square feet. It too has received a name—the Marsha Walb Heller Rehearsal Hall—that recognizes a generous gift from David and Jill Heller.

In addition to O'Connell, who served as the lively master of ceremonies on Tuesday, other featured participants included PFW Chancellor Ron Elsenbaumer, State Rep. Matt Lehman, R-Berne; and Ian Hyatt, Purdue University chief of staff to the president.

"We are deeply grateful for the multitude of individuals and organizations who have helped pave the way for us to be here today," Elsenbaumer said. "I extend my deepest appreciation to everyone who believed in this university, believed in our mission, and helped us achieve this dream."

Forty percent of the funding for the state-of-the-art facility came from private donors, including matching \$3 million lead gifts from the Auer Foundation and the Suracks, which were announced in August 2022. Fundraising efforts received another major boost in May 2023 with a \$15 million budget allocation from the Indiana General Assembly. And to help cover rising construction costs as plans were being finalized, the Suracks recently delivered a second game-changing gift of \$3 million to ensure that the project could move forward as planned.

Leaders from the university and its **College of Visual and Performing Arts** believe this important expansion fits squarely within the "**Allen County Together**" economic development action plan announced in January 2022. It included a call for Fort Wayne to become a "Top-10 Music City" over the following decade.

During the project's initial planning phase, Elsenbaumer acknowledged the efforts of members of PFW's community engagement board, Greater Fort Wayne Inc., and the Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana, whose support was essential in securing the state funding. He echoed those sentiments Tuesday, while also thanking members of the university community and other key supporters who have helped the project reach this important milestone.

Elsenbaumer also recognized separate \$1 million allocations from the English-Bonter-Mitchell Foundation and the Indiana General Assembly that were used to help establish the School of Music and equip the PFW center on the Sweetwater campus.

When asked to reflect on his company's humble beginnings 45 years ago, Surack highlighted what the entire area has been able to accomplish during that time.

"Looking at the new music building compared to Sweetwater's early days, it's amazing to see how much the music scene in Fort Wayne has grown," Surack said. "This new building shows just how far we've come and highlights the city's dedication to music education and supporting talent."

The music industry building will be connected via a second-floor skybridge to the existing PFW Music Center. This is a prime location along Mastodon Way, a path that leads through the heart of the Main Campus.

The general contractor for the project is Weigand Construction. The architecture and design elements are being provided by Design Collaborative.

A fly-through video of the building developed by Design Collaborative can be viewed by [clicking here](#).



Photographed here from left to right are State Rep. Matt Lehman, R-Berne; Ian Hyatt, Purdue University chief of staff to the president; Chuck Surack and Lisa Surack; PFW Chancellor Ron Elsenbaumer; and John O'Connell, dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts.



Control Room



Large Rehearsal



Lobby



Small Rehearsal

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