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spotlight

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRE



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New Survey:

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20 Years of Magic**

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Success in the Pacific Northwest

"a brilliant, harrowing interpretation of Remarque's famous novel"

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President's Letter

Kristi Quinn
AACT President

Recently, I was reading an article by the insightful Garrison Keillor about many wonderful things, but of course what took my fancy was his focus on food. In particular, he referenced

hot dogs and his love for a Minneapolis delicacy, Kramarczuk's bratwurst. Now, as despicable as it may be to some people, I do love a good hot dog or brat, and while I've never tried Kramarczuk's, I *have* noticed that people are adamant about the best way to indulge in these food items.

"Only mustard, never catsup!"

"Chili is the best, but chili without beans!"

"Give me everything, relish, onions, kraut—the works!"

People are insistent about which is best. But you know, I never have seen anyone come to blows or call people names or ridicule someone for their ideal hot dog. Now, in this election year, I only wish politicians and the voting public could be more like hot dog indulgers—and theatre folk.

One of the reasons I loved community theatre from the start, many (many) years ago, was that no one judged you, and in many cases never asked mundane questions, like what you did for a living, where you went to school, who you loved, or how much money you made. And they were kind. They cared about you as a person—and that you learned your lines, came to rehearsal on time, and respected your director and crew. These people were innovative and imaginative. They wanted to learn, to educate themselves about theatre and the world. They were accepting. It made no difference to them that Cinderella was 20 pounds overweight

(she had the best voice and could act), that Hansel was Indonesian and Gretel was Native American (their German accents were impeccable), or that the kid playing Grandpa Jones was 23 with lines painted on his face (he was a better old man than the 62-year-old playing Tex).

In a recent interview, Emmy Award winner and Tony Award nominee Colman Domingo touted the importance of community theatre in his life, where he worked hard and then went on to regional theatre and Broadway. "Many theatre professionals would be lost without their community theatre ties," said. Domingo, who's gained fame in the film *Rustin*.

Clearly, community theatre serves a broad spectrum of interests and outcomes. As your own theatre looks to expand its horizons and the imaginations of its volunteers and patrons, remember that AACT supports your work with programs and resources for solving problems, raising money, providing common-sense solutions and a common fellowship.

AACT works to build community theatres into a thriving kinship. Your membership helps AACT assist your theatre and the thousands of community theatres around the country, and the world.

So, eat a hot dog. Do theatre. Join AACT. Be imaginative, innovative, and inclusive.

And kind.

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AACT

PO Box 101476

Fort Worth, TX 76185

(817) 732-3177

info@aact.org

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On the cover: Chloe (Marsha Heuer, left) and Gabrielle (Natalie Coombs, right) break down the many warning signs against Gabrielle falling for a diagnosed psychopath in the AACT NewPlayFest world premiere production of *The Red Flags*, by Catherine Castellani at Verona Area Community Theater in Verona, Wisconsin

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Upcoming Events

AACT Webinars

aact.org/webinars

AACT NewPlayFest 2024 Premieres

I Thought I Knew You, by Philip J. Kaplan

Stage Left Theater, Spokane, Washington

March 22 - April 7

stagelefttheater.org

Eating Blackberries, by Pam Harbaugh

Hickory Community Theatre, Hickory, North Carolina

April 5 - 20

hickorytheatre.org

USITT 2024 Conference & Expo

Seattle, Washington

March 20-23

usitt.org/conference24

World Theatre Day 2024

March 27

world-theatre-day.org

Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC)

Two Virtual Conferences

April 5 - 7 (Pacific Time Zone)

April 12 - 14 (Eastern Time Zone)

aact.org/ctmc

AACT NewPlayFest 2026

Scripts Accepted May 1-June 30, 2024

aact.org/newplay26

AACT Board of Directors and Committee Summer Meetings

Grand Rapids, Michigan

June 21-22, 2024

aact.org/summer

Spotlight

Spotlight is published quarterly by the American Association of Community Theatre for its members, and is annually distributed to an expanded list of known community theatre organizations and interested individuals.

Spotlight Editors: David Cockerell and Stephen Peithman

Spotlight Editorial Team: Quiana Clark-Roland, Michael Cochran, Mary Doveton, Kristofer Geddie, Jon Montgomery, Stephen Peithman, Katrina Ploof, Dorinda Toner, Lou Ursone, David A. VanCleave

Content Contributors: Andrea Bingham, Rachel Bohnsack, Jolea Brown/Creative Photography, Chad-Alan Carr, James Cass/Picture This of Palma Ceia, Quiana Clark-Roland, Michael Cochran, David Cockerell, Jim Covault, Shawn Cummings, Winston Daniels, Mary Jo DeNolf, Mary Doveton, Amy Scheidegger Ducos, Morrie Enders, Katie Hallman, Kaiserslautern Military Community, Jarod Kopp, Lincoln Community Playhouse, John Lyttle, Karen Matheny, Jon Montgomery, Dr. Andrew Morgan, New Tampa Players, Northern Starz Center for the Performing Arts, Nora Paine, Jill Patchin, Stephen Peithman, Melissa Persaud, Jamie Peterson, Justin A. Pike, Katrina Ploof, Faye M. Price, Jami Salter, Michelle Swink, Noah Taylor, Danyelle Tinker, Dorinda Toner, Kristi Quinn, Kait Rose, Lou Ursone, David A. VanCleave, Cori Veverka, Dane Winters, world-theatre-day.org

Design and Layout: Jim Covault

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"*Swing State* is perhaps the first of the great American post-COVID plays, the first work I've seen not just to wrestle with what happened during the pandemic but also to explore, and call out, the fundamental changes it has wrought on our collective psyche."

—Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*

SWING STATE

BY REBECCA GILMAN

Author of *Spinning Into Butter*, *Luna Gale* and *Twilight Bowl*.



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The State of Community Theatre Today

The past three years have seen theatre companies of all sizes adapting to new ways of engaging audiences, volunteers, and learners.

So, how are community theatres faring in the process? What are the issues that affect them most, and where are the areas of hope—and occasional triumph?

To answer those questions, AACT Board Member Michael Cochran—Executive Director of Market House Theatre in Paducah, Kentucky, and Mary Doveton—Executive Director emeritus of Theatre Lawrence in Lawrence, Kansas—created a survey that would shed some light on the state of community theatre today.

The results were a mix of the expected and unexpected. Perhaps the factor that most affected the findings is the nature of those theatres that responded to the request to take part in the survey. As Cochran points out, “Community Theatres span the spectrum of budget, seating capacity, and community population. However, the largest segment of the 342 theatres that responded to our survey have smaller budgets and theatre seating capacity, and draw from smaller community population bases.”

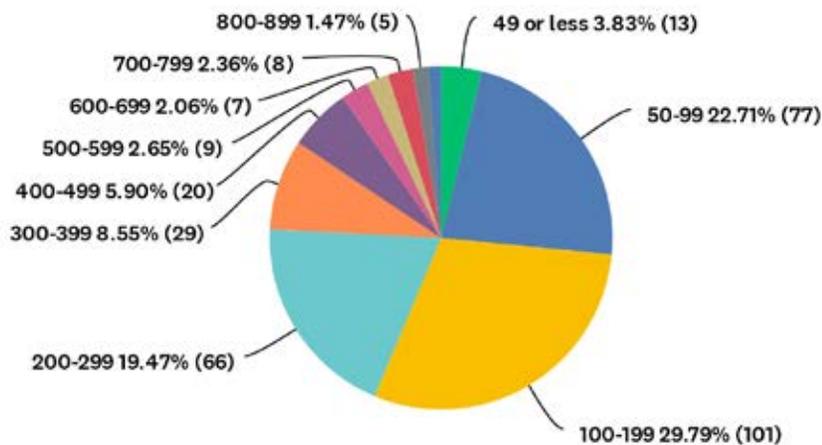
One reason may be that these theatres have simply felt the pinch more than larger, urban theatres with bigger budgets and a larger audience base.

With that in mind, our survey reveals that the most critical issues facing community theatres today include:

- **A decline in both season and single tickets since 2019—the last pre-Covid year.**
- **An increase in production expenses, but flat or lower income.**
- **A drop in the number of people volunteering their time—in particular actors and younger volunteers.**
- **An uptick in facility costs and equipment needs.**

The results of the survey, as summarized by Cochran and Doveton, are explained below. You’ll find more details and a complete set of survey documents online at aact.org/ct-survey.

How many seats are in your main performance space?



About the Responding Theatres

- **Geographic Spread:** Survey responses were received from every state except Rhode Island and Nevada.
- **Budget:** Nearly 71% of responding theatres have budgets of less than \$250,000 (28.6% were under \$50,000; 18.1% had budgets of \$50,000-\$99,999, and 23.9% were budgeted \$100,000-\$250,000). Only a few reported budgets of less than \$20,000.
- **Seating Capacity:** Overall, 75.8% of theatres surveyed have 299 seats or less.
- **Population Base:** The largest segment in the survey reported a population base of under 25,000 people, 24.2%. The second largest block was 100,000-250,000 people, 18.4%, and the third block was 25,000-50,000

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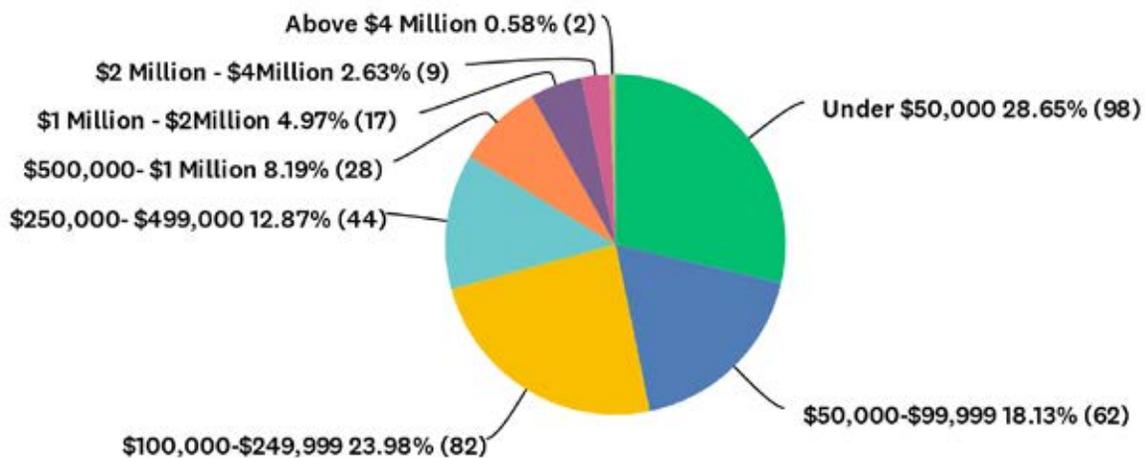
people, 17.5%. Only 6.4% of responding theatres reported a population of 500,000 to more than a million.

Income & Expense Trends

- With a few exceptions, most community theatres are operating in the black coming out of Covid. Financially, 75% of theatres reported budgets that were break-even or showed a surplus—51% break-even, 24% surplus, 24% deficit.
- Since 2019, 68% of theatres increased their expense budgets, while 22% had stayed the same, and 8% decreased their budgets.
- Most theatres rely primarily on earned income from ticket sales and class fees. Roughly 50% rely on earned income alone, 35% reported an even mix of earned and contributed income, and only 14% relied primarily on contributed income.
- Over the past six years, a majority of the responding theatres have seen flat or decreasing sales of season tickets—38% decrease, 37% flat, 23% increase.

- In addition, 45% of theatres reported that total ticket sales had decreased since 2019, with 22% remaining the same, and 32% able to increase their total ticket sales
- Since 2019, 58% of theatres have increased their ticket prices, while 38% stayed the same, and only 2% reduced prices.
- For the current season, the majority, 52%, see tickets sales remaining stable, with 39% seeing an upward trends. Only 8% see a decrease in ticket sales.
- Looking ahead to next season, 30% see ticket sales increasing, 22% see sales remaining the same, and only 3% see tickets decreasing for next season. *However, it is telling that 45% of theatres could not predict what the future might hold for them.*
- While not all theatres have sponsors, for those that do, 31% saw an increase in sponsor income, while 31% reported a decrease, and 25% said sponsor income remained the same.
 - *It's interesting to note that 25% of theatres reported fewer sponsors than in past years, while 20% saw an increase in the number of sponsors, and 16% saw no change.*

What is the current annual budget size of your theatre?



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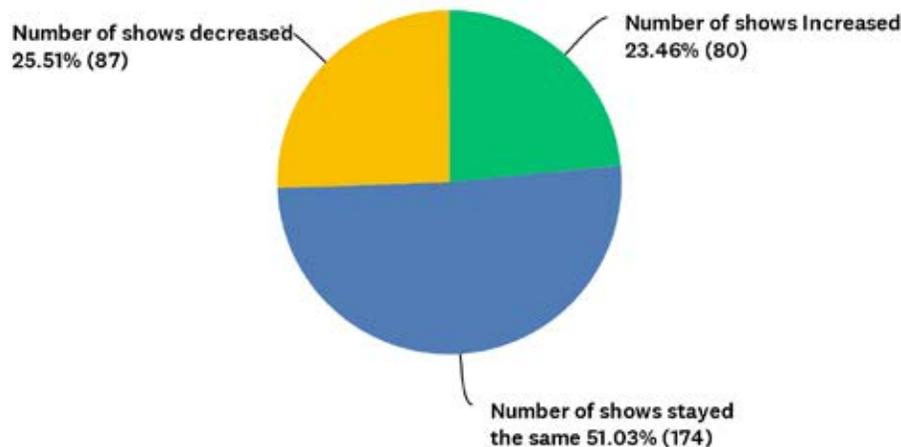
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Programming

- A majority of theatres, 51%, were producing the same number of shows as before, 23.5% increased the number of shows, and 25.5% reduced the number of shows.
- The largest block of theatres (46.2%) was producing more well-known titles, 37.4% made no changes to the types of shows they selected, and 16.3% indicated they were producing more titles that audiences might not know.
- In a related finding, 53.4% of theatres say they are programming the same type of shows as professional theatres around them, while 28.3% choose more well-known titles, and 18.2% choose more risky shows than nearby professional theatres.
- In choosing shows that feature diverse writers and/or performers, the largest block of theatres, 37.4%, said their programming was the same as it was in 2019. Specifically, 31.5% of theatres said they were selecting more shows featuring diverse roles, and 22.7% said they were selecting more shows written by diverse writers. However, 24.4% said they have not been able to increase diversity because they lacked the resources. (This question resulted in a large number of answers, detailed in the full results available online - aact.org/ct-survey.)

Have you changed your programming in terms of number of shows?



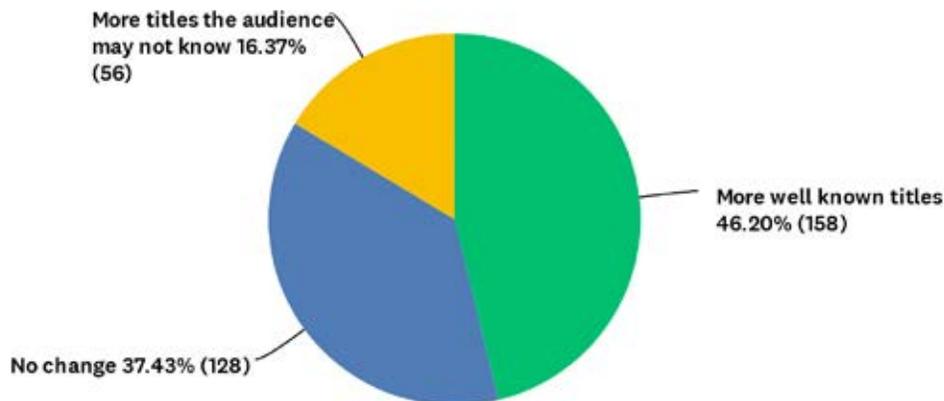
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Are you choosing more well-known titles or taking chances with titles the audience may not know compared to pre-pandemic years?



Actors and Volunteers

- The largest block of theatres, 40.7%, have seen an increase in their acting pool this season, while 31.3% have remained the same, and 26.1% report a decrease in the pool of acting talent.
- However, in the case of technical and general volunteers, the numbers are reversed, with 45.1% of theatres reporting a marked decrease in volunteers, with 26.6% staying the same and only 15.2% seeing an increase.

Paid Staff and Participants

- The largest group of responding theatres, 54.25%, have paid staff. Not surprisingly, 75% of theatres with budgets over \$100,000 had paid staff, while over 75%

of theatres with budgets under \$100,000 have no paid staff. Of those theatres with paid staff, 73.1% reported all of their positions were filled, while 26.8% were still looking for employees.

- In terms of paying people involved in productions, 37.2% said they only pay professionals for those services they provide as a living (musicians, directors, designers, etc.), while 34% reimburse participants for out-of-pocket expenses, and 26.1% don't pay anyone.
- When we break these numbers down by budget size a different picture emerges. In the case of theatres with budgets of under \$50,000, 50% don't pay anyone, while 50% pay something. That number changes significantly with budgets above the \$50,000

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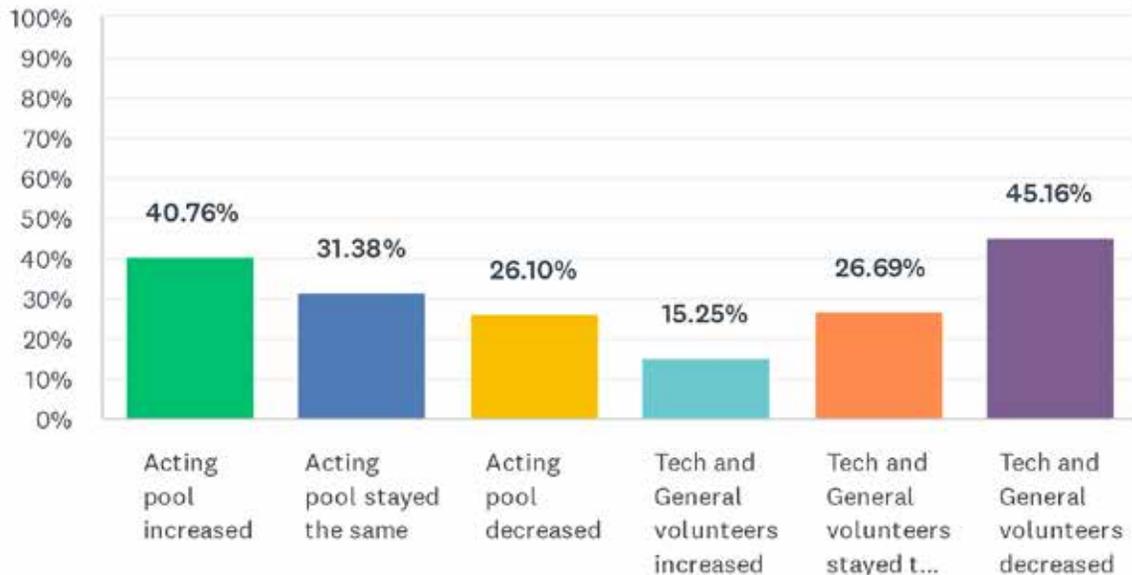
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Has your acting/volunteer pool changed in numbers?



threshold, where over 75% are paying production participants something.

- Quite a few theatres give stipends or other funds to directors, tech crews, and others who put in the most time on a show, other than actors. In addition, 13.4% offer a standard small stipend/reimbursement

to actors and crews to cover gas/travel, baby-sitting or other personal expenses related to rehearsals and performances.

- A few theatres charge participation or costume fees for their actors. This may reflect educational programs with tuition-based programming.

The results of the AACT survey are enlightening on a number of levels, showing that the state of community theatre is not as dire as some would have it, while also acknowledging areas of real concern. They also help you judge how to interpret your own theatre's situation as compared to others', providing insights into your organization's past, current, and future.

For last thoughts, we turn to the recent General Social Survey by the National Endowment for the Arts. It found while performing arts companies in general have experienced large setbacks since 2019, yet, "throughout it all, we've also seen people gravitate to arts venues and activities for social connectedness and a sense of healing."

Such is the power of theatre.

National Directors Conference: Lessons Learned



In November 2023, more than 80 community theatre directors and executive leaders gathered in San Antonio, Texas, for the 22nd AACT National Directors Conference. Launched in 1979 for full-time community theatre directors and employees from the greater Midwest area, it has since partnered with AACT and grown into a national event. This year, over 40 new member-theatres attended—the largest new attendee participation seen in a very long time.

Lead by Facilitator Michael D. Fox, Vice President and Chief Operations Officer for the Hale Centre Theatre in Salt Lake City, Utah, and President of FoxDenArts, the conference served as a forum for participants to share challenges and solutions, discover new trends and innovations in theatre, and network with colleagues from across the country.

AACT is committed to making sure that each participant is able to walk away with new information and the connections to meet the unique needs of that director and the organization. Following the conference, we interviewed three directors from around the country, asking them for the top three things they learned at the conference. Here's what they told us.



Katie Hallman,
Theatre Cedar Rapids,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Hallman assumed the role of Executive Director at Theatre Cedar Rapids (TCR) in March 2017. Before this, she served as Managing Director for Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré in New Orleans, after nearly a decade working in New York City, where she was a

Senior Director with Manhattan Concert Productions (MCP). At MCP, Hallman was responsible for more than 55 concerts at prestigious venues nationwide, including the launch of MCP's *Broadway in Concert* at Lincoln Center. With a background also including the Guthrie Theater and Le Poisson Rouge, Hallman earned her Bachelor of Arts from Luther College and a Master of Arts in Music Business from New York University.

What are the top three things I learned at the National Directors Conference?

1. *Making new connections with data.* For example, one way to measure your theatre's impact in the community is to take your population size and divide it by the average number of attendees who regularly attend your events/shows. Analyzing the population-to-attendees ratios of conference participants, we found that a large number had impact ratings between six and nine. Those of us in this range were then able to find meaningful connections with similar companies, sharing how we think and solve problems, providing valuable insights beyond traditional budget and staffing considerations.
2. *A rapidly changing industry.* Instead of outlining industry differences (like community, commercial, or nonprofit), focus on self-identifying and finding like-minded peers who share common mission objectives, programming priorities, and a commitment to community impact. The industry is changing rapidly and for the better. Let those who want the rules hold onto them while we evolve.

continued on page 16 ▶

- Theatre leadership is in an exciting transition.* Six years ago, succession concerns ruled, but this year over half of the conference attendees are first-timers, and were new to their roles. I loved digging into priorities around building expert teams, safety in intimacy, and transparency in mental health support and management.



National Directors Conference participants enjoy socializing and sharing ideas during a break during the conference



Noah Taylor,
Market Theatre,
South Carolina

Taylor is a co-founder and Executive Artistic Director of Market Theatre, located in downtown Anderson, South Carolina. He holds a Master of Arts in Theatre and a Bachelor of Arts in both Graphic Design and Theatre. He formerly served three years as the Community Theatre Chair for the South Carolina Theatre Association

and two years on staff with the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC).

What are the top three things I learned at the National Directors Conference?

- We are a community.* Managing, executive, and artistic directors are so siloed. For a long time, I isolated myself even more by thinking that my situation was unique, or too particular to our own local circumstances. Attending the National Directors Conference showed me that there is a community out there of people who do and care about the same work that I do. I loved that in addition to being in the same room with 85 other directors, the conference allowed me to work closely with other community theatre leaders who are in similar operations, based on staff size and budget.
- Our work is valuable.* The scope of topics covered in the conference covered everything from board management to casting, self-care, development, and more. Talking through these issues made me realize the value

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of my role and go home with a renewed sense of confidence and love for my work.

3. *We need each other.* Because we're so geographically spread apart in our work, there are so few opportunities to collaborate and sharpen each other. The AACT National Directors Conference is not only a place to meet and rejuvenate, but an event I can't afford to miss!



National Directorss Conference 2023 facilitator Michael D. Fox and AACT Board member Allen Ebert receive feedback from conference participants



Jarrod Kopp, Theatre Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Jarrod Kopp has served as Executive Director of Theatre Tulsa since 2015. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University, where he studied journalism and theatre. He has spent more than 25 years in various communication fields, including journalism, PR, advertising, and corporate communications. During those years, Kopp spent his spare evenings working with various local theatre companies as an actor and director while also consulting with them pro bono on branding and marketing. He was part

of those companies as an actor and director while also consulting with them pro bono on branding and marketing. He was part

continued on page 18 ▶

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of the team that rescued Theatre Tulsa from near-bankruptcy in 2012, and applied his business experience and passion for theatre into a massive reinvigoration of the company that is still growing rapidly to this day.

What are the top three things I learned at the National Directors Conference?

1. *Subscribers and Memberships:* I completely soaked up the numerous discussions about programs and strategies that convert and retain audiences as loyal subscribers and members. Inspired by that input, I took a deep dive into my own theatre's subscription and membership offerings, and as a result, developed a unique hybrid model that we are excited to roll out this spring.
2. *New Audiences:* Another insight from the conference was the various ways our peers are reaching out to new

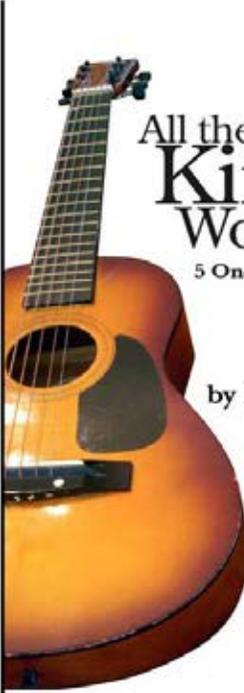
audiences. Hearing about the success stories of other theatres that targeted specific audience segments, such as tourists or veterans, pushed me to reevaluate our own audience development strategies. I realized that there are untapped opportunities to engage with even more diverse communities in our area and expand our audience base, which in turn reinvigorated my grants planning in 2024.

3. *Real Talk:* While the conference sessions were informative and inspiring, the real magic often happened during the breakout sessions and the informal networking that took place over meals or drinks. These impromptu discussions with colleagues were invaluable sources of insights and support. From best practices for self-care, to discussing the latest business tools and innovative fundraising ideas, those conversations provided me with fresh perspectives and a ton of practical advice. They have saved me time, stress, and money, while helping me solve common challenges that we all share.

I came to this year's conference suffering from a major bout of burnout, and left with a renewed energy and plenty of fresh ideas to keep our company growing. I have attended 4-5 of these, and this was the best one I've experienced. I'm very grateful to AACT for providing this resource for us.

While the next National Directors Conference won't take place until November 2025, AACT is offering two virtual Community Theatre Management Conferences (CTMC) this April. CTMC brings together administrators from all levels of theatre—from the volunteer who "runs things around here" to the "just starting" part-time administrator, to the full-time professional manager. For more information on this year's virtual gathering, see page 22, or visit aact.org/ctmc.

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Take Part in World Theatre Day

March 27, 2024

Since 1962, World Theatre Day has been celebrated on March 27 by theatre organizations and theatre lovers all over the world.



Created by the International Theatre Institute (ITI), the international non-governmental organization for the performing arts, World Theatre Day is a day to underscore the value and importance of theatre as an art form, and its positive impact on individuals and communities.

National and international theatre events are organized to mark the occasion, but many activities are local. To find out how

you can participate in the celebration of World Theatre Day, visit world-theatre-day.org

Each year, a World Theatre Day International Message is circulated, in which a figure of world stature shares his or her reflections on the theme of Theatre and a Culture of Peace. The first message was written in 1962 by Jean Cocteau, French playwright, designer, filmmaker, visual artist and critic. All messages from the first, and the years since, are published on the organization's website.



The author of the 2024 World Theatre Day message is Jon Fosse, Norwegian writer, playwright, and 2023 Nobel Laureate in Literature. His message will be published on March 27 on the organization's website, listed above.

An international non-governmental organization for the performing arts, ITI was founded in 1948 by UNESCO and the international theatre community.

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ELEVATE YOUR THEATRE JOURNEY WITH AACT MEMBERSHIP!

For over 35 years, AACT has been passionately dedicated to providing theatres with cutting-edge resources, ensuring your success in the spotlight. As we eagerly step into 2024, the anticipation for the thrills awaiting community theatres and our cherished AACT Members is palpable. A heartfelt shout-out to our current members—your support makes you an indispensable part of the AACT family and network!

If the AACT community is yet uncharted territory for you, there's no better time to explore the myriad benefits that await. Consider giving yourself or your theatre the gift of AACT Membership, where the magic truly unfolds! Annual memberships run from September 1 through August 31, and for added flexibility, we've got monthly memberships too. Uncover the possibilities at aact.org/fees.

Let's unwrap some of the exclusive perks that come with being an AACT Member:

Discounts on AACT Events, including:

- Virtual Community Theatre Management Conferences on April 5-7 and April 12-14, 2024.
- AACT Member Roundtables – Available to members only—and free.

Individual Members Receive:

- Discounted or free access to professional development programs, events, and conferences.
- Your key to the treasure trove: member-only online library and resources.
- A digital and/or printed copy of *Spotlight* magazine, plus weekly digital communications.
- Exclusive member-only discounts on scripts, rentals, and theatre services.
- Forge connections through peer-to-peer networking with theatre professionals nationwide.

Organizational Members Receive:

- Exclusive rates or free access to professional development programs, events, and conferences.
- Access to the member-only online resources and library.
- Member-only discounts on scripts, rentals, and theatre services.
- An unbeatable 30% discount on ASCAP License (available for purchase May-September).
- A 5% discount on BMI License (available for purchase May-September; combine with ASCAP for epic savings!).
- Access to the Church Mutual Insurance Program.

- A digital and/or printed copy of *Spotlight* magazine, plus weekly digital communications.
- Forge connections with other organizational members and theatre professionals nationwide.
- Flaunt your AACT pride with the use of the membership logo and decal

Discover more about the treasure trove of benefits at aact.org/benefits.

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Visit aact.org/join or scan the QR code for a seamless experience.



And if you're a first-time member, prepare to be delighted:

- First-time organizations receive a 50% discount on their second year.
- First-time individuals can join for a mere \$50!

Facing financial challenges? Reach out to the ever-helpful Membership Coordinator Karen Matheny at karen@aact.org to explore flexible payment plans.

We're ushering in the future with a digital flair! AACT has streamlined all membership join/renew processes online at aact.org. Need a guiding star? Call us at 817-732-3177. For those who cherish the paper trail, invoicing is just a request away.

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Virtual Community Theatre Management Conference

As the spotlight shines on 2024, theatre enthusiasts and community leaders eagerly await AACT's groundbreaking Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC). This year's event takes center stage in the virtual realm, offering a unique opportunity for theatre makers to connect, learn, and grow together.

The two separate 2024 CTMC sessions unfold over two weekends, allowing participants to choose the time zone that best suits their schedules.

From April 5 to April 7, the Pacific Time Zone Session will be facilitated by Dorinda Toner, while the Eastern Time Zone Session, under the facilitation of Steven Butler, will run from April 12 to April 14.

This year's conference is participant-focused, limiting each session to 50 individuals, in order to foster dynamic interactions, spark brainstorming sessions, and allow the community to build upon each other's ideas.

CTMC caters to administrators at all levels of theatre, embracing full-time, part-time or volunteer—new and seasoned alike. Through a pre-conference questionnaire, enrolled participants will shape the discourse, ensuring that discussions speak directly to their unique challenges and experiences.

The conference covers a wide array of topics, including Sales and Marketing, Fundraising, Event Planning, Volunteers, Season and Play Selections, Classes, Educational Outreach, Box Office Operations, Virtual Programming, Zoom Meetings, Safety, and Board Governance.

Each three-day conference offers a diverse schedule. Facilitators Dorinda Toner and Steven Butler, both esteemed figures in the theatre world, have extensive experience and



Dorinda Toner

contributions to the performing arts, bringing a wealth of knowledge to guide participants through this transformative experience.

AACT encourages those interested in participating to secure their spots for this virtual adventure, with fees set at \$150 for AACT members and \$175 for non-members.

You may reserve virtual seats online for either Session I (Pacific Time Zone) or Session II (Eastern Time Zone) at aact.org/ctmc.



Steven Butler

"The virtual option felt very safe for me and I was able to connect and learn, all from the comfort of my own home, with my trusty dog by my side."

AACT offers two CTMC Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Scholarships for each virtual conference session, as a way to support and mentor theatre makers of color. The application deadline is March 15, 2024.

Cori Veverka, the Artistic Director of Limelight Theatre Company/Oswegoland Park District, shares how she benefitted greatly from her first CTMC: "The virtual option felt very safe for me and I was able to connect and learn, all from the comfort of my own home, with my trusty dog by my side. After that first experience of soaking everything up at the CTMC, this 'sponge' is ready for the next opportunities to connect, learn, and grow with AACT."

The CTMC Virtual Conference promises a unique blend of insightful discussions, networking opportunities, and a renewed passion for theatre management. As theatre makers gather from their homes or offices, the 2024 CTMC is set to leave participants with a treasure trove of ideas and a strengthened nationwide network of colleagues.

Don't miss the chance to be part of this innovative and transformative event in the world of community theatre management. The curtain is rising—reserve your virtual seat by visiting aact.org/ctmc now!

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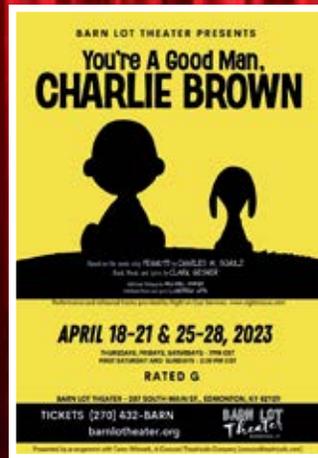
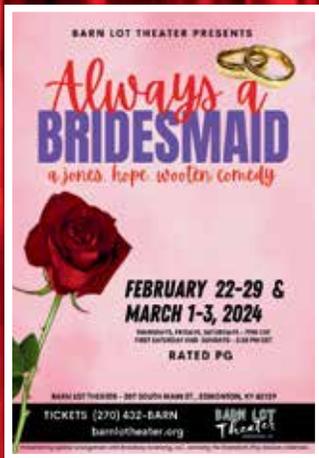
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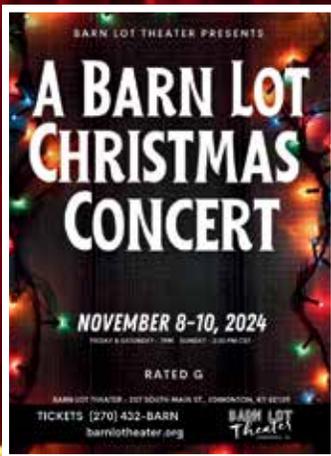
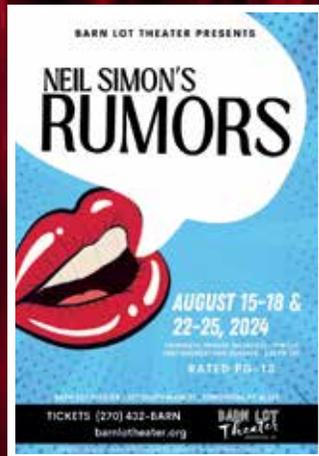


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Clean Your House

Thoughts on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Dorinda Toner, AACT Board of Directors

“There cannot be any sign of living in this house!” Chris Fleming shouts in his hysterical YouTube short, “Company Is Coming.” In this sketch, Fleming plays Gayle, an Everymom, running around, trying to get the house absolutely perfect for company. When this video first came out, my kids showed it to me, gleefully exclaiming: “Mom, It’s YOU!” Ha, ha, very funny. And, yes, guilty as charged.

To be fair, I come by this behavior honestly. As a kid, my dad worked a public job with his office in our home. Folks dropped by all the time, often unannounced; it was normal to have people stop by for meetings, classes, coffee, or just to chat. As kids, we were expected to keep the common areas of our home “company ready” at all times. Even after cleaning, I remember my mom apologizing for the “mess” any time someone came over—she wanted everyone to feel at home. Can you relate?

When I first began my DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) journey, I heard one question over and over: “Why don’t more diverse folks come to our auditions, serve on our boards, and sit in our audiences? We invite them, we want

them, we are good folks with great intentions—what’s going on?” It’s a really good question. Here’s what someone I look up to once told me: “It’s very simple, you don’t invite someone to dinner without cleaning the house first.”

In other words, before we invite people in, we need to clean house.

We shouldn’t opt for putting a sign on the front door—“Enter at your own risk,” or “Ignore the mess; the maid is on vacation.” We need to take a closer, more critical look at what’s happening inside our spaces. What metaphorical spider webs linger in corners? What dust bunnies hide under chairs? Are we inviting folks into spaces where our equipment, wigs, makeup, and mic tape aren’t designed for them? Are we challenging ourselves to tell stories outside of our own experiences? Are we crafting our audition notices through a lens of inclusion? Are we creating opportunities for humans with neurodiversity and/or non-visible disabilities? Are we providing accommodations when equality is at question? Are we putting policies in place to ensure safety and respect? Does everyone feel valued? Do our theatre spaces feel like home?

Racial disparity, gatekeeping, and lack of access have haunted our institutions for a long time. Inequity is messy and ingrained—so ingrained we’ve let the dishes pile up. We may not see that metaphorical spot in the rug that we’ve gotten used to stepping over—but it’s there. None of us love shining a light on the messier parts of our homes. Some of us may fear that we don’t have the right equipment; maybe we don’t even know how to clean those really dirty spaces.

Like cleaning, DEIB is a process that needs regular maintenance. It’s okay if we don’t get everything sparkling clean right away. Many of us need to start a decluttering process before we can get to scrubbing those fine details with a toothbrush. But we do all need to start.

So, let’s crack open the windows, let in some fresh air, and pick up our dusters. There’s work to do.

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Dorinda Toner is the Producing Artistic Director of Twilight Theater Company in Portland, Oregon. She has been performing on stages across North America for over 36 years. A member of AACT’s Spotlight Editorial Team, she serves on the AACT Board of Directors and is Vice President of PATA (Portland Area Theatre Alliance).

It's hoot. Actually, that is too mild a word. "- Cincinnati Enquirer
"It's a wonderfully silly show with a strong political bite."- Broadway World

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Penguins on Stages from Tampa to Tacoma

The Penguin Project Celebrates 20 Years of Producing Magic

Mary Doveton, AACT *Spotlight* Editorial Team

Science may tell us that penguins are flightless birds, but Penguin Project enthusiasm and imagination have been soaring over community theatre stages across the country for over 20 years.



In 2004, Dr. Andrew Morgan had the audacious idea of partnering young people with special needs with their neurotypical peers to rehearse and perform musicals. “Dr. Andy,” as he’s known, is currently Professor Emeritus of Clinical Pediatrics and the former Head of the Division of Child Development at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria. He has been treating children with disabilities for over 35 years. He is also a theatre performer and director.

Today, 55 active chapters from Tacoma, Washington, to Annapolis, Maryland, are creating magic as part of the Penguin Project

His vision called for having children with disabilities assume the role of artists, while their peers would become mentors. Together, they took part in a four-month-long journey to stage the musical *Annie*. Dr. Andy says the show was such a success that the group decided to continue to stage one show a year in Peoria, adding, “We had no expectations beyond that.”

However, after several successful years, parents of the participants began looking for a way to expand benefits of the program to special needs kids beyond Peoria. The Penguin Project Foundation was created, with the idea of replicating the program in other locations. After several other

communities in Illinois embraced the concept, it captured the imagination and the enthusiasm of theatres across the country. Today, 55 active chapters from Tacoma, Washington, to Annapolis, Maryland, are creating this magic as part of the Penguin Project.



On April 13 this year, a gala will be held in Peoria to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Penguin Project Foundation. The gala will feature returning Penguin talent reprising their original roles, along with Broadway performers.

Since 2004, thousands of young people across the country have benefited and had their lives changed through participation in this program. Morrie Enders, Executive Director at Lincoln Community Playhouse in Lincoln, Nebraska, describes the program as “transformative” and the highlight of his 37 years of community theatre leadership. Young artists with developmental disabilities ranging from Down Syndrome to autism, as well as visual, hearing, and mobility issues, cerebral palsy, and learning disabilities, gather with volunteer peers. During the rehearsal months they sing, they dance, they act, and, most important, they get to know each other.

continued on page 29 ▶



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The Actors

This award-winning comedy tells the story of a man so grief-stricken by the death of his parents he hires two actors to be his Mom and Dad.

"Brazenly original and unexpectedly profound."

John Thomason, Boca Mag



One More Yesterday

This critically-acclaimed musical tells the story of Lydia Taylor, a faded Broadway star, so desperate to work she takes a job in a no-budget slasher-horror movie called "The Vigilante Granny" and her whole life changes.

"Moving, humorous, tuneful and heartfelt...deserves many tomorrows."

William Hirschman, FloridaTheaterOnStage.com



Grindr Mom

This award-winning one-women comedy tells the story of a married Mormon woman who joins a gay-dating app called Grindr to learn more about her gay son and winds up learning a whole lot more.

"This show has something for everyone...destined to develop far-reaching legs."

Mindy Leaf, Around Town



(left to right) Kimball McClure (mentor) and Sean Neal (artist) in the 2015 Lincoln Community Playhouse Penguin Project production of Disney's The Little Mermaid JR.

Rachel Bohnsack, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Northern Starz Center for the Performing Arts in Ramsey, Minnesota, loves being part of the Penguin Family. She says, "From the first show we saw eight years ago, we knew this program would fit perfectly into our community and theatre. We have artists come to our program who have never had a friend before, some who have even contemplated suicide, but they leave with a sense of accomplishment and friendships with other artists and mentors."

This sentiment was echoed by a mother in Lawrence, Kansas, who described her 16-year-old daughter, who after taking part, received her first-ever telephone call and invitation to see a movie with new friends.

Nora Paine, Producing Artistic Director of the New Tampa Players in Tampa, Florida, says, "Everyone should experience a standing ovation once in their life. There is nothing that will build self-confidence quite like a crowd of hundreds cheering you on, clapping for you, and laughing at

continued on page 30 ▶

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the jokes you make. The Penguin Project provides a safe place where you can be you, where everyone in the room wants the best for you and is in your corner. It is life-changing for our artists, our peer mentors, our staff and our families.”

The anthem for the Penguin Project is “Don’t Stop Believin’.” You can hear it pumped out by every Penguin participant in every chapter at every rehearsal and performance across the country

A father in Lawrence explained that two of his sons are athletes and the family regularly cheers them on during games. The third son has mobility limitations, and the father described what a joy it was to see his family given the opportunity to publicly cheer for that son, as well.

Theatre institutions themselves have also seen great benefits in the program. Chad-Alan Carr, Founding Executive/Artistic Director of the Gettysburg Community Theatre in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, contracted with the Foundation in 2014. He says, “It is one of



Melissa Persaud

(left to right) Sean Faerber and Matthew Persaud in the 2022 Northern Starz Center for the Performing Arts Penguin Project production of Disney's Beauty and the Beast JR

the most beautiful, life-changing, inspiring programs that I had ever heard of or even imagined. Not only did it create an entire new volunteer, sponsor, and audience base, but it saved our theatre during a period of financial struggle.”

A colorful advertisement for 'The Rainbow Fish Musical'. At the top, a vibrant, multi-colored fish swims among bubbles. The title 'The Rainbow Fish Musical' is written in large, playful fonts. Below the title, it says 'SPREAD THE MAGIC OF FRIENDSHIP AND SHARING WITH THIS 60-MINUTE HIT MUSICAL!'. The bottom section features the Pioneer Drama Service logo, two circular callouts for 'TYA VERSION CAST OF 5-9' and 'YOUTH THEATRE VERSION CAST OF 15-30', and the website 'PioneerDrama.com'. The background is light blue with green seaweed and bubbles.

Looking back on 20 years of Penguin life, Dr. Andy is proud that the program received the 2017 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. But he is perhaps most proud of what the kids have accomplished over the years and how they have blossomed into productive young adults.

Data on the Penguin website shows that 100% of participating parents report growth in connection with other families and new friendships. In addition, 96% of young people feel prouder of themselves after participation, and 80% of young mentors feel "a lot better" about others being different from themselves. All reporting participants experienced development in singing, dancing, music, and acting.

The anthem for the Penguin Project is "Don't Stop Believin'." You can hear it pumped out by every Penguin participant in every chapter at every rehearsal and performance across the country, and listen as it spills over into birthday parties, wedding celebrations, bat mitzvahs, and local talent shows whenever Penguins take to the stage.

In a society (and an arts culture) looking for new ways to highlight diversity, equity and inclusion, this 20-year-old program captures that essence with joy, excitement, confidence, and a powerful look at friendship.

Additional information about the 20th Anniversary Gala, as well as information about becoming a new Penguin Chapter is available on the website: penguinproject.org.



James Cass/Picture This of Palma Ceia

(left to right) Front row: Zoe DeJoseph, Manning Reade, Back row: Patty Smithey, Katie Welch, and Emily Buonquisti in the April 2023 New Tampa Players Penguin Project production of Disney's Beauty and the Beast JR



Mary Doveton is founder and retired Executive Director at Theatre Lawrence (Kansas), past AACT Board Member, an AACT Fellow, and a member of the AACT Spotlight Editorial Team.



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AACT Welcomes New Staff



Michelle Swink
Marketing/Communications Specialist

Michelle handles communications, including e-news and promos, promotes AACT programs, and works to increase AACT visibility.

For her role as Marketing and Communications Specialist, she brings both a passion for, and extensive experience in, the arts. Michelle showed an interest in the performing arts from an early age, directing skits and writing stories. She began her acting journey at 15, co-founding a community theatre at 17.

Her professional involvement in the arts has been multifaceted, including acting, directing, casting, marketing, and administrative roles. With a decade of experience as a talent agent, representing a diverse talent pool, Michelle has a deep understanding of the performing arts industry, and a strong background in marketing, public relations, and graphic design.

In her personal life, Michelle enjoys family time, photography, ceramics, glass art, and voice-over work. She hopes that her

passion for the arts and her commitment to elevating cultural expression will make her a valuable addition to AACT.

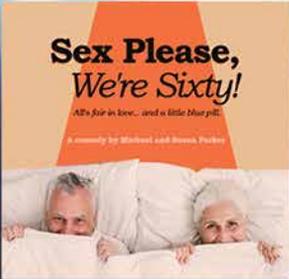


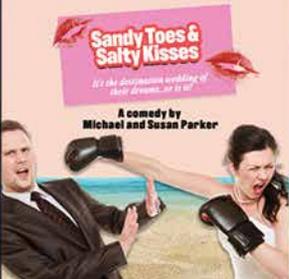
Shawn Cummings
Administrative Assistant

Shawn's love of the arts and desire to spread theatre far and wide motivates him in his new role at AACT.

Born and raised in Texas, Shawn has been involved in the theatrical arts from a young age, winning awards from his local theatres in recognition of his audio/visual and set-design skills. He attended the University of Texas at Arlington and has worked for a multitude of theatres in different capacities across the United States.

In his personal life, Shawn enjoys woodworking, sports, and live music. He is a devoted father and husband and makes a mean steak. He hopes to continue making theatre and the fine arts more accessible to the general community.







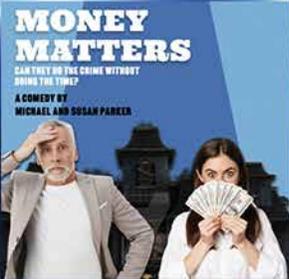
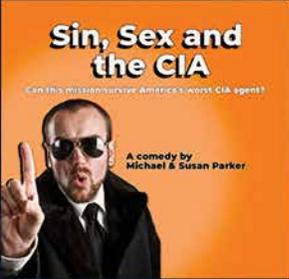
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The AACT Advantage

Lou Ursone, Executive Director of Curtain Call, Inc. of Stamford, Connecticut—and a member of the Spotlight Editorial Team—asks theatre women why they are part of AACT.



JAMI SALTER

Executive Director
Central Texas Theatre at The
Vive Les Arts Societe
Killeen, Texas

Story time! Way back in the dark ages—in the fall of 2019—I was given the absolute pleasure of becoming the Executive Director of Central Texas Theatre (CTT).

I have been a director most of my life, but at the time, never been an ED. Our theatre had faced quite a bit of hardship just prior to my arrival. As a matter of fact, without the hard work of a few very loyal patrons and citizens of the community, the CTT would have closed permanently.

Six months after my arrival, Covid reared its ugly head. Much of my job at that point (like many of us) was simply to find creative ways to make money and retain audience interest. We scheduled very small productions and we had to cancel a show and postpone one, but safely managed to keep producing art. Then, all of the sudden, Texas reopened! All of it. All at once. And I realized I didn't have the foggiest idea what to do next—I had been winging it for so long. All the plans I'd made fell by the wayside. I felt completely alone and at a loss.

Fortunately, Central Texas Theatre has been a member of AACT for many, many years. So, in the spring of 2021, when the National Theatre Directors Conference was scheduled for the fall in San Antonio, I jumped at it.

From the moment I walked into that group of fellow theatre leaders, that feeling of loneliness vanished. Over the three days of the conference, I met so many incredibly kind and supportive people. I had pages in a notebook full of questions that were answered with love and generosity. I made connections that continue to this day.

I have continued my journey with AACT. I now spend hours in webinars provided by the organization, reading scripts recommended by peers, and still bother other members with what they must think of as the craziest of questions.

I know new members will have the same experience. (And if I can answer your crazy question, or help you feel less alone, please let me know by phone at 254-624-6791 or 254-526-9090, or find me at vlakilleen.org)



ANDREA BINGHAM

Production Manager
Landmark Community Theatre
Thomaston, Connecticut

Being a member of AACT has been vital to keeping our organization alive. Through the recent challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, it has been invaluable to have a large peer group who are facing the same everyday struggles and being able to share those commonalities. We

discuss our hardships in a large format and discover possible solutions with a determinate success rate. Where else can you get such accurate results?

Through AACT, you no longer have to guess how to handle certain situations or how to mount a particular production. You have people that you can reach out to at any moment and ask those questions. In a time when the arts are so essential to the education and growth of our community, AACT provides us with the support we need to succeed.

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OFFICIAL SELECTION
AACTE
ATLANTA MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
2022

BOOK AND MUSIC BY
DANA LAMB-SCHAUBROECK

Don't you wanna join the choir and sing along?

Regionally Speaking: US Army Community Theatre

AACT's membership consists of organizations and individuals from 11 Regions. Each Region has a Regional Representative who serves on the AACT Board of Directors. (For more on AACT Regions, including a map, visit aact.org/regions.)

The Representative's role is an important one. It includes bringing regional concerns and achievements to the Board's attention, providing information about AACT programs and services to members in the Region, and furthering communication and networking among those members.



*AACT Region X represents US Army Community Theatres. Its Representative is **Dane Winters**, US Army Europe Entertainment Program Manager, IMCOM E G9.*

October 1, 2023, marked my 37th year as a member of US Army Europe Entertainment. On Oct. 31, 2023, I retired—well, *semi*-retired.

I first came to Germany for only one or two years, taking a short break from my acting career in the

US. However, the Army's theatre program's unique mission, as well as the talented and supportive colleagues, lassoed me in. I count my blessings every day that I have been incredibly fortunate to be part of an amazing and historic program.

Back row: Alan Buxkemper (Stuttgart Entertainment Director), Quiana Clark-Roland (AACT Executive Director), Nate Records (Wiesbaden Entertainment Director), Jerry Brees (Vicenza Entertainment Director), Naythen Rinehart (KMC Onstage Theatre Specialist), Brett Harwood (SHAPE Entertainment Director), Bob Chung (Ansbach Tech Director)

Front Row: Victoria Hanrahan (Ansbach Entertainment Director), Dane Winters (IMCOM E Entertainment Program Manager), and Ryan Rigazzi (SHAPE Theatre Specialist)



With my “retirement,” it seems like a great time to reflect on our unique program, AACT Region X, and why “community” is even more important to our program, our participants, our staff, and to me. (For more on our mission, history, and programs, visit ArmyEuropeEntertainment.com.)

First, let me explain my “semi-retirement.” I was honored when Tommy Mize, the Director of Installation Management Command Europe, our governing agency, invited me to stay on staff in a part-time position. This allowed me to focus on maintaining US Army Europe Entertainment and assisting the staff in continuing their valuable service to soldiers, civilians, retirees, and their families.

Harris Cashes Out!

by **Londos D'Arrigo**

writer for JOAN RIVERS, PHYLLIS DILLER and LILY TOMLIN

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Reviews and photos: www.londos.net

Publisher: www.canadianplayoutlet.com





United States Army Garrison (USAG) Ansbach soldiers, CW5 Mark Duplessie (left) as Smee, CPT Andrew Tehvand (right) as Captain Hook, and civilians in the cast rehearse Peter Pan JR at Terrace Playhouse in Ansbach, Germany

For many, the idea of the US Army not only founding, but continuing to support and fund a community theatre program seems incongruous. However, the word “community” is the vital concept at the heart of our program. I’d only worked in few community theatres in my career, but after working with Army Entertainment, I have come to understand what “community” theatre means and why it’s of vital importance.

The US Army actually has a long history of theatre, music, and entertainment. “Soldiers entertaining soldiers” is an idea dating back to the Revolutionary War and campfire songs. Even then the Army was aware of the importance of community—especially to those serving their nation far from home. Army Entertainment provides soldiers, civilians, and their families the chance to enjoy and be part of a show. More importantly, it offers them the much-needed sense of community.

As we know, being part of a show, whether onstage or backstage, creates an instant family of friends, and this has greatly benefitted soldiers and their families. They tell us that the Army Entertainment program not only gave them a sense of family and home, but was often vital in their recovery from mental stress, physical injury, PTSD, and other impacts of being a fighting soldier.

Over the years, the Army Entertainment professionals have not only brought community theatre to foreign lands, but also maintained a high-level of professionalism, innovative theatre,

and ground-breaking programming. Army Entertainment’s history is full of world and European premieres, Tony Award-winners, and launching professional performing careers.. However, it is the “community” the Army Europe Entertainment creates that is the most meaningful to me and my colleagues. It is what we are most proud of and where we have the greatest impact.

'Telling Real Truths'—The Adjudicator's Art

A star-power interview with AACTFest Adjudicator Faye M. Price

Spotlight Editorial Team member Katrina Ploof recently sat down for a phone chat with AACTFest 2023 Adjudicator Faye M. Price about her take on festivals, adjudication, and theatre in general.

For our readers who might not know much about you, can you give us a little about your theatrical background?

I began my theatrical career as an actress. I did that professionally for many years, both in Minneapolis and New York City. At some point while I was still in New York, the August Wilson Fellowship became available at the University of Minnesota. This was a fellowship in African American Dramaturgy and Literary Criticism. I had worked with dramaturgs during my time at the Guthrie in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and had a great experience with them. When I saw that fellowship open up, I knew that was for me. I applied, got accepted, and returned to Minnesota for my education at the university. After that, I was an artistic leader for 20 years, working at the Guthrie and then as Co-Artistic Director at the Pillsbury House Theatre in Minneapolis. Now I freelance, mostly dramaturgy, and do a little directing.

We are lucky that your life journey in the theatre has included your adjudications at many festivals. Can you share a bit about the adjudicator's balancing act, being both an audience member and a participant in the festival experience?

I'm an audience member, but in a different way. When I'm adjudicating, I don't necessarily get caught up in the emotional life of the play. I'm busy looking at costumes and lights. I'm listening to see if I can understand the words. If I happen to fall into *feeling* something, that's terrific. But I try to have a bird's-eye view by looking at the big picture.

I'm also a participant, but again in a different way. When I join the other adjudicators on stage, that's my *job*. We're not scripted. We are telling real truths up there about what we saw and how we feel about how the production was realized.



Jolea Brown, Creative Photography

Faye M. Price adjudicating at AACTFest 2023 in Louisville, Kentucky

Each of the 12 productions that advance to the national festival is unique. Do you have a specific process by which you differentiate and equalize such varied productions?

I go by the AACTFest Adjudicators handbook. That's my bible. It represents the values and the mission of AACT, and those are what I'm here to uphold. I also keep in mind that this is not about *my* taste—it's whether the script I read has been fully realized on the stage.

When a performance is over and you have such a short time to reflect before speaking to the audience, how do you organize your thoughts?

It's hard. I guess what happens is that the biggest things—compliments or issues, whatever rises to the top—is what I talk about first. I want to impart the most important things before my time is up.

The first time I adjudicated, many years ago, I was worried about the very public delivery of my thoughts. But I have gotten very comfortable with that. I just think, let's take it as a "notes session." My job is to talk about what I saw.

The only way a theatre company is going to learn and get better at this is to hear what is seen and heard by the audience. If you want to bring this production to full fruition, let's think through how that happens. As an adjudicator, I'm not interested in changing things. I'm not interested in re-directing. I'm interested in helping to get the best out of everybody who's doing the work.

What do you think makes a successful AACTFest entry—whether state, regional or national?

No matter what level of theatre you are working at, you have to make sure you have the cast to do the work you want to do. So, just because you love *King Lear* and you've always wanted to do it doesn't mean you *should*. If you don't have anyone to play Lear, don't do the play. You need to make sure that you have the abilities needed for the production—whether its scenic or costumes or acting talent. If you don't, then you might want to consider doing another play.

Do you have a memory from AACTFest 2023 that you wanted to hold onto for a while?

I always feel a sense of love and support from a festival audience, and it's very special for me. I could almost cry, because it really moves me to see people making theatre because they *love* making theatre. It means so much to see the art form going on in small towns and large towns. I am always touched by the level of commitment that people show to this world. It moves me and I'm always very sad to leave it when the festival is over.

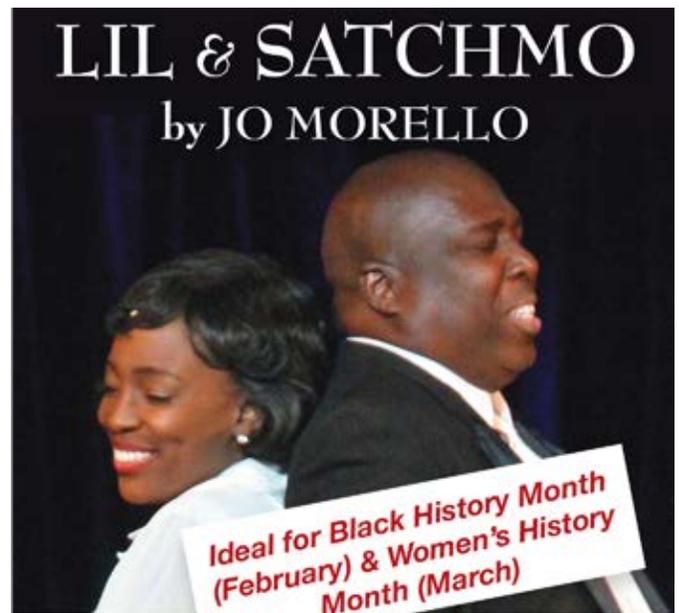
Thank you, Faye, for taking the time to talk with us, for your great work at AACTFest 2023, and all the festivals you have supported over the years.



Katrina Ploof is a native of the great State of Maine, the daughter of a music teacher and a vocalist. In the past 40 years Katrina has directed, choreographed, and coached over 250 productions in the U.S. and Canada including works by Chekov, Shaw, Sondheim, Ibsen, Wilder, Wasserstein, and McNally. She has been adjudicating theatre festi-

vals throughout the U.S. and Canada for over 20 years. Katrina is also a published playwright, and has been a member of the Lincoln Center Theatre Directors Laboratory since 2000. She is a member of the AACT Spotlight Editorial Team

AACTFest 2025, America's national community theatre festival, is set for June 22-29, 2025, in Des Moines, Iowa, at the historic Hoyt Sherman Place Theater. Explore more information about AACTFest at aact.org/festival-cycle. National companies participating in the national festival advance from state and regional festivals. Join the festival cycle: contact your AACT State Contact at aact.org/statecontacts and your AACT Region Representative at aact.org/regionreps for more information on the location and dates for your state and regional festivals.



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Ten Fifteen Productions: Success in the Pacific Northwest

Jon Montgomery, AACT Board of Directors

In the heart of the coastal town of Astoria, Oregon, a theatrical gem known as The Ten Fifteen Productions has positioned itself at the forefront of the local performing arts scene.

Originating in 2018 under a different moniker, the company underwent a renaissance in 2021, solidifying its mission for “enriching the arts in Astoria, Oregon, and the surrounding area through theatre, creative education, and community events.”



Danyelle Tinker

At the helm is the company’s astute and passionate Executive Artistic Director, Danyelle Tinker, who told a local reporter that she seeks to “cultivate a culture of kindness, respect, and inclusivity—where all feel valued and welcome to take part, regardless of their background or experience level. Astoria is so rich with theatre talent. I am happy to be able to offer a space for them to do their thing.”

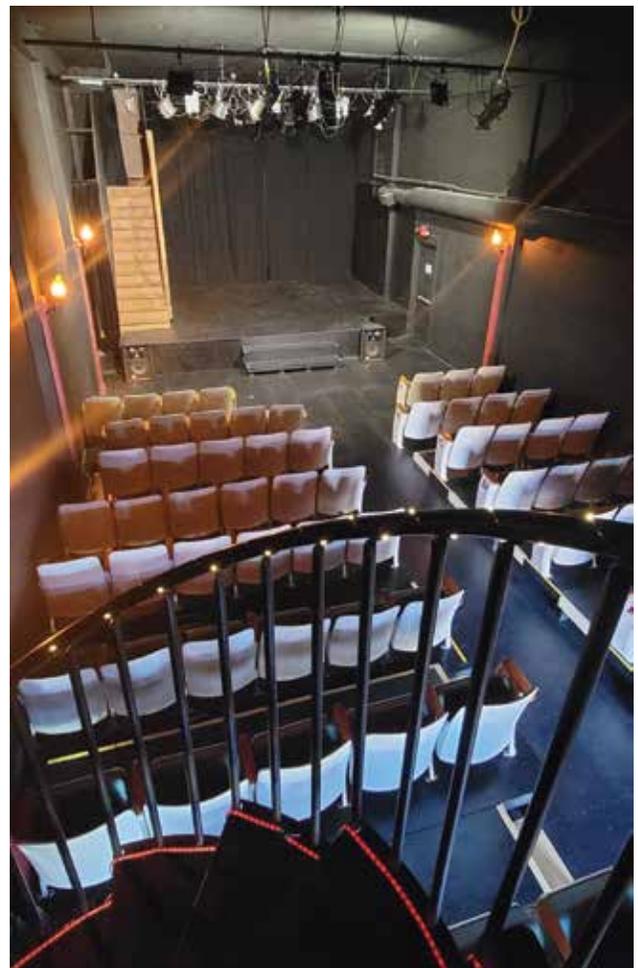
Nestled within the city’s historic Oddfellows Building (whose street address gives the theatre its name), the company’s intimate, 73-seat black box theatre serves as the canvas for Ten Fifteen’s artistic endeavors. All productions share the audience attention with a large staircase at stage right, a unique legacy from the building’s past. According to Tinker, this quirk poses a fun, but also challenging obstacle for directors. Some commit to making the staircase a fixture in their production. Others opt for using the theatre’s large black curtain to mask it. Either way, the staircase is a topic of discussion at every production meeting. It’s also symbolic of the theatre’s roots—and its upward progress.

The process of Ten Fifteen’s season-selection model unfolds with deliberation. Proposals from prospective directors are tendered to Tinker, who evaluates how those might align with the overarching theme of the upcoming season, which unfolds from January to December. (This season’s theme is “Growing Pains.”) She then undertakes a comprehensive assessment of production costs, royalty expenses, staging intricacies, and the availability of cast and

crew. This process results in a carefully crafted season plan, which is unveiled in the fall preceding the season’s start.

Tinker’s insights extend to the challenges of summer events. A diverse array of offerings, including Lauren Gunderson’s comedic play, *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* (running May 31-June 15), showcases a thoughtful curation that extends beyond entertainment. Tinker’s choice of a play resonating with LGBTQ themes aligns with the June observance of Pride Month, underlining the organization’s commitment to inclusivity.

July will see the return of the popular *Simple Salmon*, a collection of “the sketchiest of original sketch comedy,” contributed by writers especially for the event.



Interior view of audience seating and stage with onstage staircase for Ten Fifteen Productions

The low-overhead, 24-hour summer fundraiser, *Performathon*, not only serves as a financial cornerstone, but also as a platform for diverse talents within the community, transcending the confines of traditional productions. In past years, this has included karaoke, authors reading excerpts from their works, an entire quilt created from scratch in two hours at 3:00 a.m., and a knitting piece accompanied by the music of Led Zeppelin.

Budgeting and funding both the summer and regular seasons is a challenging landscape for Tinker to navigate. Ticket sales (50%), donations (25%), and grants (25%) form the triad of the company's funding streams, with Oregon's shortage of arts funding shaping the organization's approach. In response, Tinker cultivates relationships with local foundations and engages patrons through humorous appeals at every performance.

The organization's marketing efforts make use of diverse channels, catering to multiple generations. From traditional avenues such as print and radio, to contemporary platforms like Facebook and Instagram, Ten Fifteen employs a multifaceted approach. The strategic use of boosted posts on social media platforms echoes the advice of theatre marketing consultant (and frequent AACT presenter) Julie Nemitz. It's her belief that the best way to reach new people with your content is through the use of short, entertaining videos or "reels" on Facebook and Instagram.

The successful operation of Ten Fifteen Productions underscores Tinker's adept problem-solving strategies and innovative programming. Drawing from her rich reservoir of experiences, she skillfully navigates hurdles and challenges. Moreover, she actively engages with her teams, fostering a collaborative problem-solving approach.

The challenges faced by Tinker and her company are familiar to all who work in community theatre. However, the work of Ten Fifteen proves that with unwavering persistence, fervent passion, and a steadfast belief in our mission, success becomes an ever-attainable reality.

For more about Ten Fifteen Productions, visit thetenfifteentheater.com. Tinker says she would be "ecstatic" to speak to others about her passion for her organization.



Jon Montgomery is a Member at Large on the Board of Directors for AACT, and the Director of Marketing and Development for the Ellen Noël Art Museum in Odessa, Texas. He has previously served as Executive Artistic Director for both The Depot Theater and Basin Theatre Works.

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- One More For My Baby - A Sinatra Songbook
- Town Without Pity – The Love Songs of Gene Pitney
- Bonnie & Clyde
- Club Morocco

PLAYS:

- Dracula - The Case of the Silver Scream (Film Noir)
- The Incredible Jungle Journey of Fenda Maria
- Casa Blue—The Last Moments in the Life of Freda Kahlo
- Vampire Monologues
- War of the Worlds

Scripts, Information, and Licensing at:
summerwindproductions.com

Advocacy Matters

Lou Ursone, AACT Board of Directors

Shuttered Venue Grant Program Shuttered for Good

When the SVOG (Shuttered Venue Operators Grant) was announced in early 2021, it was seen as more than a token bit of support from our government. It was seen as a lifeline—a direct route to funding to keep theatres (and more) alive through the Covid crisis. The downside was that, originally, many community theatres—actually most—would not have been eligible. Through lobbying efforts across the country, that loophole was closed, and millions of dollars flowed to hundreds of community theatres.

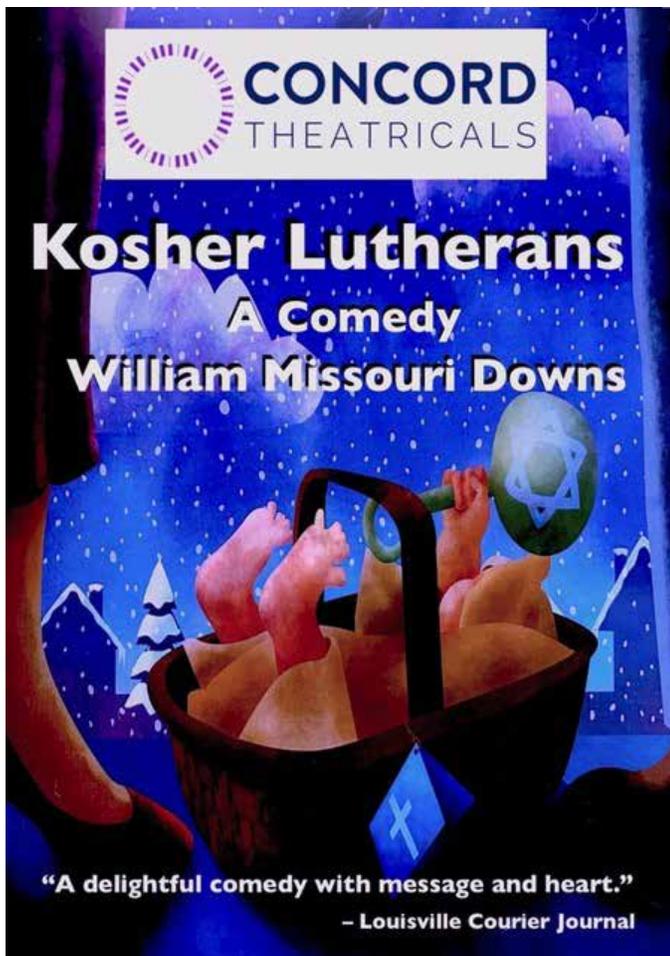
A second wave of funding was announced and awarded in late 2021, but even with that, not all of the appropriated \$16.25 billion in funds were distributed. Unfortunately, due to the way the original legislation was written, additional funds could not be allocated to previous recipients without congressional action. And now, due to the current climate in the House, there hasn't been enough support for funding any more programs like SVOG at this time.

In speaking with several of the key players in Washington about the unused funds, the most important lesson we learned is that we need to make our voices heard. We also found that

we have the power to educate them about the importance of the arts in our communities. Start small: local legislative leaders, mayors, select persons, whatever their title may be. There will be theatre-lovers among them somewhere. Find them if you don't already know them. Court them like you would do any potential funder.

Once you're in that door, ask them to introduce you to state legislators that they know—because they do know each other. And yes, the next step is to use state leaders to get you into the door with your federal delegation. This may sound simplistic, but it does work. And just like auditioning, sometimes it takes a lot of tries before landing the gig.

Here's the upshot: We all need to be better prepared to tell our story to the nation. Know how many lives you impact, how much money you put directly into the local economy through payroll, rent, and supplies like paint and lumber. You'll find resources on the Americans for the Arts website for the "Arts & Economic Prosperity Report" [americansforthearts.org/aep5], as well as ways for calculating the indirect value of the arts in your community.



Lou Ursone is the Executive Director of Curtain Call, Inc. in Stamford, Connecticut, a member of the AACT Board of Directors, and serves on the Spotlight Editorial Team



New AACT Region Representatives



The AACT Board of Directors welcomes **Jamie Peterson** as the new AACT Region III Representative, which includes Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Peterson is a 30-year veteran of Players de Noc Theatre in Escanaba, Michigan, where he has served four terms on its board of directors, as President, Treasurer and Marketing Director. He is an award-

winning actor, designer, and an accredited AACT Adjudicator. Jamie also serves on the executive board for the Community Theatre Association of Michigan (CTAM), and the executive board for the Spotlights organization, a nonprofit designed to raise funds in support of youth in the performing arts.



The AACT Board of Directors welcomes **Justin A. Pike** as the new AACT Region VI Representative, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Pike serves as Artistic Director for The Studio Theatre in Little Rock, Arkansas, and is director (and co-creator) of the YP Second Stage (YP2S) program at Royal Theatre, a pre-professional youth theatre program for high school

and college-age artists. He is also President of the Arkansas Community Theatre Association and Arkansas Liaison to the Southwest Theatre Conference. An award-winning director, actor, scenic, and lighting designer, in 2020, he was one of three directors chosen for the Arkansas Arts Council's Individual Artist Fellowship. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from the University of Central Arkansas.



The AACT Board of Directors welcomes **John Lyttle** as the new AACT Region VII Representative, which includes Colorado, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming.

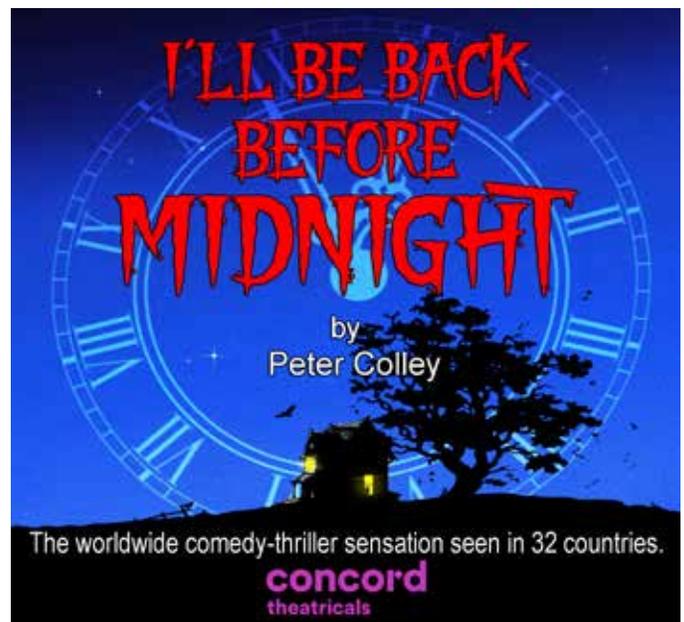
Lyttle serves on the Board of Cheyenne Little Theatre Players (CLTP) as the Immediate Past President. His work with CLTP includes directing, acting, set design/building, and interim

managing director. He is Vice President of Laramie County Retired Education Personnel, and volunteers for the Wyoming AARP State Executive Committee and We the People Wyoming competition. A retired Superintendent of Schools in Laramie County School District 1, he currently works part-time, facilitating and training school districts in contract negotiations using interest-based strategies.

AACT Board Nominations

AACT's Nominating Committee needs your help to identify persons who would be good candidates for members on the AACT Board. If you are interested, and/or know persons you would like to see serve, please complete the nomination form at aact.org/nominate. Board Nominations close March 20.

- The role of the Board Member at Large is to provide leadership, direction, and oversight to the American Association of Community Theatre through support, development, and review of policies and goals for the association.
- For more information on the structure, responsibilities, and requirements of the board, see pages 1-2 of the AACT Bylaws, and page 7 of AACT's Operational Manual. (Links to both are on the nomination form.)
- Board Members at Large will be elected to the board by the board.
- Suggested nominees should be aware of their nomination, and be willing and able to serve if elected.



2024 MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

Diamond (celebrating 75 years)

Hickory Community Theatre (Hickory, North Carolina)

Goshen Players, Inc (Goshen, Connecticut)

SETC - Southeastern Theatre Conference (Greensboro, North Carolina)

Tallahassee Little Theatre dba Theatre Tallahassee (Tallahassee, Florida)

Dominion Stage (Arlington, Virginia)

Hanover Little Theatre (Hanover, Pennsylvania)

Gold (celebrating 50 years)

Tahlequah Community Playhouse (Tahlequah, Oklahoma)

Ashtabula Arts Center (Ashtabula, Ohio)

Lyric Theatre Company (South Burlington, Vermont)

Winner Community Playhouse (Winner, South Dakota)

Southeast Alabama Community Theatre (Dothan, Alabama)

Port Austin Community Players (Port Austin, Michigan)

Center Stage Theatre Kalamazoo (Comstock, Michigan)

Silver (celebrating 25 years)

KMC Onstage, (Kaiserslautern Military Community, Germany)

Hershey Area Playhouse (Hershey, Pennsylvania)

Ascension Community Theatre (Gonzales, Louisiana)

Valley Musical Theatre (Ellensburg, Washington)

Stageworks Northwest (Longview, Washington)

4th Street Theater/North Coast Cultural Association (Chesterton, Indiana)

Actors Theater of Orcas Island (Eastsound, Washington)

The Actors Conservatory Theatre (Lewisville, Texas)

Congratulations to you all for your dedication and hard work in reaching these milestones in your theatre's history! We encourage all member theatres to add your founding date to your theatre's AACT profile, so you can be included in future Milestone listings.

Make a Legacy Gift

Please consider including the American Association of Community Theatre in your legacy plans through a will, trust, life insurance gift, or other legacy gift. Through these special gifts, friends like you are able to sustain AACT's mission and provide learning experiences for AACT-member companies participating in AACTFest national festivals

To learn more about AACT's Legacy Society, visit aact.org/legacy or contact the AACT office at info@aact.org

AACT Century Club Members



Footlight Club
Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts
147 years in 2024



The Weston Friendly Society
Weston, Massachusetts
139 years in 2024



Memorial Opera House
Valparaiso, Indiana
131 years in 2024



Belmont Dramatic Club, Inc.
Belmont, Massachusetts
121 years in 2024



Barnstomers Theater
Ridley Park, Pennsylvania
116 years in 2024



Players of Utica
New Hartford, New York
111 years in 2024



Diamond Head Theatre
Honolulu, Hawaii
109 years in 2024



Booth Tarkington Civic Theatre
Carmel, Indiana
109 years in 2024



Prairie Players Civic Theatre
Galesburg, Illinois
109 years in 2024



Erie Playhouse
Erie, Pennsylvania
108 years in 2024



Waterloo Community Playhouse/
Black Hawk Children's Theatre
Waterloo, Iowa
108 years in 2024



Bay City Players, Inc.
Bay City, Michigan
106 years in 2024



Tacoma Little Theatre
Tacoma, Washington
106 years in 2024



Cranford Dramatic Club
Cranford, NJ
105 years in 2024



Concord Players
Concord, Massachusetts
105 years in 2024



Des Moines Community Playhouse
Des Moines, Iowa
105 years in 2024



Peoria Players Theatre
Peoria, Illinois
105 years in 2024



Theatre Jacksonville
Jacksonville, Florida
105 years in 2024



Theatre Memphis
Memphis, Tennessee
104 years in 2024



Whittier Community Theatre
Whittier, California
102 years in 2024



Little Theatre of Wilkes Barre
Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania
102 years in 2024



Kanawha Players
Charleston, West Virginia
102 years in 2024



Shreveport Little Theatre
Shreveport, Louisiana
102 years in 2024



Theatre Tulsa
Tulsa, Oklahoma
102 years in 2024



Chattanooga Theatre Centre
Chattanooga, Tennessee
101 years in 2024



Quincy Community Theatre
Quincy, Illinois
101 years in 2024



Florence Little Theatre
Florence, South Carolina
101 years in 2024



Community Players
Bloomington, Illinois
101 years in 2024



Rochester Community Players
Fairport, New York
100 years in 2024



Walpole Footlighters
Walpole, Massachusetts
100 years in 2024



Omaha Community Playhouse
Omaha, Nebraska
100 years in 2024

AACT Corporate Partners

Much of the work of the American Association of Community Theatre would not be possible without the generous support of our Corporate Partners, who are listed below. We thank each of them for their commitment to AACT—and to the work of community theatres everywhere.

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Become an AACT Corporate Partner! For information, visit aact.org/partner.

The Resource Center: Fundraising

Whether it's asking for gifts from individuals, companies, or foundations, fundraising is an essential component of a theatre organization's overall revenue generation strategy. It can also be a daunting task if you're new to it, or if the methods you've been using haven't borne fruit. Even the most experienced fundraisers are on the lookout for new ideas and approaches. Below is a selection of resources that cover a variety of digital and traditional communication methods. (Since some of the links were quite long, we've provided shorter versions of those that will forward you to the actual websites.)

Online Resources

BoardSource focuses on successful board engagement in raising contributed income, but its library of guides, tools, and publications covers all aspects of fundraising.

aact.org/fund1

The National Council of Nonprofits offers online resources on Fundraising & Resource Development.

aact.org/fund2

Nonprofit Hub provides free nonprofit how-to guides on fundraising and other topics.

aact.org/fund3

The Fundraising Authority is a for-profit website, but it also offers a range of articles on fundraising basics, direct-mail tactics, and donor cultivation.

thefundraisingauthority.com

The Classy Blog deals with everything from fundraising and marketing advice to technology trends and industry insights. Articles explain how to enhance your donor engagement strategy and modernize your online, peer-to-peer, event, and crowdfunding strategies. Free downloadable guides, webinars, and case studies are also available.

aact.org/fund4

Candid provides comprehensive data and insights to help nonprofits find funders to support their work. Potential funders also look to *Candid's GuideStar* service to verify and research nonprofits that are aligned with their priorities.

candid.org

Books on Fundraising

Most titles are available from online booksellers like Amazon and Barnes & Noble, or by order from your local bookstore. Used copies may also be available from Amazon, eBay, Abe Books, and other online sources.

Brice, Eloise. *Don't Make Me Fundraise!: A Guide for Reluctant Fundraising Volunteers* [Independently published, 2020]

Dove, Kent E. *Conducting a Successful Capital Campaign* [Jossey-Bass, 1999]

Felberbaum, Michael and Christopher M. Cannon. *Focused Fundraising: How to Raise Your Sights and Overcome Overload* [Wiley, 2022]

Heyman, Darian Rodriguez. *Nonprofit Fundraising 101: A Practical Guide to Easy to Implement Ideas and Tips from Industry Experts* [Wiley, 2016]

Howlett, Susan. *Boards on Fire: Inspiring Leaders to Raise Money Joyfully*, 2nd Edition [Word & Raby Publishing, 2019]

Ierardi, Lynn Malzone. *Storytelling: The Secret Sauce of Fundraising Success* [Gift Planning Advisor, 2021]

Levine, Janet and Laurie A Selik. *Compelling Conversations for Fundraisers: Talk Your Way to Success with Donors and Funders* [Chimayo Press, 2016]

Shaker, Genevieve G. *Achieving Excellence in Fundraising*, Fifth Edition [Wiley, 2022]



View the entire collection at
KNOCKEMDEADSCRIPTS.COM

Calendar of Events

Dates	Event	St	City	Phone	Web Site
March 7	Virtual MasterClass: Don't Let the Door Hit You on the A**! - A Guide to Succession Planning		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/masterclass
March 19	AACT Roundtable: Women in Theatre Leadership		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/roundtables
Mar 22- Apr 7	NewPlayFest Opening: <i>I Thought I Knew You</i> by Philip J. Kaplan	WA	Spokane	509-838-9727	stagelefttheater.org
April 5-7	Virtual CTMC (West Coast)		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/ctmc
April 5-20	NewPlayFest Opening: <i>Eating Blackberries</i> by Pam Harbaugh	NC	Hickory	828-328-2283	hickorytheatre.org
April 10	AACT Industry Connection: ThunderTix		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/ic
April 12-14	Virtual CTMC (East Coast)		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/ctmc
April 16	AACT Roundtable: AACT NewPlayFest 101 for Playwrights		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/roundtables
April 18	AACT Chat: How To AACTFest		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/webinars
May 8	AACT Industry Connection: Ludus		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/ic
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May 21	AACT Roundtable: BIPOC Leaders in Theatre		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/roundtables

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a New Musical

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