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**'Arts Center'**

• Whitney, WYO sign lease agreement for Hallmark building

*From staff reports*

Whitney Benefits Inc. and the WYO Theater have signed a 10-year agreement under which the WYO will lease the Crown Hallmark building at 50 N. Main St. at no charge with an option to purchase the facility.

Nick Johnson, executive director of the WYO, said the WYO plans to create a "comprehensive arts center" on Main Street by incorporating the renovated Hallmark and Perkins buildings as educational and rehearsal wings to the WYO.

The two "wings" will be open to all performing arts organizations in the area, Johnson said.

Whitney — a private, nonprofit educational foundation created by the will of Edward A. Whitney in 1917 — purchased the Crown Hallmark building in January 2004 "for the continued development of educational resources for the residents of Sheridan County," according to a news release from the organization this morning.

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**Arts**

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The WYO Theater and Whitney began discussions earlier this year, according to the release.

Under the agreement, the WYO assumes leases of current tenants of the building and will make the building accessible to Sheridan County's three school districts and Sheridan College for educational activities.

"We're grateful to Whitney Benefits for the extraordinary opportunity this lease affords the arts community of Sheridan," Johnson added.

Pete Schoonmaker, Whitney trustee and chairman of the organization's property committee, said, "Whitney is pleased to assist in this creative opportunity for educational purposes."

Whitney formed community member groups, including the Whitney Community Performing Arts and Visual Arts Committee, in early 2004.

That committee's discussions of possible development and planning for the Hallmark Crown building's future uses was part of the basis for the Whitney-WYO agreement, according to the news release.