

# Preserving our Culture, Arts & Heritage

## History of the Village Theater at Cherry Hill

Canton Township began investigating the need for a performing Arts Center in April 1996. At that time a committee was established by the Board of Trustees to study the feasibility of building and operating a performing arts center.

Three committees were established. They included the Partnership Committee, Art User Group Committee, and the Building Design Committee.

Each committee developed a list of recommendations for their specific area. The Partnership Committee developed a list of local and regional arts organizations who might be interested in utilizing the facility. Many of the organizations contacted were very supportive and enthusiastic about the need for such a center. Their needs for a theater varied in size from a small intimate house to one that could accommodate more than 1200.

In November of 1996 Canton retained Plante and Moran, L.L.P. to conduct a thorough analysis of the cost of constructing and operating a 600 and 1,200 seat Performing Art Center. The analysis was intended to be the initial effort in developing a theater business plan that was recommended by the Development Committee. The Partnership and Development Committees agreed to obtain cost estimates for land acquisition and construction of (1) a facility with an auditorium seating approximately 600 people, and (2) a facility with an auditorium seating approximately 1,200 people.



The Village Theater at Cherry Hill is home to a number of local arts organizations, including; Ever After Productions, Spotlight Players, The Canton Community Band, Orchestra Canton, and The Canton Community Chorus. The theater's general operational budget receives contributions from Canton's General Fund and The Partnership for the Arts and Humanities.



The Development Committee recommendations included hiring a fund raising consultant to approach the foundations identified in the report in an effort to determine the financial feasibility of the project. They also recommended the creation of a 501 (c) (3) supporting organization under the Canton Community Foundation to manage the facility and coordinate major gift giving. Finally they recommended developing a business plan for the performing arts center project.

The Partnership for the Arts and Humanities was successful in raising more than \$5 million toward the construction and operation of the theater. A number of donors each committed in excess of \$250,000 toward the project. In addition more than 400 seats were "sold" to residents.

The Design Committee forwarded detailed information to Plante Moran to be included in their study. They also developed building and operation design criteria.

In October of 1997 a meeting of interested regional arts organizations was held at the Summit. The vision for the theater project was shared with the attendees. Each group then shared their interest and possible involvement in the project. Involvement varied from presenting programs to education outreach. In September of 1998 Growth Design was engaged by the Canton Community Foundation to conduct a feasibility study to determine the advisability of seeking \$3-4 million dollars in philanthropic gifts toward the construction of a new Performing Arts Center in Canton.

Twenty six interviews were conducted with area leaders "to ascertain opinions about the perceived need for such a facility, estimations of community capability to provide the funds to construct the facility and key strategies to optimize the potential for success." The study indicated that there was no strong consensus for the committee to decide either to proceed or not, but if the leaders were committed to making the proposed facility a reality for the community, the project could be successful, in the opinion of the consultants. The report also recommended acquiring the services of an architect to create the initial concept drawings and floor plans. Additionally, it was recommended that the



committee assemble a task force of key leaders to assist with articulation of the case for support and further identification and cultivation of donor prospects.

In April of 1997 Plante Moran completed a comparative analysis of a 600 and 1200 Seat Theater. All estimates were based on preliminary assumptions provided by Canton and costs of similar types of buildings. The study indicated that a 1200 seat theater would cost more than twice the 600 seat theater and would be prohibitively expensive. The Plante Moran study indicated that a smaller house would operate approximately 152 days per year, while the larger house would be utilized 64 days a year. The committee indicated that before the size of the facility was finalized that the location and construction costs needed to be considered.

Beginning in December of 1998 a small group of interested individuals were invited to participate in formulating a non-profit organization to raise the needed funds and to operate the theater. Shortly after this

meeting the group named themselves The Partnership for the Arts and Humanities. Numerous meetings were held, some with the steering committee (individuals from the early effort to study a theater). During this period the group attempted to determine the role of the Plymouth Canton Schools in the performing arts



effort. The school district was preoccupied with the planning for a third high school debate and a lawsuit filed to stop its construction.

The partnership retained the services of a consultant who could answer the questions, "Where should the theater be built?," "How much might it cost?" and "What might be the operational costs?" A request for proposal was sent to a number of well-known consulting firms. Three firms were interviewed. The consulting firm AMS was hired, utilizing a State of Michigan grant, to answer these questions. The partnership also developed a mission statement and considered and adopted Articles of Incorporation. A preliminary report from the consultant was presented to the partnership in November of 1999. The report indicated that the theater should be constructed in Cherry Hill Village and should seat 450 patrons.



After more than four years of discussions, studies and analysis the Canton Board of Trustees decided that the project should move from the conceptual to the concrete. Many small and large arts organizations in Southeastern Michigan were engaged through the process resulting in a commitment by a critical mass to have a presence in the facility as either a presenter or as a provider of education.

It was clear from the AMS report that the appropriate location for the theater was Cherry Hill Village. The site offered, in the not too distant future, a spectacular venue for cultural events. The combination of village homes, intimate retail and restaurant would serve as a destination for Canton and non-Canton residents.

Canton has earned the reputation as a community committed to creating and sustaining a quality of life second to none. In the area of recreation Canton has long prided itself on providing its residents with a full array of first rate facilities and programs. The Summit on the Park helped establish Canton as a leader in addressing the recreational, social and cultural needs of its residents. The architectural firm of TMP was retained to be the project architect, while the George Auch Company was selected as the Construction Manager. Preliminary architectural plans were developed and shared with each arts group and feedback was solicited. Construction began in the spring of 2003. The theater was completed in the summer of 2004 and a grand opening occurred in the Fall of 2004.

