

Arts center awarded \$300,000

Transforming the former armory into a high school and center for performing arts is expected to cost \$6.5 million.

01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, April 8, 2004

By JOHN CASTELLUCCI
Journal Staff Writer

PAWTUCKET -- A \$300,000 appropriation by Congress has put a nonprofit group a little closer to its goal of transforming the Pawtucket Armory building into a performing arts center.

The project, which involves turning the armory into the home of a variety of arts organizations, as well as a high school of music and art, has an estimated price tag of \$6.5 million.

With the \$300,000 appropriation, announced Tuesday by U.S. Sen. Lincoln Chafee, the Pawtucket Armory Association has raised about \$1.8 million, Seth Handy, president of the association, said.

Most of the money has come from the state and federal government. The armory association plans a major fundraising campaign to raise part of the money, but a kickoff date hasn't been set.

"We're actually deliberating when we're going to kick off a public campaign," Handy said. "The traditional rule is at least being 50 percent the way to the goal. We're thinking that we may actually hold off until we're further toward the goal."

Abandoned by the National Guard in 1993, the armory was vacant until last fall, when the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, the first tenant, mounted the first of several productions in the armory annex, a small brick garage next-door.

A Child's Christmas in Wales, adapted from the tale by Dylan Thomas, was followed by a Wallace Shawn play, Aunt Dan and Lemon.

Until Sunday, the Gamm Theatre is presenting Barrymore, a two-act play about the famous alcoholic actor John Barrymore, with Sam Babbitt in the title role.