



UNC SCHOOL OF THE ARTS PHOTO

This schematic shows how Michael Kohler and his team of Alex Bright and Kyle Grant plan to light up the Millennium Center next weekend. Their team is one of six made up of students studying lighting at the UNC School of the Arts.

# Glowing in the Dark

**Focus on Arts:** *Project of lighting students and expert will for three nights be an eyeful for visitors to the city's downtown*

By Ken Keuffel  
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**T**hey have lit up many a show for actors, dancers and opera singers.

Now, the lighting students at the UNC School of the Arts are about to apply their know-how to a prominent downtown building, showcasing possibilities for public art and, perhaps, beginning careers in architectural lighting design.

The students are taught by Norman Coates, who conceived the project. They have teamed up with Paul Gregory, a leader in the lighting industry, to create a multicolored light show on the facade of the Millennium Center, 101 W. Fifth St. During the production, which will run Thursday through Saturday, 30-minute programs containing the work of six design teams will be repeated from 6:30 to 11 p.m.

The light show is being sponsored by Gilbert and Suzanne Mathews, the founding owners of Lucifer

Lighting in San Antonio, who recently joined UNC's board of visitors. It grew out of a master class that Gregory taught there earlier this fall.

"Paul, the students and I decided that to make this master class a memorable educational experience, we had to get outside the classroom and into real applications of cutting-edge lighting technology and applications," Coates said.

Show organizers are betting that the Millennium Center, a former post office of classical design built in 1928, has the sort of architectural details to accommodate a range of leading lighting techniques.

"The building is such a beautiful structure," Gregory said recently on the telephone from New York, where he is the president of a company called Focus Lighting ([www.focuslighting.com](http://www.focuslighting.com)). "The architecture stands out so wonderfully; it will accept light very well."

The light show will highlight a busy weekend that also includes the Piedmont Craftsmen's Fair in the

nearby Benton Convention Center. "The potential traffic is really good to do this as a first-time kickoff and to get the idea out there," said Coates, who plans to make similar presentations in the future.

## Light it up

The light show at the Millennium Center has several goals.

One is to promote the cause of public art, which seems to have picked up steam in recent months. The Arts Council of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County has led the way, having called for several measures. These include an inventory of public art (now under way), the formation of a public-art and design commission and the appointment of a public-art curator employed by the city. Another hope is the formation of a separate I-40 bridges committee that would work with local and state officials from the Department of Transportation on

See LIGHT, Page E10



# LIGHT

Continued From Page E1

the future reconstruction of the roadway.

Milton Rhodes, the council's president and chief executive, calls the light show "a gift in the form of public art" for area residents and visitors.

"It will be a way to experience the arts in a whole new fashion," he said. "Only in a city defined by the arts would people have an opportunity to view a cutting-edge installation of this complexity."

Coates called lighting "the most public of art." He envisions creating the lighting-walk equivalent of Boston's history trail, with pedestrians being able to take in various lighting attractions as they stroll around the city.

Coates also plugged permanent lighting designs.

People "like to go to areas that are lit," he said. "One of the easiest and least-expensive ways to upgrade and renovate the facades of ... buildings downtown is to just light them properly. As the technology changes, it's actually becoming energy-efficient.... It's easy to

maintain, and it will enhance the atmosphere of downtown immediately."

Another goal of the light show is to illustrate one way in which lighting designers find inspiration, namely through the work of other artists.

Coates said, "Right now, the path the students have taken with Paul Gregory is to look at artists and look at the building and (ask) 'How would this artist paint this building or put color on this building?'"

Gregory said that a lighting design could suggest a narrative, draw on an artist's work or end up being a combination of the two.

"It's really trying to figure out what emotion you're trying to create in the viewer as he enters or looks at the space," he said.

## Applied arts

As for what the show will do for students, it will expose them to job possibilities outside the theater.

"Our theory has always been that you come here and you learn to design with light," Coates said.

"And then you go out and apply it where your personality

best fits," he said. "Not all of our students have the personalities to survive Broadway."

Instead, they might choose to follow in the footsteps of Gregory, who, after working in the theater, made his mark in architectural lighting design. Gregory's company is responsible for the lighting in such places as the Mall at Millenia in Orlando, Fla.; a Toys "R" Us store in New York's Times Square; and several restaurants and sports venues.

"The work is permanent," Gregory said of architectural-lighting design.

"In the theater, your best work is wiped out after 16 weeks or 10 weeks or four weeks, whenever the show closes. You have pictures, but that's about it."

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■ *The light show at the Millennium Center, 101 W. Fifth St., will run in 30-minute increments from 6:30 to 11 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, showcasing the work of Paul Gregory and of Norman Coates' lighting students at UNCSA. Admission is free. For more information, call 336-770-3232, ext. 116.*

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