Cora Cahan will become CEO of the Baryshnikov Arts Center, the brainchild of Mikhail Baryshnikov. PHOTO: BRYAN THOMAS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In her nearly three decades as president of the New 42nd Street nonprofit organization, Cora Cahan led the charge to restore historic theaters near Times Square and bring new life to the area.

Now she is turning her attention a few blocks south to a different cultural entity.

In mid-October, Ms. Cahan will become president and chief executive of the Baryshnikov Arts Center, officials with the organization said.

The 14-year-old, 20,000-square-foot center, located at 450 West 37th St. in the Hudson Yards neighborhood, is the brainchild of the dance legend Mikhail Baryshnikov, who continues to serve as its artistic director.

The center aims to be a gathering space for artists of many disciplines, including dance, music and theater, and offers residency opportunities and subsidized rehearsal space. The nonprofit organization, which has a $3.5 million annual budget, presents several performances a year at its 238-seat Jerome Robbins Theater and other spaces.

Ms. Cahan said she wasn’t necessarily seeking another position as she prepared to step down earlier this year from New 42nd Street. But with a previous background in dance as executive director of the Eliot Feld Ballet, she had long been friendly with Mr. Baryshnikov and welcomed the opportunity to work with him and other artists.
“I suddenly realized I was missing that in my life,” Ms. Cahan said, noting that her work at New 42nd Street focused more on theater operations.

During her 29-year tenure at New 42nd Street, Ms. Cahan guided the restoration of several theaters for a variety of uses. In particular, she turned one of the spaces into the New Victory Theater, one of the city’s major presenters of productions for children.

Mr. Baryshnikov said he saw Ms. Cahan as a kindred spirit who could help take his nonprofit center to the next level. In particular, he mentioned such challenges as expanding the center’s board and increasing its endowment from the current $3.5 million to $10 million.

Plus, Mr. Baryshnikov, who is still active as a theater artist, said that he needed an administrator who could guide the organization when he is out of town for performances.

“I will sleep better” with Ms. Cahan in charge, he said.

Ms. Cahan could be very valuable to the center in terms of fundraising because of her many years in the New York cultural world, said Richard Mittenthal, president and CEO of TCC Group, a New York-based consultant to nonprofit organizations.

“She knows everybody in town,” he said.

Ms. Cahan comes to the center in a newly created role.

Georgiana Pickett previously served as the center’s executive director, but stepped down earlier this year. Ms. Pickett couldn’t be reached for comment.

Russell Granet, a veteran arts administrator, recently succeeded Ms. Cahan as president and CEO of New 42nd Street.

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