

Liberty Theater celebrates 90 and 10

The Liberty Theater is 90. The theater opened in April 1925. Its construction was a major element in downtown Astoria's rebuilding following the great fire of Dec. 8, 1922.

Liberty Restoration Inc., will mark this anniversary with a day of open houses next Saturday, Jan. 24. That night will be a dinner and concert.

Cities are defined by their cultural assets. Here are my nominations for the three most significant historical-cultural features of Astoria. My answer would be 1. the city's watershed — a purchase of great foresight in 1914, with expansion in the 1950s. 2. the Astoria Column and 3. the Liberty Theater.

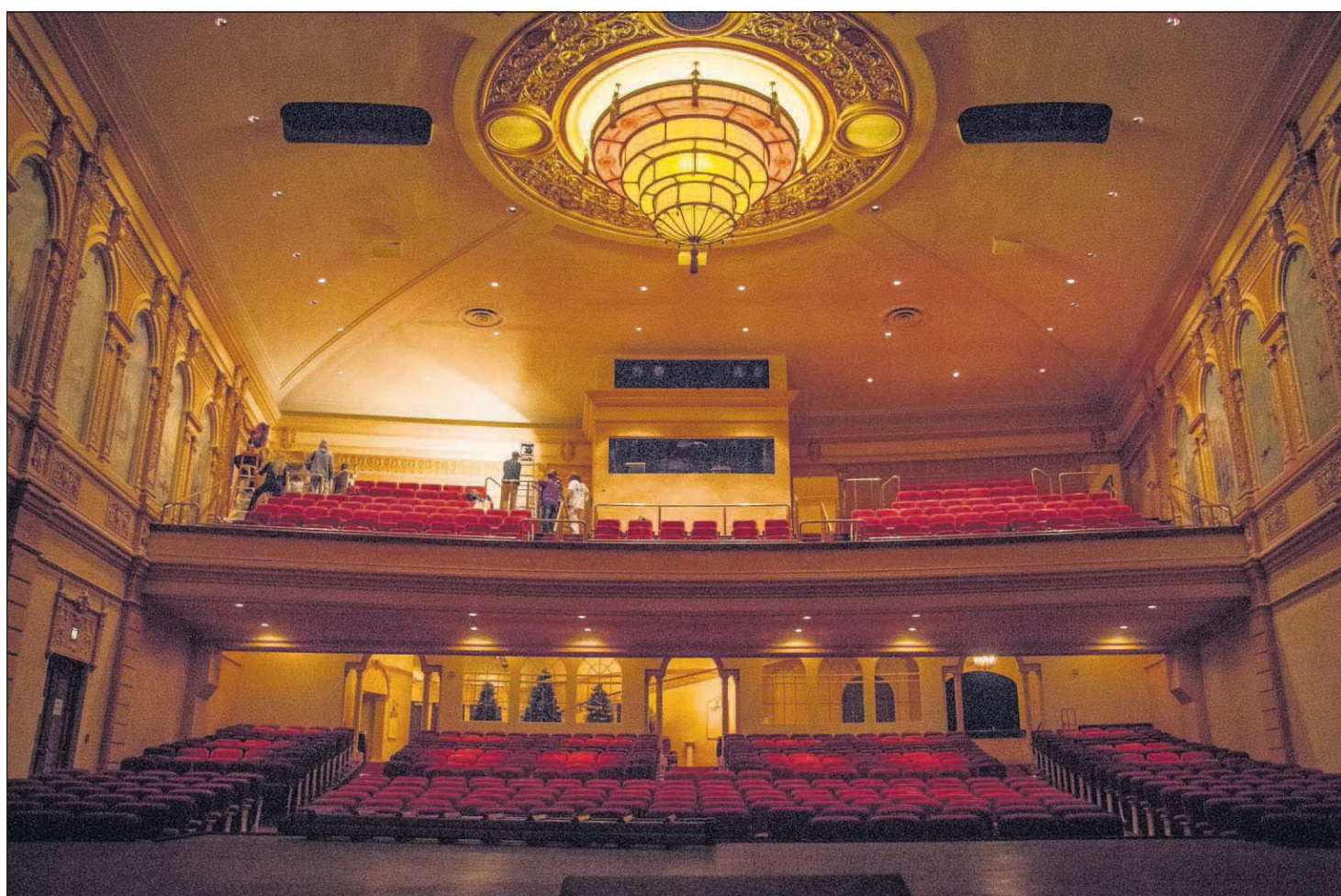
From its opening until the advent of television, the Liberty was a social hub. If you ask the generations that graduated from Astoria High School in the 1940s onward, you will hear their Liberty Theater stories. Some revolve around the contests that kids entered during Saturday matinees. Others are about a first date or a first kiss. Bill Wyatt's story is that his mother went into labor with him while seeing a movie at the Liberty.

When people see a finished product, they soon forget how much trouble and money went into creating it. In a recent interview this newspaper, Willis Van Dusen said this about the impact of the theater's restoration: "It is beautiful. But the more important point is what it would be if we hadn't purchased and restored it." Indeed. It would be the kind of dead zone you see in many small towns and cities.

The biggest single accomplishment was making the Liberty a public, nonprofit property — not a tax write-off of an absentee landlord.

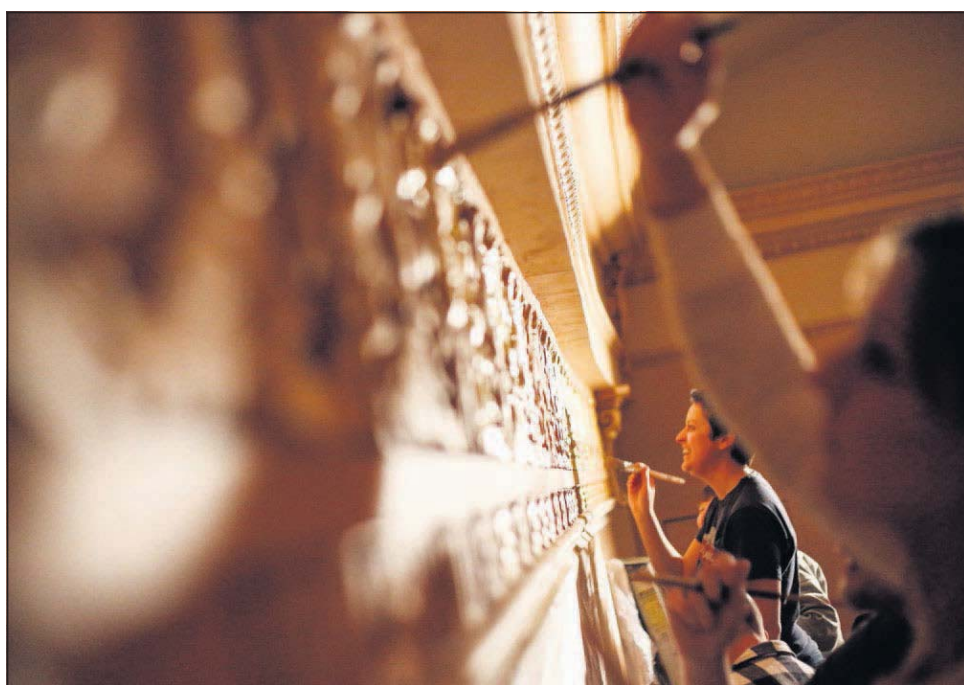
The drive to acquire and restore the Liberty began in about 1992 with a group that called itself the Theater Committee. We were casting about for new theater space.

From the period when we struggled to complete the purchase I have two abiding memories. The moment when Edith Henningsgaard Miller and Marge Bloomfield showed great courage. The moment when Mayor Van Dusen urged



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Students from Clatsop County Community College Historic Preservation and Restoration program gild medallions on the walls of the Liberty Theater. The students were guided by Lucien Swerdloff, John Goodenberger, Don Herlin and Jonathon Pierce.



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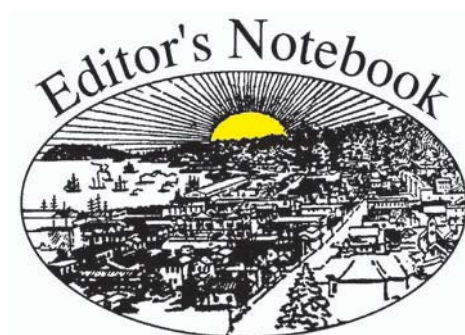
Brenna Chase, a student at Clatsop County Community College, works with other students to gild medallions in the balcony level of the Liberty Theater.

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the committee to ask for an urban renewal grant to complete the purchase.

A defining moment of the theater's restoration occurred when the

Portland architect Skip Stanaway stepped into the lobby. "I can't believe it," he said. "It's all here." The fact that no one had stripped the theater of its fixtures was a huge asset. So were the street-level rental



properties that came with it.

Here are two more special moments. To restore the ornamental plaster work, Liberty Restoration Inc., hired a Vancouver-based group who used Romanian artisans. Those Romanian masons fell in love with the theater. They made five replicas of the medallions one sees in the theater and placed them in the new McTavish Room.

My second memory is of Michael Foster gilding plaster work throughout the theater and lobby. Michael did not like working on a scaffold, so we masked the fact by shielding him.

On opening night 10 years ago, our board of directors walked down the aisles to the front of the theater. As we took that walk through the newly restored space, I asked Cheri Folk: "Can you believe it?"

—S.A.F.

The next giant protest should be led by Arabs and Muslims

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
New York Times News Service

President Barack Obama was criticized for failing to attend, or send a proper surrogate to, the giant anti-terrorism march in Paris Sunday. That criticism was right.

But it is typical of American politics today that we focus on this and not what would have really made the world feel the jihadist threat was finally being seriously confronted. And that would not be a march that our president helps to lead, but one in which he's not involved at all. That would be a million-person march against the jihadists across the Arab-Muslim world, organized by Arabs and Muslims for Arabs and Muslims, without anyone in the West asking for it — not just because of what happened in Paris, but because of the scores of Muslims recently murdered by jihadists in Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria and Syria.

Abdul Rahman al-Rashed, one of the most respected Arab journalists, wrote Monday in his column in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat: "Protests against the recent terrorist attacks in

France should have been held in Muslim capitals, rather than Paris, because, in this case, it is Muslims who are involved in this crisis and stand accused. ... The story of extremism begins in Muslim societies, and it is with their support and silence that extremism has grown into terrorism that is harming people. It is of no value that the French people, who are the victims here, take to the streets. ... What is required here is for Muslim communities to disown the Paris crime and Islamic extremism in general." (Translation by Memri.org.)

The truth is there is a huge amount of ambivalence toward this whole jihadist phenomenon — more than any of us would like to believe — in the Arab-Muslim world, Europe and America. This ambivalence starts in the Muslim community, where there is a deep cleavage over what constitutes authentic Islam today. We fool ourselves when we tell Muslims what "real Islam" is. Because Islam has no Vatican, no single source of religious authority, there are many Islams today. The puritanical Wahhabi/Salafi/jihadist



Thomas L. Friedman

strain is one of them, and it has more support than we want to believe.

Ambivalence runs through Europe today on the question of what a country should demand of new Muslim immigrants by way of adopting its values. Is Stratfor's George Friedman right when he argues that Europeans adopted multiculturalism precisely because they didn't really want to absorb their Muslim immigrants, and many of those Muslim immigrants, who went to Europe to find a job, not a new identity, didn't want to be absorbed? If so, that spells trouble.

Ambivalence runs through Washington's ties with Saudi Arabia. Ever since jihadists took over Islam's holiest shrine in Mecca in 1979, proclaiming that Saudi Arabia's rulers were not pious enough, Saudi Arabia has redoubled its commitment to Wahhabi or Salafist Islam — the most puritanical, anti-pluralistic and anti-women version of that faith. This Saudi right turn — combined with oil revenues used to build Wahhabi-inspired mosques, websites and madrassas across the Muslim world — has

tilted the entire Sunni community to the right. Look at a picture of female graduates of Cairo University in 1950. Few are wearing veils. Look at them today. Many are wearing veils. The open, soft, embracing Islam that defined Egypt for centuries — pray five times a day but wash it down with a beer at night — has been hardened by this Wahhabi wind from Arabia.

But U.S. presidents never confront Saudi Arabia about this because of our oil addiction. As I've said, addicts never tell the truth to their pushers. The Saudi government opposes the jihadists. Unfortunately, though, it's a very short step from Wahhabi Islam to the violent jihadism practiced by the Islamic State. The French terrorists were born in France but were marinated in Wahhabi-Salafi thought through the Web and local mosques — not Voltaire.

Also, the other civil war in Islam — between Sunnis and Shiites — has led many mainstream Sunni charities, mosques and regimes to support jihadist groups because they're ferocious fighters against Shiites. Finally — yet more ambivalence — for

60 years there was a tacit alliance between Arab dictators and their Sunni religious clergy. The regimes funded these uninspired Muslim clerics, and these clergy blessed the uninspired dictators — and both stifled the emergence of any authentic, inspired, reformist Islam that could take on Wahhabism-Salafism, even though many Muslims wanted it. An authentic reformation requires a free space in the Arab-Muslim world.

"Muslims need to 'upgrade their software,' which is programmed mainly by our schools, television and mosques — especially small mosques that trade in what is forbidden," Egyptian intellectual Mamoun Fandy wrote in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat.

(Also translated by Memri.org.) "There is no choice but to dismantle this system and rebuild it in a way that is compatible with human culture and values."

In short, jihadist zeal is easy to condemn, but will require multiple revolutions to stem — revolutions that will require a lot of people in the Arab-Muslim world and West to shed their ambivalence and stop playing double games.

Open forum

Seaside solution

A suggestion for the expansion of the Seaside Civic & Convention Center:

Build a multistory parking garage on the adjacent center parking lot, similar to the nearby one at the timeshare property, ex-

cept that the ground floor would be a large convention meeting space room. Leave room at ground level for recreational ve-

hicles, buses, etc. Provide a second-story walkover access from the main building, as well as a street level entrance.

Leave the river alone.

ROBERT KRONING
Seaside



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