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Ex-dairy may house cream of the city's cultural crop

By MICHAEL PHILLIPS
Theater Critic

Five for the new year: a building, three people and a musical. Let the noise begin. Let the sound waves bounce every which way. With a certain convention coming to town, we're gonna need all the competing noise — theatrical or otherwise — we can get.

■ **The ReinCarnation Project** — For eight years, architect Wayne Buss had a month-to-month lease on the former Carnation building, which is bordered by J and K streets and 10th and 11th avenues downtown. Now he owns two-thirds of the building. As San Diego chugs toward the new century, the ReinCarnation Project could become a key component in the city's indigenous artistic future.

Already, Buss has the right anchor tenant: The formerly homeless, eternally valuable Sushi Performance and Visual Art, now



Jackie Mari Roberts: *With an L.A. play workshop, a Sushi event and a baby due in a few weeks, the actor-playwright-director is keeping busy.*

THEATER

under the executive directorship of Vicki Wolf. Sushi's set to break in its 3,500-square-foot performance

space this summer. Elsewhere in the ReinCarnation building: Campo Ruse, which was presenter of the recent Juan Pazos poetry, music and theater mixed-grill selection

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"Solo Cafe." The work featured a coffeehouse-of-your-dreams setting by the 740 Group.

Other prospects? InSITE '97, the site-specific visual-arts festival, has its eye on ReinCarnation as a home base. Meantime, Buss may pursue sister projects with El Nopal, the Tijuana cafe and performance space.

The crucial question: Does the city of San Diego know a good urban-redevelopment idea when it sees one? Buss has submitted for funds from the Centre City Development Corp. to incorporate a community center within the former milk factory, alongside the other multipurpose tenants.

It's a great idea. A community center — lodged among various performance spaces and live/work artist facilities, maybe a cafe, maybe a jazz club — folds very, very nicely into the whole impetus behind the downtown Centre City East redevelopment.

With visionaries such as Buss — a fourth-generation San Diegan — along with Wolf, Pazos and others, who knows what could happen?

As Buss told the *Union-Tribune* recently: "It's fitting we're in a former dairy. This project is really a petri dish to grow culture of a different kind, that has nothing to do with acidophilus."