

Downtown Akron pedestrians are reminded of the renovation going on inside the Civic Theatre.



KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal

the CURTAIN rises on the New CIVIC

\$22.6 million restoration returns playhouse to its 1929 splendor

By Kerry Clawson
Beacon Journal staff writer

On April 20, 1929, the sun rose and set for the first time in the lush Moorish garden of Akron Loew's Theatre, ushering in a new era of the talkies as the golden age of movie palaces and vaudeville was fading.

The effect was created by lights that shone through port-holes on each side of the theater projection booth. The talking picture was *The Voice of the People*, and 10,000 celebrated the unveiling of the glorious new theater.

Working folks were awed by the splendor of architect John Eberson's new \$2 million atmospheric theater, which re-created the heavens with twinkling stars and clouds floating across its blue domed ceiling.

Those were the days when lines snaked down Main Street and around to Bowers Street as patrons waited to get into the theater. No one could have imagined that this grand movie house, the jewel of Main Street, would grow increasingly drab over the decades and would struggle to stay open.

After more than 30 years of disrepair, a new dawn will rise on the Civic Theatre on Nov. 5 when the 1929 theater reopens to the public after a \$22.6 million renovation and restoration. The extensive, 16-month project has brought the historic theater back to its original glory and the house up to modern performance and patron standards.

The theater's decorative plaster facade has been restored to

its vibrant 1929 palette, thanks to the work of EverGreene Painting Studios of New York. Once again, Eberson's bright polychromatic ornamentation pops out from the restored proscenium arch as well as throughout the auditorium, interior lobbies and grand staircase.

Greatly improved lighting finally calls attention to the elaborately painted decorative plaster ceiling below the balcony, which one wouldn't have looked up at before.

Now, guests may pass under a vibrant green arbor in the promenade — a marked contrast to the previous off-white ceiling. The paint restoration revealed that the original ceiling was made up of individual green plaster leaves, covered up over time and



Construction worker Gary Mesko puts bolts in the new seats in the auditorium of the Civic Theatre.

forgotten.

With more than 70 years of grime and soot from the rubber industry cleaned away, other details such as orange and teal tiling under decorative windows in the auditorium are noticeable for the first time in many years.

Lighter and brighter is a key theme of this renovation project. Part of the theater's new dazzle is because of an increase in candle power from 1.4 to 4.8 throughout, including new fixtures plus originals that have been rebuilt to handle brighter bulbs.

Gold filigree Dixie cup holders in the lobbies now serve as lighting sconces. Lighting fixtures in the upstairs promenade glisten, including circular ones with a candle motif that used to

fade into the decor.

Every accessory in the theater auditorium and inner lobbies, many purchased by Eberson in Europe, has been refurbished. They range from ornately hand-carved furniture, wall hangings and mirrors to vines and statuary.

Old water fountains also have been replaced, and zodiac signs in the decorative tiling above them now gleam.

Loretta, the stuffed parrot who used to grace an alcove overlooking the grand lobby, probably won't be back on her perch. It's impossible to refurbish a real bird, said director Dan Dahl. But he's looking into having live parrots visit for the theater's grand opening.

The parrot theme, a symbol of good luck, extends to the new purple-patterned carpet on the mezzanine and grand staircase. New burgundy carpet with a floral theme now covers the main floor promenade and auditorium.

Inside the theater, 98 fiber-optic stars glow more brightly in the freshly painted, deep blue dome ceiling, replacing the individual 7½-watt bulbs that used to burn out all too often.

The signature Kliegl Brothers cloud machine has been retrofitted, so the clouds now move more dramatically across the domed sky. The goal was to make the clouds brighter so audiences could better enjoy their effect.

For patrons taking in these heavenly views, the lower level seats have been refurbished and those in the balcony have been

cleaned.

For the first time in many years, folks also may see the theater's original fire curtain, a dramatic depiction of the voyage of the *Nina*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria*. That too, has been refurbished.

Band-Aid repairs

The theater, which had never undergone a major renovation, had been held together with Band-Aids for several decades, with most repairs done on an emergency basis. It was plagued by a failing infrastructure, inadequate lobby space and restrooms, and a stage too small to accommodate most touring productions.

In 1982, a \$1.2 million renovation updated air conditioning, heating and emergency lighting.

In the current restoration, electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems have been replaced, as have the roof and exterior masonry. Other improvements include an expanded stage to allow for a greater variety of shows, a new mezzanine concession area, and a northern addition with two stories of restrooms, tripling their capacity.

The old is tied into the new in the spacious new women's restrooms, which feature colorful tasseled and bejeweled pendant lamps that used to hang under the theater balcony.

Lobby space also has increased with the new addition and new concession area.

Folks may remember the former women's restrooms on the mezzanine level, which included a large outer salon with couches and mirrors. That area has been renovated to create a concession area and reception room, with the newly painted ceiling in the reception room repeating the theater's motif of floating clouds.

The stage is larger, thanks to a bustle added to the back of the building and a new fly system for scenery. The stage also boasts a new floor and a new stage door.

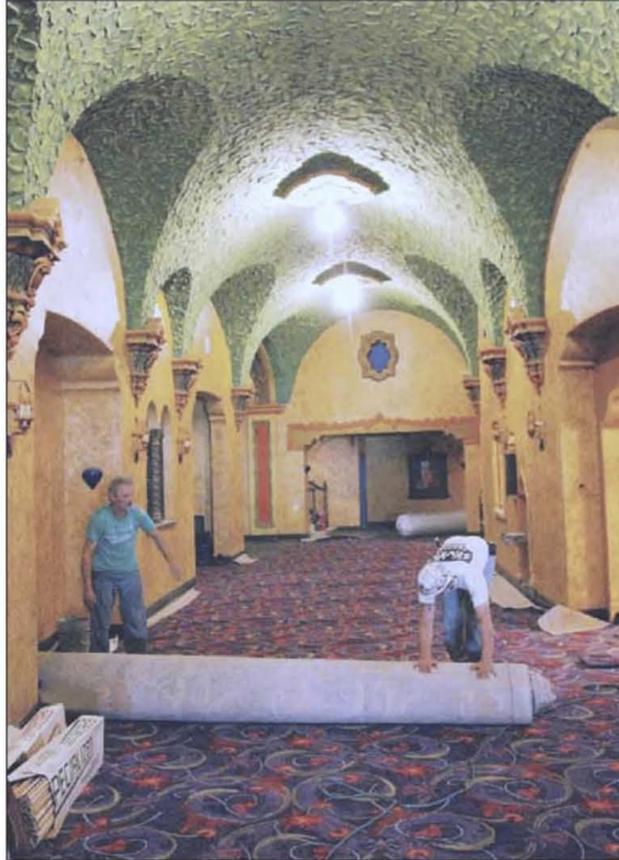
A loading dock also will make unloading sets much easier, allowing for two trucks instead of one. A freight elevator will make it easier to transport costumes to and from the basement, which boasts updated facilities for performers. The theater now has a public entrance in the northern addition on Bowers Street, close to surface and garage parking and accented by landscaping.

The addition also has a handicapped entrance on Bowers Street that's easily accessible to a new elevator.

All patrons may enter the theater through the Bowers Street entrance. Those without tickets will be escorted through the theater to the arcade box office.

Checked history

The theater almost didn't make it to this point. By the early 1960s, Loew's Theatre's interior was losing its luster and the theater was facing financial difficulty. A number of ornate fixtures disappeared or were sold to raise



Dan Gangloff (right) and another construction worker prepare to install carpeting in the promenade of the Akron Civic Theatre.

money.

The darkest times began in 1964, when Loew's Inc. sold the property. Buyer Karam Joseph, a former Loew's user, planned to raze the theater to build a parking lot.

"I didn't want it to be a parking lot, which they (civic leaders) were talking about," Belfance said. "It was very difficult at that time because historical preservation wasn't the 'in' thing."

Belfance, whose earlier career included working as a producer and director in New York, launched a successful Broadway subscription series in the late '60s. He'd wait until bus and truck companies had already booked shows in Erie, Pa., and Columbus, then book the same tour for half the price.

In the 1980s, manager Patti Eddy was known to work there

Arts Hall, built in 1973, added to the hard times.

According to former manager Bob Belfance, who ran the theater from 1967-1969, the threat of closing was always imminent.

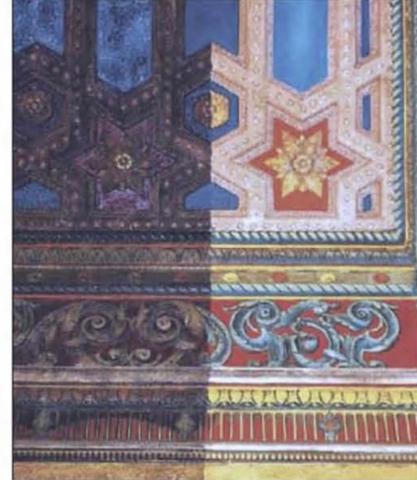
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The ceiling in the Akron Civic Theatre Auditorium features clouds generated by a cloud machine and "stars" created by a fiber-optic lighting system.



There is a sharp division between the unrenovated left part of the Civic Theatre entrance hall and the redone part back in July.

around the clock, sleeping on a cot at the theater in her efforts to keep the place afloat. She and board member Ron Syroid came up with creative programming to get people in the door.

They included a *Three Stooges* pie-throwing contest on Main Street, a *Rocky and Bullwinkle* festival, and a "Spanky Watch" for that lovable Little Rascal Spanky McFarland, who arrived for the gig hours late in an April blizzard.

The precarious outlook for the Civic Theatre improved greatly in 1997 when the theater came under the management of the University of Akron, with Dahl serving as director of both E.J. Thomas and the Civic. Under his leadership, talk turned from whether the theater should be knocked down to whether it should be saved at its current site or moved to a downtown cultural district.

When plans for the cultural district were dropped, preservation and restoration became the future for the Civic.

Fund-raising to pay for the \$22.6 million Phase I continues even as the theater reopens, with \$3.4 million yet to be raised.

Patrons entering the theater's grand lobby now will see a dramatic line from floor to ceiling, delineating where the painting restoration has left off.

The line between the glistening new and the tired old paint should serve as a constant reminder that although the Civic's restored auditorium is dazzling, change for this theater that has faced such hard times in its motley past.

Organizer Mary Ann Jackson calls the sold-out party a "champagne problem," a welcome change for this theater that has faced such hard times in its motley past.

though development director Howard Parr is projecting it to begin three to five years from now.

With the reopening, the theater will host mainly live performances, including comedian Tim Conway on Nov. 9. The season also includes local performance groups, smaller touring productions such as *Sesame Street Live* and *Stomp*, and concerts with acts such as Yes and Jewel. The Civic also will continue the tradition of showing movies.

Although the stage has been expanded, it's still not able to house large Broadway musicals. Those shows will continue at E.J. Thomas, which Dahl manages jointly with the Civic. The Civic may present smaller Broadway shows.

Folks will get their first chance to see the Civic in its restored beauty Nov. 5, with *Barage*, which features dueling violins and choreography, followed by musician Ricky Skaggs in the Kent State Folk Festival Nov. 7 and the movie *Roman Holiday* Nov. 8.

Those who have clung to the long effort to keep this grand lady from going dark and labored to restore it will have much to celebrate at the sold-out gala reopening preceding Conway's Nov. 9 performance.

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A construction worker installs foam padding on the new stage at the Civic Theatre. The stage was expanded during the renovation.

Players get more space

Bigger stage, dressing areas, technical upgrades increase theater's possibilities for performances

By Elaine Guregian
Beacon Journal music and dance writer

Performers are getting a bigger, brighter space in the renovated Civic Theatre.

More room onstage and behind it, along with vastly improved places to dress for performances, will make the Civic a whole lot more pleasant, said a number of local directors whose groups will return to the Civic this season.

In the auditorium, where fiber-optic lights twinkle in the newly pristine Mediterranean-blue sky, the freshly scrubbed surroundings seem warmer and more inviting. Ohio Ballet's artistic director Jeffrey Graham Hughes, said he was amazed at how cleaning and repainting the vivid colors and beefing up the lighting in the auditorium had improved the ambience.

"The dancers looking out from the stage are going to feel like they're in the theater. Before, (the audience) seemed so far away," he said.

"People felt the Civic was cavernous, and I think that will no longer be the case," he added.

While the auditorium feels cozier, the usable performance area is now 12 feet deeper. This will make logistics easier for Tucker Jolly's much-loved *TubaChristmas*, among other things.

With nearly 500 players participating in recent years, it has been necessary to turn away potential spectators from some *TubaChristmas* shows. The stage was so crowded that some performers had to take seats in the audience. Jolly may now be able to seat as many as 100 more players onstage, freeing up places for more listeners to sit. Not only that, but having more of the players seated together should help create a more cohesive performance, Jolly said.

For dancers, the addition of a crossover space backstage will eliminate a lot of effort that the audience never saw. "It was hysterical. We had to go down the stairs, under the stage and back up the other side," said Mia Klinger-Welch, artistic director of the Cuyahoga Valley Youth Ballet. Now a hallway in back of the stage allows dancers to move quickly from one side to the other without being seen.

Scott Wilson, a partner at Wilson Butler Lodge Inc., the Boston architecture firm hired for the restoration, said space was gained by getting rid of clutter that had been stored onstage because there was no other place for it.

Performers have also gained room through the removal of the large pin rail that was stage right and anchored the old system of hemp lines and sandbags. The new system of steel cables and counterweights takes much less space.

Klinger-Welch and Christine Meneer, artistic director of Children's Ballet Theatre, both conformed to a soft spot for the old method of hoisting and hanging scenery and lights. But all the directors agree that the performers gained valuable space. "I want my dancers to move and to show their power onstage," Klinger-Welch said.

There used to be only 26 batons to fly scenery or lighting. Now that there are 85, a door has opened to much more complex effects.

Stomp! and *Sesame Street Live* are two shows that couldn't be presented at the theater before it was renovated, but space and technical requirements shouldn't be a limiting factor anymore. Not only out-of-town touring performers reap the benefits of the upgrades, Meneer

said Children's Ballet Theatre's 10th anniversary shows of *The Nutcracker* will reflect the more sophisticated technical possibilities.

Some invisible changes will help performers, too. For dancers, maintaining a comfortable temperature is essential. The renovation of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system should make the climate more comfortable for all performers. The stage floor is improved, too. Hughes, who praises the new foam flooring system as "state of the art," said it will provide a nice cushion but with the firmness and resistance dancers need for jumping.

The new loading dock, with space for two trucks instead of one, will make it easier, faster and thus cheaper to unload sets for shows.

'Actors' Alley'

Echoing a common sentiment, Meneer said: "I'm so glad they saved that theater. There's so much history there."

One piece of that history is a small room just behind the curtain, stage left. Officially, it was a quick change room, but performers also had a tradition of signing the wall. A giant speaker now takes up much of the wall space, but many names around it remain.

Meneer, who performed in the theater as a teen-age member of the Ohio Chamber Ballet, confessed to a sentimental attachment to the two tiny basement restrooms for performers, where, as she put it, "You had to keep your knees up (to keep the door closed) and stuff toilet paper in the keyhole, or people would catch (a glimpse of) you as they were walking by."

Performers won't have to get a friend to stand guard outside the door anymore. Instead of two restrooms, there are four toilet/shower combinations — all with working doors, no less. The dark warren of basement rooms has been replaced by a star dressing room, two principal dressing rooms that seat six people each, and two chorus dressing rooms that can seat 14 and 18 people, respectively, at individually lighted counter spaces along the wall. Having two new group dressing rooms will make it easier to keep track of all the student dancers, Klinger-Welch said.

When performers using the star or principal dressing rooms step outside their rooms, natural light floods in the windows, and track lights (with artwork to come later) illuminate this hallway nicknamed "Actors' Alley." If the performers want fresh air, they can take a few steps to the balcony overlooking the Ohio & Erie Canal and the city park that's under construction next door.

That's not all that's new downstairs. A large conference room has been built, and a laundry room outfitted with washers and dryers has been added, mostly for the convenience of touring companies. "The big shows, like Broadway shows . . . there are union rules. And you need to have those amenities if you want to go after quality shows," said Dan Dahl, executive director of the Civic Theatre and E.J. Thomas Hall.

It seems the only inhabitants that the planners of this ambitious project didn't take into consideration were the fabled Civic ghosts. Let's hope they, too, like their new digs.

Elaine Guregian is the Beacon Journal's music critic. She can be reached at 330-996-3574 or eguregian@thebeaconjournal.com.

Clouds drift high in Civic sky

Lighting engineer's retrofit of machines uses modern techniques to improve brightness, efficiency

By Kerry Clawson
Beacon Journal staff writer

Lighting engineer John Perovsek can appreciate the ingenuity that went into making Loew's Theatre's original cloud machines.

The machines, which he has retrofitted for the theater's reopening, were created by the Kliegl Brothers, the "godfathers" of stage lighting equipment in the 1920s and '30s.

When Perovsek took the cloud machines apart, he discovered that the fanciful clouds projected on the theater's domed sky were hand painted on a rotating disc made of mica. Nothing but a mica slide could give the clouds such a natural, layered look.

"It's as old as the planet," and hard to find in sheets, Perovsek said. The durable, yellowish mineral can withstand the heat of the light very well.

"It was one of the more un-

usual things that I've ever seen when I first opened it up."

Originally, the 1929 cloud machine assemblies were going to be replaced by static film rolls. Perovsek said they would have looked like "cardboard cutout" clouds, lacking depth. The only high-tech way to improve on the original machines would have been to use video projections, which would have been too costly.

Folks had improvised with the original cloud machines over the years, adding part of a coffee can to shield the lens from ambient light and even camouflaging the machines from the audience's view with blue cardboard.

Former manager Patti Eddy remembered having to kick the machines in the '80s to get the motors to keep running. But those days are gone.

Perovsek, owner of Perovsek Engineering in Euclid, con-

vinced Civic Theatre staff that he could retrofit the original cloud machines to make them better than ever. First, he consulted with John Kliegl, grandson of one of the original Kliegl brothers, who's still in the stage lighting business.

The goal was to make the clouds brighter and more noticeable. Deciding what light source would shine through the clouds painted on the 24-inch mica disc was all-important.

Perovsek has replaced old 1,000-watt quartz lamps with new light fixtures at the back of each assembly. He also has added fan cooling systems to the machines so the original cloud paint isn't in danger of melting.

"This is six times brighter than it used to be, using new techniques in lighting equipment," Perovsek said. The mechanisms also are twice as

efficient now.

All the added ambient light in the theater auditorium helps enhance the new, improved cloud effect.

From now until opening night, Perovsek will be tweaking the machines, which sit high above the organ screens on either side of the proscenium.

Perovsek Engineering has provided all the new stage lighting for the Civic renovation project, adding state-of-the-art improvements to a lighting retrofit the company did in 1995.

In the theater's old days, "it wasn't anywhere near as bright and glorious as it is today," Perovsek said.

Theater writer Kerry Clawson may be reached at 330-996-3527 or by e-mail at kclawson@thebeaconjournal.com.

CIVIC MEMORIES

“The Civic Theatre holds a very special place in my heart. As Loew’s Theatre, my husband and I had our first date there. A blind date at that! It was April 22, 1961. He picked me up wearing a suit (it WAS Saturday night, after all), and I, too,

wore a suit, hose and heels.

We settled in to see a double feature — Elmer Gantry and The Apartment. Somewhere in the middle of The Apartment, I thought, “I’m going to marry this man!” Then shook my head — what am I thinking — I just met him!

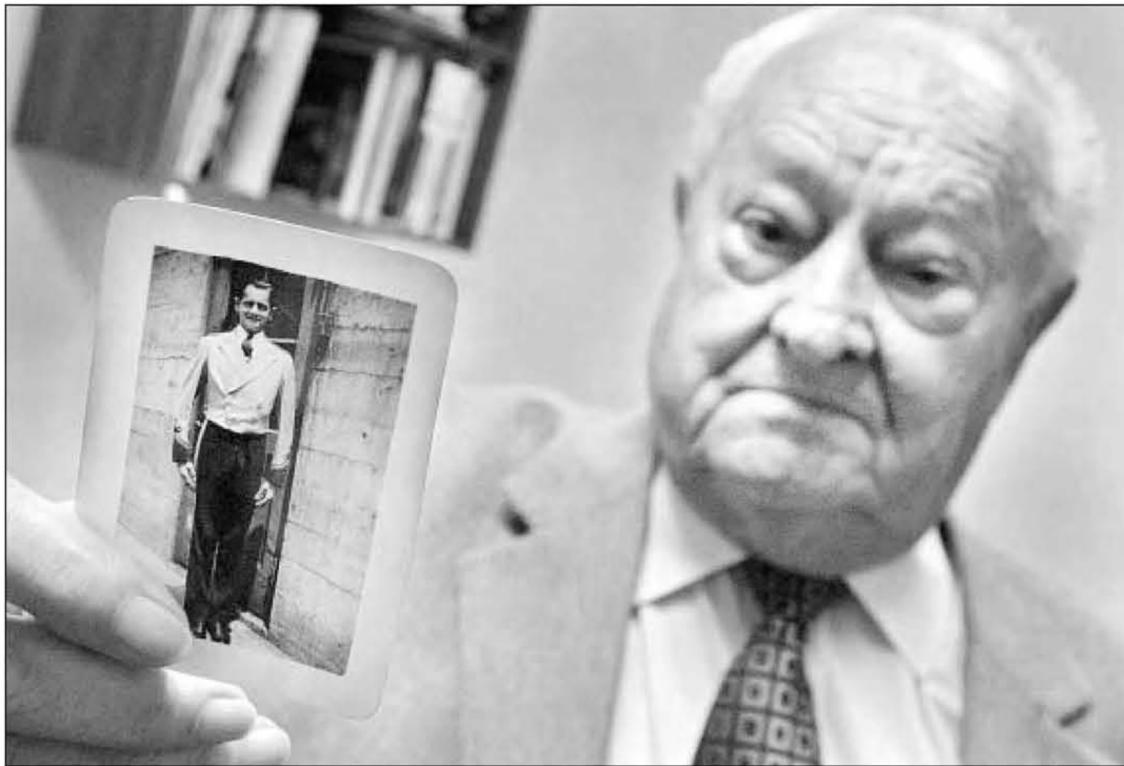
Well, I did marry that man — six

months later! (That was when you didn’t have to have a year or two to plan a wedding). Three children and 41 years later we are still together.

But, I could NEVER sit through a double feature now!

**Edna Gainer
Barberton**

Ushers had front-row seat



GREG RUFFING/Akron Beacon Journal

C.P. Chima holds a photo of himself at age 14 when he worked as an usher at the old Loew’s Theatre in the 1930s.

Low pay, but job dream for '30s teen

By Kerry Clawson
Beacon Journal staff writer

Being an usher in the early days of Loew’s Theatre was an impressive, high-profile position, especially for a teen-ager of the Great Depression.

These were the days when Main Street, which Loew’s main entrance faced, attracted plenty of foot traffic. Folks recognized and befriended each other on the street, and plenty of cute girls came calling to see their favorite ushers at Loew’s.

“Main Street was a hubbub place then,” said former usher Bob Hudak. “People enjoyed life, even as tough as it was. And they had no outlet. They came down

ter, and the teens were lucky to get them over adult applicants with families to support.

When they filled in as doormen, they made \$12 a week. Tyulty remembers the days of limos pulling up to the theater to be greeted by a doorman. For years, the popular theater would regularly have crowds waiting to get in.

In the Depression, Akron-area high school students attended school for half the day and then often worked the other half, well into the night. Of Hudak’s weekly \$10 paycheck, \$7 went to his mother and family, while he kept \$3 for streetcar fare and lunch.

Back then, he could eat a full meal at White-law’s bar on Main Street for just 50 cents.

The theater had its share of unusual characters. Hudak remembers one organist who was known for tipping. One night, as the organist and the organ rose from the orchestra pit, he was frozen facing in the wrong direction, looking at the audience.

An usher called Hudak backstage and asked him to fix the situation. Hudak went into the orchestra pit, reached up and turned the organist’s stool around so he was facing the organ.

“He started playing, and he didn’t miss a beat,” Hudak said. “He could play sober or drunk.”

Ushers were expected to dress impeccably. Audience members wore their Sunday best, too, no matter what day of the week it was.

“You had to look good to be an usher down there,” Hudak said.

“We had to be like the military, standing as stiff as a board there as people came in before we had to seat them,” Tyulty said.

Chima, who attended Garfield High School, worked 4 p.m. to midnight weekdays and double shifts on Sundays. He kept only \$1.50 of his weekly wages, \$1 of which was for his bus pass. His family owned Chima Travel, but business wasn’t good in the Depression. He lived with five siblings, two parents, an uncle and a cousin.

Chima remembers that folks used to line up down Main and around on Bowery Street for classics such as *Gone with the Wind* and *China Seas*, Chima’s favorites. He also remembers being part of a comedy skit with the emcee before a Cab Calloway performance, and partying

with Calloway and his orchestra members in the Loew’s basement afterward.

Sometimes, things were too quiet in the balcony during matinees. One day, Chima showed off to Hudak by walking a tight-rope act on the wrought-iron railing around the balcony. “I’m lucky I didn’t kill myself. It was stupid, really,” Chima said.

For years, the theater has had a stuffed parrot as part of its decor. But back in the '30s, the ushers also were responsible for capturing assistant manager Fred Clover’s live parrot, Loretta, when it flew into the balcony alcoves. “That parrot used to drive me nuts, talkin’ and hollerin’ at me,” said Leidal.

Leidal, who attended Garfield, liked working backstage best, sorting mail and picking up laundry. The pay was better, and the tips were good. “We didn’t make much money, but we had a lot of fun,” he said.

When Tyulty was hired in 1930, the 16-year-old was told to get a bow tie and patent leather shoes and come back the next day. He was head usher by 1932 and floor manager by 1934. As floor manager, he wore a tuxedo and was in charge of the screen, lighting and audio for every

movie.

Now 88, the Akron resident has a personal stake in the current Civic restoration, having made a sizable donation as a member of the Marquee Club. He wishes only that the Civic would bring back vaudeville acts. “We had a beautiful thing going, even in the old days,” Tyulty said.

Theater writer Kerry Clawson may be reached at 330-996-3527 or by e-mail at kclawson@thebeaconjournal.com.

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“Main Street was a hubbub place then (during the Great Depression). People enjoyed life, even as tough as it was. And they had no outlet. They came down to the theater to break the monotony.

BOB HUDAK, a Kenmore native and Loew’s Theatre usher from 1934-39.

to the theater to break the monotony.”

Hudak, a Kenmore native, ushered there from 1934 to '39, when the theater mostly showed movies. But he remembers seeing Ziegfeld dancers in a live Broadway revue called the *Glorified Follies* of 1936.

“A lot of pretty legs. Pretty drumsticks,” he said.

A friend who worked at People’s Drug next door to Loew’s got Hudak, 15, an audience with the theater manager, Jack Flex, who told him that if he fit into the form-fitting, gold-buttoned usher’s uniform, the job was his.

“I wanted that job so bad, by God, I buttoned it (the vest), and I held my breath,” Hudak said.

Responsibilities included making sure every light in the house was lighted and changing the marquee.

Hudak remembers that it took 20 minutes for the theater’s atmospheric clouds to lazily make their way across the domed ceiling. “I use to stand there and time it.”

He was awestruck the first time he entered the theater. “You felt big working there,” he said.

Hudak and fellow ushers C.P. Chima, John Leidal and Raymond Tyulty remember earning \$10 for a 70-hour workweek. Although the pay was peanuts, these jobs were highly sought af-

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Akron Beacon Journal

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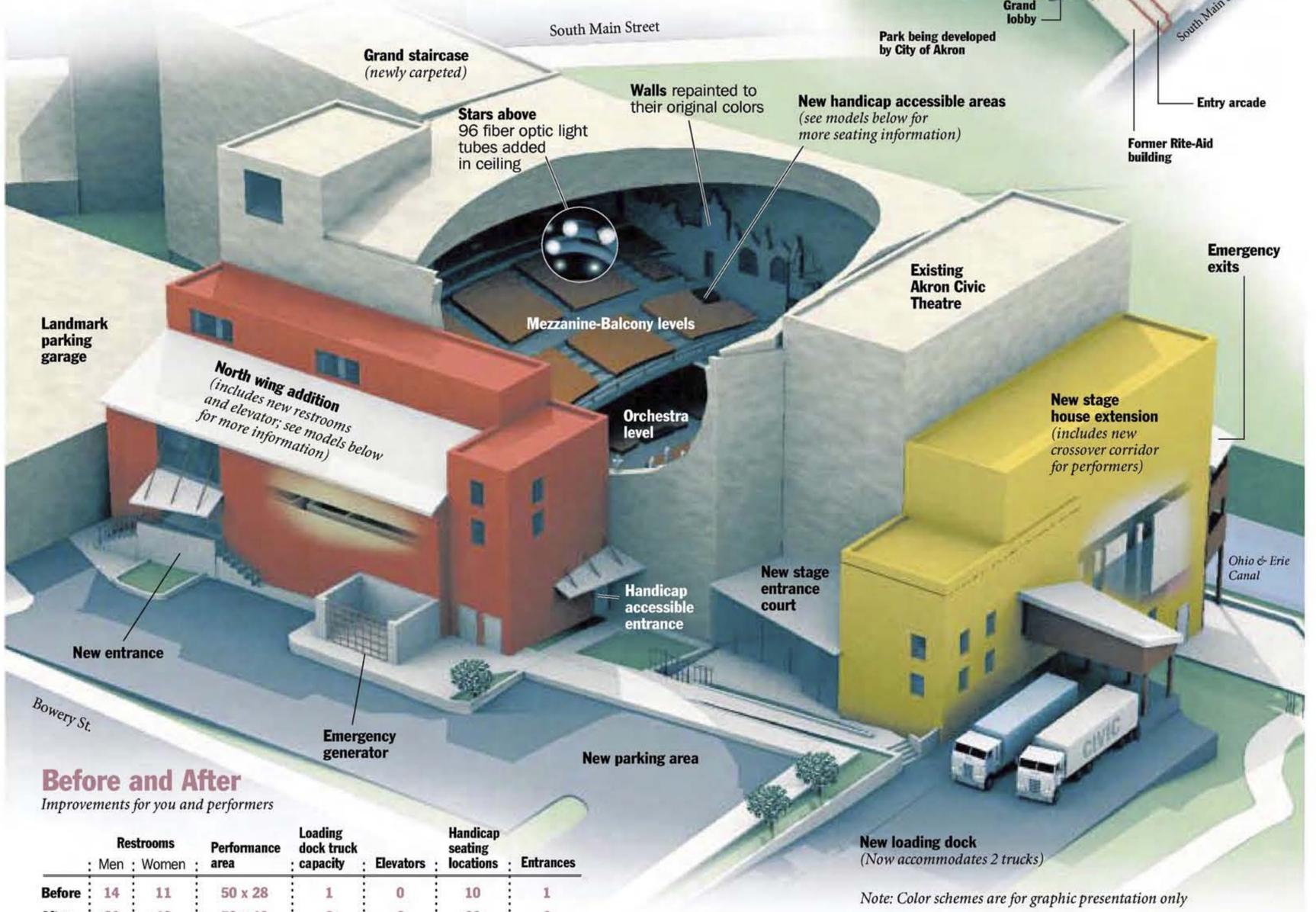
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3 pm

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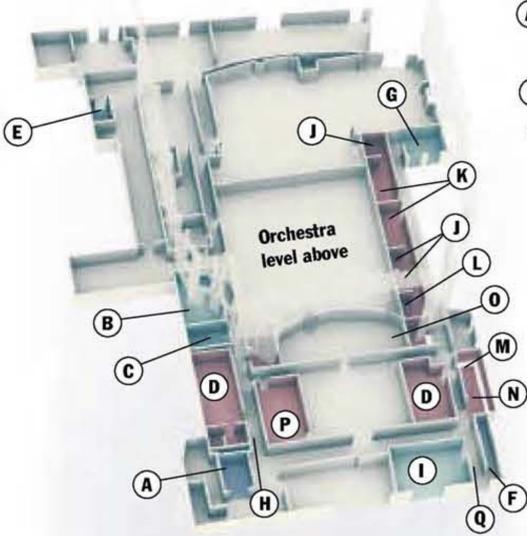
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The New CIVIC

\$22.6 million renovation and expansion brings historic theater back to original glory and the house up to modern performance and patron standards

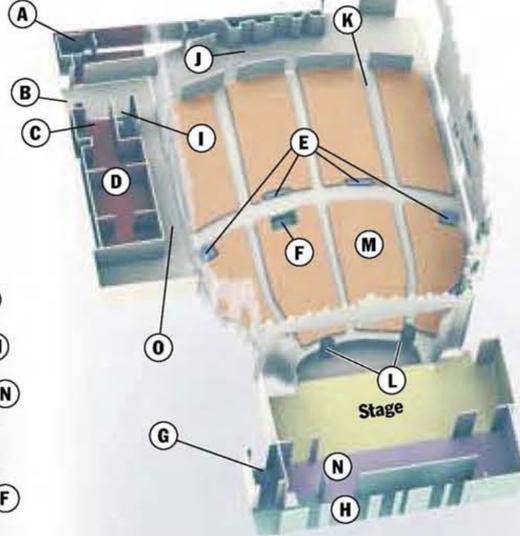


Basement level



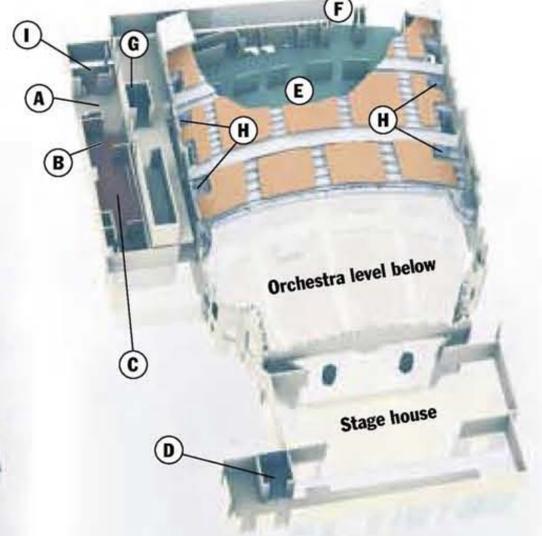
- A** Freight elevator
- B** Audio rack room
- C** Wardrobe/laundry
- D** Chorus dressing room
- E** Elevator
- F** Rigging pit
- G** Production office
- H** North corridor
- I** Multipurpose room
- J** Toilet
- K** Principal dressing room
- L** Star dressing room
- M** Women's room
- N** Men's room
- O** Organ console lift pit
- P** Dimmer room
- Q** Corridor

Orchestra level



- A** Men's room
- B** Orchestra gallery
- C** Powder room
- D** Women's room
- E** Handicap area
- F** Sound pit
- G** Freight elevator
- H** Crossover corridor
- I** Elevator
- J** Orchestra promenade
- K** New carpeting in aisles
- L** New rigging
- M** Seating refurbished (Orchestra level only)
- N** New stage area
- O** Orchestra corridor

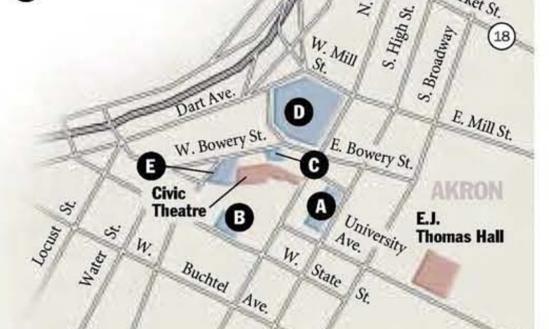
Mezzanine-Balcony levels



- A** Mezzanine gallery
- B** Powder room
- C** Women's room
- D** Freight elevator
- E** Mezzanine lobby
- F** Mezzanine overlook
- G** Elevator
- H** Balcony handicap area
- I** Men's room

Where to park

- A** Summit County parking deck
- B** O'Neil's parking deck
- C** Landmark parking deck
- D** Cascade parking facility
- E** Paid surface lot



2002-03 Civic Theatre schedule

- Nov. 5:** *Barrage*
- Nov. 7:** Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder
- Nov. 8:** *Roman Holiday* (1953 film starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck; free with ticket, which must be picked up at box office)
- Nov. 9:** Comedian Tim Conway
- Nov. 10:** Organ concert with Lyn Larsen; free public tours follow
- Nov. 15:** Yes
- Nov. 16:** *Storm* (Warren Miller's 53rd annual ski and snowboard movie)
- Nov. 22, 23:** Ohio Ballet
- Nov. 24:** Jewel
- Nov. 30, Dec. 1, Dec. 6-8:** Children's Ballet Theatre, *The Nutcracker*
- Dec. 14, 15:** Christmas Music Spectacular
- Dec. 21:** TubaChristmas (free)
- Dec. 31:** First Night Akron
- Jan. 10, 2003:** Apollo Theater Amateur Night auditions
- Jan. 12:** *Star Wars — The First Trilogy*

- Jan. 16-19:** Sesame Street Live, *Let's Be Friends*
- Jan. 21-22:** *Stomp*
- Feb. 1:** Tuesday Musical presents River City Brass Band
- Feb. 14:** Apollo Theater Amateur Night, Live on Tour!
- Feb. 15:** *The Mark of Zorro!* (silent movie with organ)
- Feb. 21, 22:** Barbershop Quartets
- Feb. 23:** The Little Angels, Children's Folk Ballet of Korea
- March 7, 8:** Cuyahoga Valley Youth Ballet
- March 14:** Cleveland Jazz Orchestra
- March 28:** Apollo's Fire, the Cleveland Baroque Orchestra

- April 3:** *Wait, Wait ... Don't Tell Me!*
 - April 11, 12:** Ohio Ballet
 - April 26, 27:** *Coppelia*, presented by the Children's Ballet Theatre
 - May 3:** Laughter and Reflections with Carol Burnett
 - May 6-11:** *The Vagina Monologues* (eight shows)
 - May 17:** Michael Feldman's *Whad'Ya Know?*
- For more information, call the Civic at 330-253-2488, or visit the box office at 182 S. Main St. Box office hours are 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

SOURCE: Richard Hodges, stage manager, Akron Civic Theatre

Akron Beacon Journal research and graphic by staff artist JEMAL R. BRINSON

CIVIC MEMORIES



Beacon Journal file photo

Loew's Theatre circa 1929, when it was the place to see Milton Berle in vaudeville and magician Harry Blackstone.

“ In February 1946, I met Floyd, (cousin of close friends). He called me four times asking for a date. On the fourth time I could not think of any more excuses, so he called for me on Jan. 4. We went to Loew's. On the way home, Floyd said he was going to marry me - I laughed.

Our wedding was Sept. 14, 1946. He is 81 and I am 75.

In June 1997, our granddaughter's graduation commencement took place in the Civic, where Sam Salem introduced my mother, Thelma C. Furry; me; our daughter, Pamela Kilgore; and our granddaughter, Amanda Stiver as four generations of graduates of Kenmore High School.
Jacqueline Cummings Akron

“ Over the years, I saw many great shows at the Civic . . . including Devo's triumphant return to Akron after their success and Bob Dylan's "born again" tour supporting his *Slow Train Coming* album.

"I see a lot of Devils out there tonight!" he drawled.

Alice Cooper brought his Guillotine.
Gary Wright's all keyboard show on his *Dreamweaver* tour.
Peter Frampton, Roy Buchanan and Steve Miller shake the rafters with wonderful guitar work.

Lou Reed scaring the hell out of us with dark tales of junkies and street people in front of an Andy Warhol-inspired stage setting of dozens and dozens of black and white TVs.

But my most memorable moment came at the David Crosby solo acoustic show in 1973. My date and I expected to get crummy seats that night, so I brought my binoculars. I'll be darned if we didn't buy two seats in the third row - center!

During opener Kenny Rankin's set, I loved it. I could get close-up views of him and his guitar fingering. It was like I was directing an episode of *In Concert* right from my seat!

David Crosby received a huge ovation, and after a few songs, he sat back to admire the view of the Civic's lush interior. He said how cool it was to play in such a far-out looking venue but - "The weirdest thing is the guy in the third row with the binoculars! Wheee!" he said, holding up an imaginary pair to his face. "I can see up his nostrils!! Weird man, really weird."

I waved sheepishly and slowly sank into my seat, mortified.
Mark Hughes Kent

“ I am the daughter of Dr. Wayne C. Reed, the veterinarian who treated the Civic Theatre parrot, Polly. I was thrilled as a little girl when Polly would call, "Hi Doc," when the family came in the lobby. We would go in the southeast corner of the lobby where the perch was and Daddy would carry on a conversation with Polly. People ran from all directions to hear the parrot talk.
Lois A. Johnson Akron

“ It must have been the winter of 1933. The fan dancer Faith Bacon was slated to perform at Loew's Theatre. My eighth-grade classmate and I planned to play hooky to see it. Due to the advance notice, we had time to scrape together the 35 cents for each ticket. First a movie and then the main event. Miss Bacon enthralled two boys who were trying to grow up and started us on our way. As we left the theater we bumped into our teacher, Miss Wolfe. She gave us a warm smile and never mentioned our absence.

W.G. Powell Ravenna

“ Memories! Memories! The Civic Theatre will always be one of my "loves." Of course, years ago it was the Loew's Theatre, where we would all go on Sunday afternoons and evenings.

Well, on my first date with this gentleman, we did go to the theater. We sat in the balcony enjoying the movie when his head came closer and closer to mine. I thought, hmmm, this is sort of nice, 'cause I thought he was cute.

Then suddenly, crackle, crash - his eyeglasses broke against my forehead and fell on the floor. He couldn't see much after that, he said, only me.

Well, that cute gentleman became my husband, and 55 years later, we still love the Civic Theatre. (He has new glasses now.)

Madeline Bozzelli Cuyahoga Falls

“ I have two significant memories regarding the Civic Theatre. In 1950 and 1951 I was a proof and/or copy boy for the display advertising department of the Beacon Journal. My downtown territory included the Loew's Theatre, where I would pick up advertising copy and deliver proofs to the then-manager, Frank Henson. He allowed me to enter the Loew's any time, free of charge! . . .

My second and most cherished memory is when Debbie Reynolds and Carlton Carpenter were at the Loew's with their *Song and Dance Show*. Mr. Henson invited me to have lunch at the Garden Grille with him and Debbie Reynolds and her mother, who always traveled with her at that time. I was too young to tell Debbie that I was in love with her, but I will next time we have lunch.

Ronald Tietz Akron

“ In late August 1942, the United States was embroiled in a great war. Our senior class at St. Thomas School of Nursing was prepared to graduate in three weeks. Several girls of our group had already decided on the directions their lives would take after they joined the Army or Navy Nurse Corps.

We gathered for one last outing together before the September graduation event. We

CIVIC MORE ONLINE

Many more Civic memories available online at www.ohio.com/XXXXXX

chose a visit to Loew's Theatre for a movie and for Wild Oscar's music.

I do not remember what movie we saw but I clearly remember Wild Oscar's playing *Why Don't We Do This More Often?* (How we wished that we could.)

While we walked across the viaduct back to the nurses' home we sang that significant song with such meaning.

That day 60 years ago was the last celebration of the entire class of '42.
Mary Maffitt Vaughan Wadsworth

“ It was always a treat to go to a movie at Loew's downtown when I was a young girl (in the '40s and '50s). I just loved looking at the sky inside and watching the twinkling stars. When I was very young, 6-8 years old, I thought it was real. My sister Pat (she's 2½ years younger than me) and I argued whether it was real or not. Ever the dreamer, I insisted it was real. It looked so realistic to me. I didn't know how they brought the real sky in, and even when it was raining outside, you could see the stars twinkling in the sky at Loew's, and the rain didn't come in either.

I would sometimes fantasize about the statues on either side of the stage. It looked to me like there was a princess on the right and a prince on the left. The princess was kept prisoner in her castle, and the prince was calling to her and telling her he was going to rescue her. Or he was singing a love song to her in my other fantasies. I thoroughly enjoyed fairy tales and made up my own when in Loew's.
Shirley Tona Akron

“ When I was around 13, my two junior high school buddies, Jerry and Ken, and I would frequent the Loew's on weekends. Somehow (I can't remember exactly how) I discovered what I will call, for the lack of a better name, an "acoustic hot spot." I discovered that when standing in a specific

place, in a specific corridor of the theater, I could create a sonic reverberation by humming just the right tone. This reverberation could be quite powerful depending on how loud I, or my friends and I, could hum the note. The sound produced from this exercise seemed to come from all directions, making it impossible for any passers-by to locate its source.

It didn't take us long to figure out how we could have fun with this phenomenon. If all three of us hit exactly the right pitch at the same time, we found that the resulting sound waves seemed so strong as to shake the very walls and floor around us. We would wait until some unsuspecting theater patrons would come strolling along, then we would start our humming. It was easy to conceal the fact that we were humming, as humming reveals no obvious visual signs. We could even talk to each other and maintain the illusion. While one would talk, the other two would continue to hum.

The passing patrons were always mystified and sometimes frightened by the effect. Especially if the movie being shown that week happened to be science fiction, as our sonic trick definitely seemed otherworldly. Then, before long, an usher or manager type would come to investigate the mysterious sounds, and we would pull the same trick on them. No one ever figured out what we were doing.

As an adult, I have visited the theater many times, and I always go back to my secret acoustic hot spot to see if it still works. I have long since passed the secret on to my two sons and someday expect to reveal it to my grandsons.

I will not reveal the exact location of the spot for publication for fear that hordes of teen-agers will show up to try it out, and the old place will come tumbling down amid a storm of sonic vibrations. If any of your readers go to the opening of the new renovation and hear some strange sonic reverberations bouncing around the place, it's probably just me up to my old tricks.
Jobie Smith Akron

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CIVIC MEMORIES

“My grandfather was Harry Hann, but most knew him as ‘Pappy.’ When he was retired from B.F. Goodrich in the '40s, he had been used to working two jobs. He had worked hard all his life and enjoyed doing so.

After his retirement, he found himself with nothing to do. He eventually just ended up sitting around the house, vegetating. He wore the same clothes, wouldn't shave for days and lost all interest in everything. Then came the call from Loew's! They wanted him to be an usher on a part-time basis.

Pappy gladly accepted the position and eagerly looked forward to catching the bus and going to work three or four times a week. He wore a uniform and looked real sharp. He enjoyed being able to get into places in the theater in which the general public was not allowed. I am sure it brought back many pleasant memories of his vaudeville days.

In the days following, the family saw my grandpa happy again. So you see, in this way, the theater was responsible in restoring an old man's self-worth and for this, I am grateful. It helped make his last days memorable, and ours, too.

**Jack DeLong
Canal Fulton**

“My grandfather, John Thompson, was the foreman for the plasterers when the Loew's Theatre was built. I was 8 or 9 when he died, but remember him and my grandmother taking me to the movies there, and him describing how the work was done. The moving ceiling, the ornate plaster work, all lost arts.

**Bob Keller
Calhoun, Ga.**

“In 1976, our family was in downtown Akron for the sesquicentennial celebration. The remodeling on the Civic had begun and they were offering tours.

My then 8-year-old son and I took the tour and when we were in the main theater, he asked how they made the clouds move across the sky. ‘I know how they do the stars,’ he offered, ‘those are just lights, but how do they do the clouds?’ ‘Magic,’ I whispered. ‘No, no,’ he insisted, ‘How do they do it?’ ‘OK, if you don't believe me,’ I said, ‘ask Mr. Henning,’ the theater manager, who was conducting the tour.

As we were moving to the backstage area, Brian made his way to the front of the group and tugged on the tour guide's sleeve. ‘How do they make the clouds move?’ he asked. Mr. Henning hesitated, bent down a bit and whispered, ‘Magic!’

**Darlene Musgrave
Akron**

“My fondest memories of the Civic Theatre come from the 1970s, when I was a mere teen-ager. After being caught jumping from the old O'Neil's parking deck some 50-60 feet in the air to sneak into the concerts through the emergency exits, the Civic Theatre allowed me to become a volunteer so I could see the concerts. I remember meeting Todd Rundgren, Billy Joel, B.B. King and a host of others. I also remember practicing in the Red Jennings Band in the basement of the Civic and also being allowed to walk around when no one else was there, where I encountered the ‘ghosts.’

**R.W. Peterson
Akron**

“In the late '70s and early '80s, my mother was an usher at the Civic Theatre. Often tagging along, I started volunteering myself at the concession counter, in between stealing peeks at the various shows.

One that I remember as a favorite was a Vaudevillian Revue, where I was invited backstage by one of the performers. Too young to understand their significance, but nonetheless awed by the pomp and circumstance, I obtained the autographs of performers such as George Kirby (whose birthday I discovered was a week before mine), Donald O'Connor (whom I had seen on *The Love Boat* and therefore revered as a superstar), Gloria De Haven (who invited me to share in the backstage refreshments), George Jessel (he was very old, and very grumpy in his wheelchair), Danny and the Juniors, and more.

**Chris Kovacevic
Akron**

“During the '40s and early '50s, my grandmother, Nellie McDermott, would take me to the Civic, which was then Loew's, for Wednesday afternoon matinees. Wild Oscar played then and we sang along on many, many wonderful afternoons. A lady sitting next to my grandmother leaned over one day and told her that her daughter, me, should take singing lessons with Sister Catherine at St. Bernard's. My grandmother told my mother



Singer and actor Donald O'Connor performs at the Civic Theatre in Akron in the late 1970s. A letter writer revered O'Connor, who had been on *The Love Boat*, as a superstar.

and that began my journey through music.

I've sung with symphony choruses and as soprano soloist many times. This life of music has led to many countries in Europe and Russia and all of Great Britain. Meeting wonderful people has been the greatest pleasure and joy. To work with great conductors and to learn is another reward. To sing in pubs in Wales with men and women who sing along to choruses from the great oratorios is a spiritual experience.

It all began with Wild Oscar's music and his sing-a-long.

**JoAnn Marcinkoski
Akron**

“Little did I know in 1989, when we presented our first audience-participation mystery at the Civic, that it was the start of a 12-year collaboration that literally changed my life. That first show was definitely a learning experience. As I stood alone at the top of the grand staircase, I looked down at 500 eager people all waiting to rush up the steps to turn in their solutions. At that moment, I immediately decided what would become Rule #1: THIS IS NOT A RACE!

Over the years our mysteries at the Civic developed a very loyal audience. I've always been very proud and glad that we introduced some ‘newbies’ to the Civic. It was great fun watching them walk in the door and discover it for the first time. Because even though there were places in the building that were a little sad and faded (and some that were downright shabby), the Civic always had a special grandeur that captivated everyone who came through the doors.

Our Civic audiences were a parade of very diverse people. Scary looking tattooed bikers (who turned out to be serious mystery buffs) mingled with young teens celebrating birthdays. A drag queen became an unintentional ‘red herring.’ Reluctant men, dragged there by wives/girlfriends, turned into rabid detectives who would mow down little old ladies to get to clues.

We became part of the Civic's extended family over those 12 years and I have especially fond memories of the stagehands. Invisible to most patrons and audience members, they are the backbone of the Civic and, indeed, any performing venue. From Steve ‘I'm Having A Good Time But You'd Never Know It From My Expression’ Kazar to Richard ‘My Day Isn't Complete Unless I Get Eileen To Believe Something Totally Stupid’ Hodges, they all had one thing in common. Namely, that the Civic was more than a job - they loved the place and took pride in it.

They enjoyed working on the mysteries and really got involved. So much so that I started adding ‘bits’ for them to do. My personal favorite was watching Richard Hodges go onstage during *Audition For Murder* and deliver the immortal line, ‘Hey, who left this rat poison over by the coffee pot?’ Richard and Tim ‘Buffo’ Shuff also pestered me for years to

‘kill’ someone with one of the sandbags that are used as counterweights to various curtains and drops. I finally relented and for *Reunion At Homicide High* they made a ‘sandbag’ filled with Styrofoam. It worked so well that when it plummeted down heavily onto our poor ‘victim,’ there were audible gasps from the audience.

**Eileen Moushey
Kent**

“My favorite Civic Theatre memory took place in March 1973 (I remember the date because my oldest son was born March 30, 1973). I was playing trumpet in the pit band for the Shrine Circus.

During the tiger act, they had the cages located right at the edge of the stage. One of the tigers relieved itself in the direction of Akron's best tenor sax player (I will leave his name out to avoid embarrassment). The sax player's tux coat was drenched. He played the rest of the show, but without the coat.

**Bob Westbrook
Macedonia**

“When I was a young girl, going downtown to see a movie at the Loew's Theatre was a special treat. Who would believe that, years later, at age 45, I would be tap dancing on that stage? I joined an adult tap class taught by an Akron treasure, Jean Shepherd.

After we completed our class, we had a dance review on the stage of the Civic Theatre. There we were, middle-aged and a little lumpy, ‘slap ball changing’ on the same stage that was touched by some very famous feet.

**Nancy Sauer
Akron**

“It was May 11, 1968. Cream, one of the reigning British blues-rock groups of the day, appeared live at the Akron Civic Theatre.

One of my greatest privileges ever was to have been a member of one of the four opening acts for this concert. Akron's Poor Girls came first, then Cleveland's Penny Arcade. Our group, the Brambles, was third and then the up-and-coming James Gang with Joe Walsh closed the local portion of the show.

We were all very excited to be a part of this concert. I will never forget Ginger Baker drinking a can of Budweiser just as the curtain opened for Cream when he was supposed to be tapping out the opening beats of *N.S.U.* He took a gulp, put that can down quickly and never missed a beat. Jack Bruce, after brilliantly executing *Born Under a Bad Sign* and *Sunshine of Your Love* with Clapton, sitting quietly on the banister of the back stairway, smoking a cigarette while Clapton and Baker went at their solos in *Crossroads*. And Eric Clapton in his librarian-looking suit and clear glasses, hair up in a ponytail and blank stare.

Often when people ask me what I consider among my greatest accomplishments, I mention my participation in this concert.

Bruce Davies

the starlights in the dome) and attached what looked like a child's swing seat on it. I sat on it, had a paint can between my knees, paint brush in one hand, holding onto the rope with the other. They pulled me upward but I wasn't quite close enough, so I had to swing back and forth. Each time I got near enough, I would dab a brush full of paint on the spot.

Another time they asked me to sand and repaint the fire escapes leading from the balcony down to the ground. The strange thing is that the lady who is now my wife and was working at O'Neil's looked out and saw me on that platform.

What she saw at that moment was me lying down taking a nap about 60 feet above the ground (which wasn't too smart but nothing went wrong).

I met some interesting people from the vaudeville groups that were coming to the theater at that time. One of them I can remember was Sally Rand.

The one that stands out in my mind was Cab Calloway. On his last night, after his last performance, he threw a backstage party.

I was standing not far from him. He grabbed a uniform hat off of one of our maintenance people, put it on me, and started laughing like crazy, and hollered to his helper, his valet, ‘More

gin, Harold.’

**Robert W. Collins
Banning, Calif.**

“In the early '50s, my boyfriend (later, husband) and I were all dressed up like everyone did on dates then, and while walking down the corridor from the parking lot to the Loew's lobby, I caught my 3-inch heel in an iron grating on the floor and broke it right off.

However, an usher came to my aid, saying they had a shoe repair room. He whisked off my broken shoe after setting me on one of those wonderful velvet chairs and returned so promptly that we never missed a bit of the movie. Fifty years later I still remember the feel of sitting in that wonderful chair, swinging my unshod foot.

**Patricia (Pat) Williams
Akron**



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