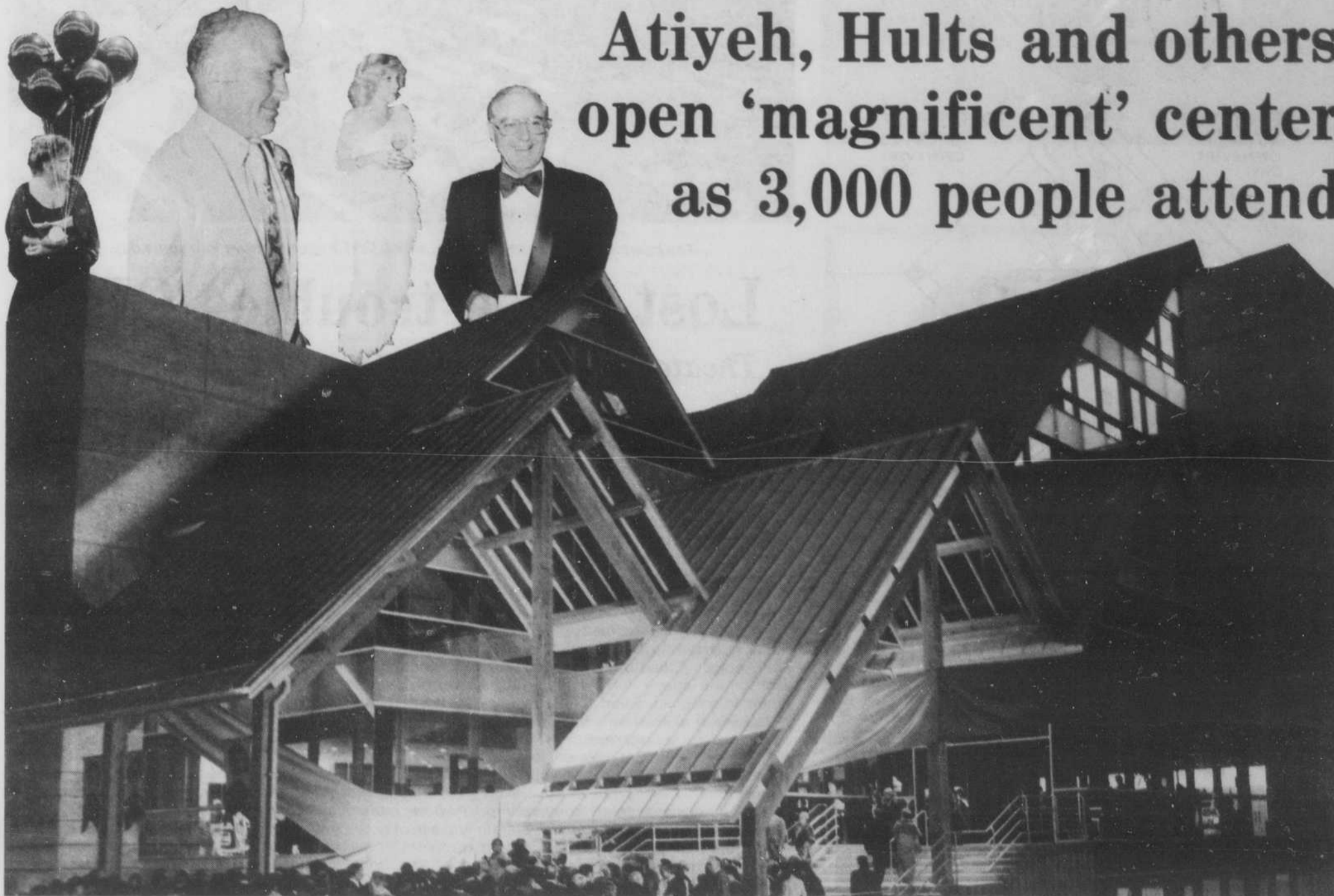


distractions

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Atiyeh, Hults and others open 'magnificent' center as 3,000 people attend



Tophats, tails and gold lame... Eugene dressed up for an evening of glorious revelry honoring the opening of its \$22.3 million world-class Hult Center for the Performing Arts.

Approximately 3,000 people attended the gala event, including a number of art enthusiasts and critics, members of the national and local media and a handful of celebrities.

Patrons enthusiastically explored the interior of the massive cement building, awed by its dramatic warmth and beauty. Eugeneans viewed the center with pride, out-of-towners with appreciation and respect. "This is magnificent," said one Portland man, "something Oregon, especially Eugene, can really be proud of."

Magnificence wasn't confined to the Hult Center's interior, however. A magical evening of parties and entertainment was provided for patrons, beginning with a wine and cheese reception in the Eugene Conference Center. Animated conversations were held within small groups of well-dressed people, while state and local politicians campaigned discreetly among them.

At 7:30 p.m., a large excited crowd gathered around the front steps of the Hult Center for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony. Depression era songs played by the band Tattoo provided an impromptu background for the ceremony. Gov. Vic Atiyeh, Eugene mayor Gus Keller, arts patrons Nils and Jewel Hult, John and Betty Soreng, Carolyn Silva Chambers and their families used gigantic cardboard scissors to cut a large red ribbon tied around the building.

With the building officially opened, Keller shouted "Let's go see what we bought!" and led the way inside. Patrons were greeted at the door by members of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce with a handshake and a "Welcome to the

Hult Center for the Performing Arts."

Concert goers milled about inside, unwilling to leave the cavernous lobby. They examined the fine ceramics on the walls, conversed and anxiously tried to see and be seen.

Reporters had the opportunity to interview Pleasant Hill author Ken Kesey, Emmy-award winning author/composer Mason Williams of Eugene, Gov. Atiyeh and a many of the other prominent persons present. Outside, Tattoo continued to play "protest" rock and 1930s music. One inebriated tuxedo-wearer danced a carefree rhumba to a particularly lively piece.

Fifteen minutes before showtime, the theater doors were opened to reveal what had thus far been concealed from the public. Especially eye-catching were the basket-weave walls and ceiling of the 2,531-seat Silva Concert Hall and the warm, dark colors of the 515-seat Soreng Theatre.

The Silva Concert Hall, subject of so much media attention, was designed to provide high-quality acoustics in an attractive setting. Many of its features serve both purposes, including varied surfaces within the hall which add texture and richness to its appearance and the horseshoe-shaped balconies which provide the audience a good view from anywhere in the hall. A complicated computerized audio system is capable of providing an acoustically perfect performance for any kind of music.

The Eugene Symphony formally inaugurated the hall with an original piece by Portland composer Thomas Svoboda, the stirring "Eugene Overture," written especially for the occasion. The composer viewed the performance from his seat in the balcony.

Highlighting the two-hour program was the outstanding performance of mezzo-soprano Ma-

rilyn Horne, who captivated the audience with a variety of serious and light pieces.

Following her inauguration of the hall, Horne praised the concert hall and later inaugurated the backstage wall as well, writing "Whoopie!! I got to be here on the 'Big Night!' Thanks and love, Marilyn Horne."

Master of Ceremonies, David Ogden Stiers, recited Shakespeare soliloquies, with the explanation that it would be "inconceivable" the evening should end without music of another sort. Stiers, who graduated from North Eugene High School in 1960 and attended the University for two terms, is best known for his role in M*A*S*H as Major Charles Emerson Winchester — a role written exclusively for him.

Howard Hesseman, Dr. Johnny Fever on "WKRP in Cincinnati" and himself a homegrown Salem boy, was the master of ceremonies for the Soreng Theatre's debut performance, the "Riverboat Ragtime Revue," a foot-stomping rendition of a Gay '90s riverboat show. Despite such technical difficulties as a malfunctioning sound system and the sale of tickets for a nonexistent row I, the revue was exciting and generally well received.

Following the shows, nearly 500 people attended a catered champagne supper with performers and dignitaries in the Eugene Conference Center.

The Hult Center's grand opening was, indeed, a night to remember. Stated simply by a visitor from Scottsdale, Ariz., it was "Extraordinary!"

*Story by Lisa Laurs
Photos by Mark Pynes
and Jonathan Siegle*