

Theater from 1A

"This was the cast coming to us and saying they wanted to do this. They wanted to be the first happening at the theater. The theater isn't going to be finished when it happens," said Rosemary.

She and David are working with a contractor to finalize the rest of the building's remodel. The Laurias converted the former Christian Science Reading Room from a small church into a theater complete with a lobby, new bathrooms and ADA-accessible ramps.

"We want to honor the feeling of the cast and its feeling of giving," David said. "Doing this show with this cast has been such an awesome experience. To do it again for another week was too irresistible."

The Laurias, Burnett, Dave Hansen and Jason Wood teamed up to make this early show possible. The five were the production team for "Putnam" last June, along with "Chicago" in November.

Wood said, "It's the five of us. When we first got together for 'Putnam,' it just clicked. It sparked, it was like magic, things happened."

Because of the space — CAT has a small stage and seats 72 people — the cast of the musical will perform a concert version of the play.

"It's the same length, but

with less staging," Wood said. "Usually, when you see a musical in concert, it is presented with actors in front of music stands. We're kind of doing things this way, but we aren't going to be satisfied just staying behind those music stands."

Last summer's performance saw actors Tamara Cole, Matt Korso, Jesse Reeves, Erin Reinke, Hilary Roach, Elizabeth Rose, Jacob Ternyik and Wood running all over a stage at the Florence Events Center during "Pandemonium."

"We have a couple of little surprises tucked up our sleeves," Wood said.

Only Leah Goodwin will not be returning for her role; David will fill in for her character.

CAT will have a grand opening later in the spring, possibly with a variety show.

"We really want CAT to be a multipurpose venue. Not only will we put on our own plays, but other people may want to rent space to put on their plays, musicals and student showcases," Rosemary said.

CAT will add variety to the other entertainment spaces available in Florence.

"It makes sense if you don't need a huge space," David said. "We see this as filling a niche for a smaller venue."

The Laurias also hope to restart Florence Repertory

Theater Company, and plan to do business as Florence Actors Theater, meaning that any of their shows put on in the space could come to be known as FAT CAT.

"We're going to fulfill the name 'class act' and really do powerful performances," David said.

Several members of the production team mentioned the word "edgy" in terms of future shows, along with more dramatic productions, a night of one-act plays, showcases for student playwrights and shows that might not have been offered on the coast before.

"Mostly it is a new and fabulous place to put a new and fabulous theater, some of which hasn't been done in this town before. It will be different," Wood said. "They're not copy-cattin anyone. It's really smart that they're giving the Florence audiences some credit. ... I think if a show is enjoyable, it's enjoyable. If it's good, it's good. Those are the shows we want."

"Everything produced there will be high production value, high quality, well rehearsed and well presented," David said.

CAT has capabilities for tech support, lighting, sound, projection and streaming via Wi-Fi. Small groups might not need microphones with the building's acoustics.

Burnett said, "It would be a great place for experimental theater and for people up and down the coast who want to debut their plays."

Wood hopes that people will be able to hold classes, workshops and recitals in the space as well.

The production team hopes to announce the first shows of a new season at the performance of "25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee."

"We have stuff in the works already. We're not wasting any time," Wood said.

"It's a little overwhelming to think about," Rosemary said. "I'm still trying to get the front door painted."

Vision from 1A

The Highway 101 Streetscape project was presented by David Dougherty, a landscape architect and urban designer and a subconsultant for Murray, Smith and Associates Civil Engineering (MSA).

"Our scope of work is the public realm along the highway, the right of way on Highway 101," Dougherty said.

He and other designers are working with FURA and Oregon Department of Transportation to improve aspects of the highway as it is repaved in the coming years.

According to Dougherty, MSA created designs to improve safety, beautify streets, provide better pedestrian access, delineate travel and bicycle lanes and add in trees, native wildlife and even bio-swales to treat grey water along the highway.

MSA targeted properties around Maple, Nopal and Quince streets as prime targets because they are "gateways" into Old Town.

"We hope to beautify and activate the streets and complement the Leland Group with private development and supporting life along the street," Dougherty said.

He presented initial design plans of the gateway locations featuring open space, benches and "urban expression" elements that could factor in features of the Siuslaw River Bridge or Old Town architecture.

Some of the designs show archways at the entrance to Maple Street on Highway 101 or Quince Street on Highway 126. They also could include "fluid ebb and flow" designs for pavement and landscape in pedestrian areas.

Engineers propose open spaces around these streets by reclaiming public property from adjacent private properties and straightening intersections to 90 degrees.

"By aligning the streets into a more 90 degree connection to the highway, it gives us bonus space for outdoor activity, plazas and art. We think this is an exciting opportunity," Dougherty said.

MSA referenced the Urban Renewal Agency and the city's recent work in assessing the highway, along with past efforts to revitalize the zone.

Chris Zahas, president of Leland Consulting Group, spoke about FURA's economic strategy in the Urban Renewal District, 341 acres including Old Town and the Highway 101 corridor from the Siuslaw River Bridge to Highway 126.

FURA retained Leland Consulting Group in 2015 to develop an economic opportunities strategy and to identify key development sites.

"We work in communities of all sizes and we usually see half the turnout in cities twice as big," Zahas said. "It's a testament to your commitment to your city and what you see as the potential for Florence."

In Leland Consulting Group's first phase of planning with the Urban Renewal Agency, consultants assessed

the city in stakeholder meetings and a community-wide survey. Zahas presented those findings in a market analysis to the agency at the end of November.

"We looked at Florence's assets and strengths we can play off toward the goal of economic opportunity and development in the Urban Renewal District and the Old Town area. Tonight, we are translating those ideas into opportunities," Zahas said.

The ideas involved design plans and ways to "create neighborhood in community" at strategic zones in the district by looking at retail, residences and civic spaces.

The focus area was Old Town, Florence's downtown area that is essentially the heart of the community.

"Old Town is the place people come to, where you take your family from out of town and where business leaders look first," Zahas said.

"Because it is your front door, a downtown really is an essential economic development tool for the entire community."

The four targeted areas include the Lotus Restaurant and parking lot, the Port of Siuslaw Boardwalk and parking lot, public and private properties along Maple and Nopal streets and the vacant site across from the Florence Events Center on Quince Street.

The consulting group wants to focus on housing, employment and other revitalization goals by looking at businesses, culture, Siuslaw Public Library, Florence City Hall, parks, public art and open spaces.

Zahas said the consultants are looking at priorities for the city, ways to engage with the private development community and marketing and regulatory tools to work in partnership.

"You have a compelling story to be told. We're looking at additional ways to tell it," he said.

Representatives from Myhre Group Architects, MSA and Leland Consulting Group were able to show design ideas of multi-use spaces, open air districts and Old Town aesthetics before and after the presentations.

"This community is so supportive of the future vision that is being presented here. Its really nice to see such an active, well-informed community," Dougherty said. "The feedback we've been receiving has been excellent with things we may not have thought about. You live here, you are citizens and this is your realm."


Both MSA and Leland Consulting Group met with FURA on Feb. 24 to discuss outcomes and explore next steps.

Zahas said, "In the next month or two, we will be developing implementation strategies to how to make this happen. Pictures and ideas are great, but we want to attract that investment to make these ideas a reality."

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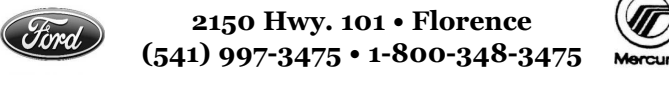
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