

Saturday, June 28, 2003, 12:00 a.m. Pacific

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## Virginia Anderson, the powerhouse at the Center

By **Melinda Bargreen**  
*Seattle Times music critic*

When Virginia Anderson faced the cameras at a recent media tour of Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, she wore an iridescent purple jacket that echoed the hall's shiny interiors. So complete is her identification with her work as Seattle Center director that it's no surprise to see her dressing to match McCaw's walls.

This hall — which opens tonight — is the biggest, lengthiest project she has tackled in her 15 years at the Center, the capstone of more than \$350 million worth of investment in new construction and improvements.

Anderson is a dynamo, driven by a mission: to give others opportunities she never had, growing up poor as what she calls "a parched little plant" on Chicago's South Side. Whether it's sports, populist entertainment or high culture, Anderson wants the best for all comers at Seattle Center.

Anderson describes her life's mission as "dissolving boundaries. I care deeply about dissolving barriers at McCaw Hall, bringing what is inside to everyone outside."

The grim days following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when people flocked to the Center for five days and nights, "distilled everything that we worked for," Anderson believes.

"People with purple hair and body piercings put their arms around little old ladies in white gloves, and everybody grieved. ... The Seattle Center is truly Seattle's center.

"Everything in our society tries to divide us by religion, color, age and income. The Center honors all people in an environment safe for them to experience the sense of community that is so profoundly needed. We host 14 cultural festivals, from Vietnamese to Spanish and Irish. We have little kids and seniors. It's a wonderful mishmash."

**Not a consensus-seeker**

