

Cottage Theatre begins construction on major remodeling project

Cottage Theatre is beginning construction on its ACT III remodeling project, an effort that has been 10 years in the making. The remodel will add 50 seats to the theatre's auditorium and make a variety of safety and technical upgrades to enhance audience and participant enjoyment at the 39-year-old community theatre. Design for the project is being handled by GMA Architects of Eugene, and Ordell Construction will be serving as the general contractor. "This project was conceived following years of capacity crowds and multiple sold-out performances," said Cottage Theatre Executive Director Susan Goes. "At the same time, our old seats had passed the end of their useful lifespan and some chronically-underfunded portions of our budget provided a strong incentive to look for a way to grow revenues. Adding more seats emerged as the most practical way to accomplish this." To make room for 50 more

audience members, the theatre will "re-rake" the auditorium by adding concrete on top of the existing levels to make a steeper slope. The far side seating sections will be eliminated and more rows added to the center three sections. "One of the things we're most excited about is the improved view from every seat post-remodel," said Goes. "The lobby also will be updated, with new, larger bathrooms added, along with a community room that can host pre- and post-show receptions, classes, and private meetings." Safety and accessibility improvements to the facility include the addition of a fire sprinkler system (which was not required by code when the building was constructed in 1998), aisle lighting, additional ADA seating, and a Hearing Loop Assistive Listening System. The latter will greatly improve the theatre experience for all patrons with telecoil-equipped hearing aids.

Longtime Cottage Theatre volunteer Board Treasurer Mark Allen has led the fundraising effort for the \$2.4MM ACT III project. "We are so excited to finally begin construction on this project," said Allen. "This moment has been a long time in coming. We had originally hoped to complete what was to have been a \$1.5 million project in 2019, but an unexpected construction cost increase caused us to delay the project, so we had additional time to raise more money. We are so very grateful to the hundreds of theatre patrons who have stepped forward to support this project, by sponsoring one of our new seats or making an even more substantial contribution." The largest single source of support for Cottage Theatre's remodel comes from individual donations, a fact which helped CT attract additional foundation and government support. Major funders include the State of Oregon, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, Ford Family Foundation, Woodard Family Foundation, Fred W. Fields Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation, Faye and Lucille Stewart Foundation, Sunderland Foundation, and the Oregon Cultural Trust.

Construction on the remodel is expected to continue through the summer. Assuming construction occurs on schedule and COVID guidelines permit, Cottage Theatre hopes to resume performances in October with their long-postponed production of Mamma Mia.

"We cannot wait to welcome everyone back to the theatre!" said Allen. Now in its 39th year, Cottage Theatre has grown tremendously since humble 1982 beginnings under a parachute on the lawn of Cottage Grove's Village Green. After operating out of a small storefront for many years, the theatre's current facility was built in 1998 (ACT I). A Rehearsal Hall was added in 2006 (ACT II). Cottage Theatre normally produces plays and musicals year-round, typically presenting 80 performances annually; the theatre has been closed since March 2020 due to COVID restrictions. The theatre also offers children's theatre camps and partners with Cottage Grove High School to produce the annual Rhythm & Blues Revue each February.

A member of the American Association of Community Theatre (AACT), Cottage Theatre was one of six theatres in the nation selected to produce a world premiere in the AACT 2018 NewPlayFest. Cottage Theatre will share construction updates on its website at www.cottagetheatre.org.

"At this point, we have raised about 95 percent of what we need," Goes said. "But we are far enough along with our fundraising that we are confident we can complete construction this year."



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