

## Bull City Rising

Musings, reflections and general gossip for those more inclined to say Durham-Raleigh

April 09, 2008

### Venable gets Somerhill Gallery

In case you missed Tuesday's paper, be sure to check out Monica Chen's [excellent article breaking the news](#) that Chapel Hill's esteemed Somerhill Gallery is relocating to downtown Durham. The Somerhill, a leading art gallery, is relocating in May to the Venable Building complex renovated by Andy Rothschild's Scientific Properties.

Somerhill, which over 35 years has established what its owners describe as a reputation as "one of the most prominent galleries in the Southeast," was unceremoniously dumped out of Chapel Hill's Eastgate Shopping Center, which has for some reason decided that the kind of shoppers going there for Trader Joe's and the Great Outdoor Provision Co. would have no interest in having an art gallery close by. (Naturally -- we all know that the Trader Joe's crowd would never, just never, buy art. Er, right.)

As the H-S notes, Phil Szostak, the architect who's designed the DPAC as well as the existing Somerhill gallery, is working with Somerhill owner Joe Rowand on a new design for the business' expanded space in the Venable.

The move is a win for the Bull City in a couple of ways. First, it adds another retail attraction to downtown's revitalization in the midst of a national economic and shopping downturn that has, as the TBJ pointed out this week, dried up many new retail starts throughout the country and region.

Second, the presence of the gallery -- in combination with recently-opened and pending new restaurants and the Durham Performing Arts Center under construction -- solidify downtown Durham's chosen self-marketing towards the arts and creative pursuits. (As the Somerhill's owners note, the Venable is visible from the Durham Freeway and Roxboro will be a main thoroughfare of access for the new DPAC.)

Intriguingly, Somerhill chose the Venable, which has to date houses government offices and the Independent Weekly, over Golden Belt, another Scientific Property site that's devoted to the arts. On the surface, it would have made a lot of sense for Somerhill to choose that site; it's possible Somerhill didn't want to deal with the wrap-up of construction given the very short time frame the gallery has to relocate.

Still, the expansion of Durham's arts scene with their addition should continue to help build a critical mass for the arts downtown. (And, hey, all those I-bankers over at Smith Breeden should feel a little more at home as they leave their Chapel Hill digs for American Tobacco later this spring.)

The Somerhill has posted updates about their eviction and new digs on their blog (<http://somerhillgallery.wordpress.com/>) and promises ongoing updates on the renovation and the move.

Posted at 10:30 AM | [Permalink](#)

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## Comments

I hope the gallery will allow the residents of "Mangum South: 219" to come by on an art appreciation program...  
<http://bullshat.wordpress.com/2007/06/12/another-one-bites-the-dust/>

Posted by: [hovercraft](#) | [April 09, 2008 at 11:22 AM](#)

I was momentarily worried about Somerhill's financial strength when I read that they had been subject to an "eviction." Oh, my! I thought.

While perhaps an overly lawyer'd distinction, Eastgate deciding not to renew a lease after the end of the lease's current term is not an eviction.

I have little doubt Somerhill was a good tenant; just that Eastgate is changing its tenant mix.

Posted by: [Tar Heelz](#) | [April 09, 2008 at 02:26 PM](#)

this is great news for third Fridays. i'm sure somerhill will be a strong participant in the local art scene.

Posted by: [libby](#) | [April 09, 2008 at 08:51 PM](#)

This is great news for Durham. Chapel Hill's Eastgate has been changing their tenant mix periodically for years. I hope they can find one that makes them happy. And before the next flooding! That was such a mess.

Posted by: [Valerie](#) | [April 10, 2008 at 04:53 AM](#)

Eastgate kicked out a lot of their tenants for not being "upscale" enough a while back. I wonder what their new strategy is? Swim wear and sand bags?

Posted by: [Lenore](#) | [April 13, 2008 at 08:57 AM](#)