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# GRAND VISION FOUNDATION: OVER TWO DECADES OF LOVE FOR THE WARNER GRAND THEATRE



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Approaching her 90th birthday, the 1500-seat Warner Grand Theatre reminds us of Hollywood's golden age while beckoning visitors and residents to downtown San Pedro, now a pedestrian-friendly arts district of galleries, theaters and restaurants.

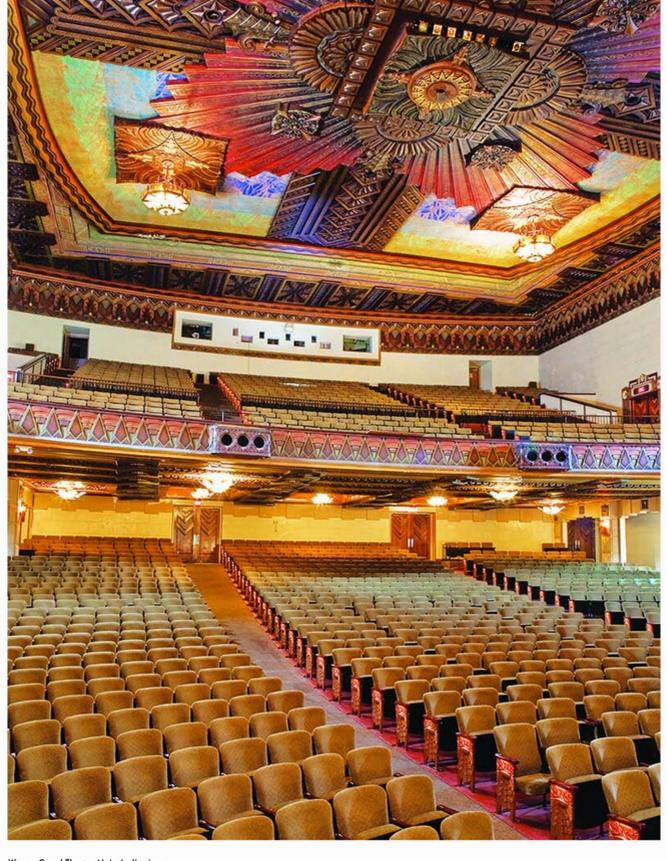
Grand Vision Foundation, the Warner Grand's Friends Group and a non-profit organization, is dedicated to ensuring that the theater remains an active performing arts venue while maintaining its historic integrity.

Today, the City of Los Angeles' Department of Cultural Affairs owns and runs the Warner Grand as a rental house for theater, film and concert productions and community events. San Pedro City Ballet, Encore Entertainers, the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservatory, Rolling Hills Prep, Grand Vision, Long Beach Opera and others book it regularly. In 2019, the Long Beach Opera premiered, "The Central Park Five" at the Theatre, which recently won the Pulitzer Prize in Music.



Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the theater is the only one of the three movie palaces built by Warner Brothers in Los Angeles that's still intact. Opening day on January 20, 1931 brought film stars Barbara Stanwyck and Walter Pidgeon to the busy LA Harbor to celebrate. Guests were thrilled by the decorative opulence and impeccably dressed ushers.

But time takes its toll. The theater's stylish interior faded and equipment grew obsolete. San Pedro's booming maritime economy took a downturn. By the early-1990's plans were on the table to turn the Warner Grand into a swap meet or tear it down.



Warner Grand Theatre Main Auditorium  
 Credit: Papadakis Photography

"Fortunately," says Liz Schindler-Johnson, Grand Vision's Executive Director, "community leaders saw through the layers of neglect, and believed restoring the theatre could revive the area."



Warner Grand Lobby ceiling revealing historic designs under existing white paint. A section is painted to show what it would look like when fully restored.

They formed Grand Vision Foundation in 1996 and convinced the City of Los Angeles to purchase the theater. Then they repaired the long-dark neon blade sign. It was unveiled at a spectacular "Light up the Night" street party, igniting a passion for the arts throughout the community.

In 2000, Schindler-Johnson became director, bringing her city planning and fine arts background to the cause. She spearheaded the Save Your Seat campaign to restore the theater's seats, upgrade rigging, sound, projection, lighting and more. Community members contributed by "adopting" 1,000+ seats.



Warner Grand Theatre, Opening Day, Jan. 20, 1931

"The projects we did in the 2000s got the Theatre running. Through countless events and the work of many devoted volunteers, Grand Vision continues to care for the theater, raising over \$3.5 million in the past two decades. Many friendships have formed through shared affection for the theater," added Schindler-Johnson.

While Grand Vision has expanded to present concerts at the Grand Annex, their 150-seat music hall and provide their Meet the Music program in underserved local schools, the Warner Grand is always at the forefront.

In 2019, Grand Vision launched a new project - Love the Lobby, to restore the original painting on the theater's main lobby ceiling. People are again adopting seats - so this beloved theater can look her best for her 90th. For information about Theatre celebrations and restoration progress, visit [www.grandvision.org](http://www.grandvision.org).

**Grand Vision's mission is to inspire and engage the diverse Los Angeles Harbor/South Bay community through culturally inclusive music, arts and educational experiences.**



### Liz Johnson, Executive Director, Grand Vision Foundation

Liz Johnson has served as Grand Vision's Executive Director since 2000, working long hours to save the historic Warner Grand Theatre. Over the past two decades, she has built Grand Vision Foundation into a resilient not-for-profit arts organization that not only serves as the official Friends Group to the Warner Grand Theatre, but also operates The Grand Annex, a live music venue, and Meet the Music, a robust music education program for underserved public schools. Johnson holds a B.A. from Yale University and an M.A. in Urban Planning from UCLA. She is an active community leader and philanthropist in the Harbor Area of Los Angeles. Johnson is proud to serve as a Los Angeles County Arts Commissioner representing the Fourth District. She also

sits on the San Pedro Chamber of Commerce board of directors, the board of Crail-Johnson Foundation and the board of The Marine Mammal Care Center-Los Angeles.