

State OKs theater deal for National Dance Institute

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The state Board of Finance on Friday approved a deal between Bernalillo County and the National Dance Institute of New Mexico for NDI-NM to lease Albuquerque's Hiland Theater in exchange for services.

The deal was approved by the Bernalillo County Commission last week but needed the OK from the Board of Finance.

The group's headquarters, the 33,000-square-foot Dance Barns on Santa Fe's west side, are built on 3.5 acres leased from the Santa Fe Public Schools and opened in 2003.

The organization, founded in 1994, serves more than 6,000 children and 650 public-school teachers statewide through its outreach, advanced training and teacher-training programs, according to its Web site.

Bernalillo County purchased the Hiland Theater, 4804 Central Ave., in 2005, and voters approved a \$1.1 million bond that went toward some improvements to the theater, built in 1948 on historic Route 66 and opened in 1951.

It was supposed to serve as a performance space for various Albuquerque groups.

As part of the agreement, NDI-NM will pay for completion of the theater renovation, which the group estimates at \$9 million, will pay utilities and will provide services to Bernalillo County residents in exchange for use of the building.

"The prospect of leasing the Hiland Theater was an opportunity we had to pursue," Russell Baker, executive director of NDI-NM, said in a prepared statement. "We've had programs in the Albuquerque schools for 12 years, and we look forward to expanding our programs to include after-school options.

Having a permanent building in Albuquerque will allow NDI-NM to offer after-school programs for students in Bernalillo County, according to the statement from the group.

Sixteen Albuquerque public schools participate in its dance programs, while another 18 are on a waiting list, according to the statement. NDI-NM provides \$500,000 in services to Bernalillo County residents, according to the group. Once it moves into the theater, it expects to triple those services.

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