

The Association for The Colonial Theatre

More Experiences to Share: A Vision for Our Future

A Strategic Roadmap for Community
Engagement and Financial Stability

2024-2026



Table of Contents

The Association for The Colonial Theatre **Strategic Plan 2024-2026**

- 3 President's Message
- 5 Strategic Planning Process
- 6 Executive Director's Message
- 7 The Theatre's History
- 10 Mission & Vision
- 11 Values
- 13 Strategic Plan: Programming
- 14 Strategic Plan: Facilities
- 15 Strategic Plan: Philanthropy
- 17 Board of Directors
- 18 Management Staff
- 19 Contributors



*Mayor Peter's New Year's Eve Ball fundraiser, December 2023.
Photo by Bryan Kirkwood.*

President's Message



Forward Together

What an exciting time to be a part of The Colonial Theatre family! We've weathered a pandemic, we are competing favorably against streaming services, and we recognize the importance of reaching a diverse audience. Each of these challenges makes us stronger now and for the future.

The Association for The Colonial Theatre reopened the doors of this historic building in 1999, believing but not knowing for sure if they would remain open. They have, and in the intervening years this theatre has inspired a struggling town to thrive.

Like Phoenixville, we too have evolved and we will continue to do so to meet the challenges ahead. This **Strategic Plan** is our guide. We have a strong team of committed individuals who give 100% every day so that we can offer engaging, relevant programming to Phoenixville and communities beyond.

Our **Four Pillars of Focus** are the foundation for our goals and objectives:

- **Financial Sustainability**
- **Programming**
- **A Pre-Restoration Plan**
- **Community Citizenship & Engagement**

This plan would not be rich with ideas were it not for the hard work of the committee led by Pauline Monson, Niche Partnership Consulting, and our Executive Director, Jennifer Carlson. They encouraged Ken Mumma, Ron Arena, Janice Hartmann, MaryLouise Sterge, Ryan Wilson, Drew Boardman, and me to think big picture, but also to stay focused on what is achievable in the next three years. I thank them all for their hard work and dedication to our **Vision**:

Engage audiences by presenting innovative programming that animates a restored state-of-the-art historic venue where all are welcomed and valued.

As we embark upon the plan's implementation, I think about our vision statement and how it will influence our decisions, help preserve our theatre, and reaffirm our commitment to its future.

There is energy and excitement among the Board of Directors, Executive Director Jennifer Carlson, her team, and our host of volunteers. We are a non-profit organization, so our work is never done. We have challenges ahead, but the results will be rewarding.

Jocelyn S. Harris
President

The Association for The Colonial Theatre

**"Theatre is the most enriching and powerful way for societies to examine themselves.
It is a mirror up to nature, a reflection of who we are and what we can become."**

August Wilson



After being covered by a tarp for more than 15 years, the original 1903 Theatre ceiling medallion was restored to its natural beauty in 2023. Donor funding contributed to reaching this historic accomplishment.

Strategic Planning Process

Getting from Here to There



Strategic Planning Workshop, April 2023.
Photos by Lauren Ariel.

In **2022** The Association for the Colonial Theatre (ACT) embarked on the creation of a three-year plan that would carry the theatre forward from 2024 through 2026.

The project utilized 2020 interview feedback from 23 Colonial and community stakeholders, augmented by an additional 13 stakeholders surveyed and interviewed in **2023**.

The committee collaborated with Niche Partnership Consulting to conduct a daylong, off-site **Strategic Planning Workshop** on April 11, 2023. A total of 25 people attended, including select members of The Colonial staff and board, volunteers, and community stakeholders.

The workshop shared proposed new **Mission, Vision, and Values** statements with the participants. The Strategic Planning Committee also defined essential areas of concentration for the workshop, and teams worked together to identify and outline the most compelling projects for our **Four Pillars of Focus**:

- **Financial Sustainability**
- **Programming**
- **A Pre-Restoration Plan**
- **Community Citizenship & Engagement**

The committee met regularly for a year to discuss, write, and refine the goals and objectives based on the results of the workshop and stakeholder surveys. The result is a January 2024 through December 2026 **Strategic Roadmap**, which the Board of Directors approved.

Executive Director's Message



Connecting for Tomorrow, Today

The Colonial Theatre touches the hearts of many. It conjures nostalgia for those who have grown up with it, or adopted it, or even only recently discovered its magic. Our historic venue harkens to a colorful past. At the same time, it offers an inviting setting for the creation of new memories.

The Colonial has witnessed more than a century of cultural, technological, and social change; 120 years into its story, it remains the arts and entertainment heart of Phoenixville.

In planning for our immediate future, we also consider our long-term legacy. With feedback from patrons, clients, and community stakeholders, we are:

- **Expanding programming to better serve a growing and diverse regional community**
- **Redressing deferred maintenance of the 1903 Theatre**
- **Strengthening organizational sustainability by deepening a culture of philanthropy**

Daily decisions regarding programming, patron engagement, and community involvement carry lasting impact.

This new **Strategic Plan** is our script, our book, our blueprint in these endeavors, but achieving our goals is also dependent on our team embracing feedback and engaging new audiences.

The Colonial Theatre is not merely an arts and entertainment destination. It is a gathering place to reunite with fellow community members and connect through shared experience.

We invite you to join us in realizing our **Mission**:

Showcase the transformative power of the arts to enrich lives, connect people, and enhance the cultural and economic vitality of Phoenixville and our surrounding communities.

Jennifer L. Carlson
Executive Director
The Association for The Colonial Theatre

The Theatre's History

1903

Harry Brownback purchases adjacent Bridge Street properties and creates The Colonial Theatre to bring Broadway-quality shows to the working people of Phoenixville. Its \$30,000 cost equals \$1.04 million today.

1928

Mary Pickford (1915) and Harry Houdini (1917) tread our boards. Stage shows, vaudeville, and concerts continue to entertain, but this year brings *The Jazz Singer*, the first talking picture, to our screen.

1958

A low-budget sci-fi/horror film starring a young Steve McQueen brings The Colonial itself to the big screen in *The Blob*.

1970s

The independent Colonial Theatre struggles to compete with emerging national chains.

1995

The Colonial closes its doors—but, thankfully, for a relatively brief time.

1996

The Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corporation purchases The Colonial. Patrons Mary Foote, Trish Himes, and others create the non-profit Association for The Colonial Theatre (ACT).

1999

The Colonial reopens on October 1 with a screening of *Run Lola Run*. With two full-time and two part-time employees, the theatre rededicates itself to presenting arthouse, independent, and classic films via its 35mm projection system.

2000s

ACT works with local promoters to present more live performances. But, with only a single auditorium, the demand for live shows soon collides with the number of film showings distributors require. More space is needed.

2010s

The Colonial's next-door neighbor vacates its stately old bank building home. In less than a year, ACT raises funds to acquire the property. Plans are drawn for an adaptive reuse of the bank building.

2017

The Colonial becomes a three-theatre venue, adding the White Rabbit Theatre and the Berry Theatre. The Bank on the Arts Campaign raises funds for the expansion. It also garners a Grand Jury Award from the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia and a Public Impact Award from Preservation Pennsylvania.

2020

In March The Colonial goes dark when COVID-19 strikes. From July to mid-December, the theatre operates with varying capacity restrictions. In mid-December a pandemic surge again closes entertainment venues.

2021

In May theatres get the all-clear for full-capacity seating. Live concerts return in August. The Colonial survives, in large part due to pandemic-related funding but also thanks to the persistence of staff, board members, volunteers, and donors.

Which brings us to...



Barbie release party, July 2023.
Photo by Lauren Ariel.



Hush: Speakeasy, January 2023.
Photo by Lauren Ariel.

...**today**. The Colonial, like the Phoenix that inspires our town's name, has again risen from the ashes to bring live theatre, concerts, films, and other events to the community.

The Colonial is now composed of its original 658-seat **1903 Theatre**, the 174-seat **White Rabbit Theatre**, and the 65-seat **Berry Theatre**. Each space shows films and hosts live performances. Six accessible restrooms, a three-stop elevator, a catering kitchen, a rental suite, and a rooftop event space were also added. In the first year after expansion, revenues and attendance doubled.

It is not an exaggeration to state that The Colonial's perseverance has inspired a struggling town to thrive once again. In turn, we serve our community by embracing and reflecting its broad and evolving culture. It is the intent of this **Strategic Plan** to keep The Colonial Theatre—the heartbeat of Bridge Street—going strong on the way to its 125th anniversary in **2028**.

The first 125 years are always the toughest. We're still here, though, and we have plenty of important work to do—for our community, for its collective creative soul, and for The Colonial's ongoing legacy.



"In the movie theater, we find a social sanctuary where the art of cinema binds us together, transcending differences and fostering a sense of community."

Martin Scorsese

Mission & Vision

The Colonial Theatre's Strategic Planning Workshop and subsequent committee meetings refined our purpose, defined our value to the people we serve, and outlined how we will advance our mission and community impact in the years ahead.

Our Mission

Showcase the transformative power of the arts to enrich lives, connect people, and enhance the cultural and economic vitality of Phoenixville and surrounding communities.

Our Vision

Engage audiences by presenting innovative programming that animates a restored state-of-the-art historic venue where all are welcomed and valued.

Our Values

We believe:

- ▶ Everyone should be able to enjoy the arts and participate in the cultural life of our community.
- ▶ Stories conjured by the arts enrich our lives and equip us to navigate a complex world.
- ▶ A healthy dose of the offbeat stirs the soul.
- ▶ A shared theatre-going experience transforms us, and the way we see each other.
- ▶ Artful collaborations build a resilient future for all.
- ▶ By animating historic spaces, we enliven a touchstone for community identity.

Blobfest, an annual celebration of *The Blob* and its local origin, celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2024 and we will again welcome visitors from around the world. Like its namesake, the event has expanded to include local merchants in a joyous three-day festival.



*Blobfest Friday night Run-Out, July 2023.
Photo by Lauren Ariel.*

Strengthen connections.

Steward conservation.

Systemize a culture of philanthropy.

These principles are the foundation for the goals that will help The Colonial maintain its mission and advance in the immediate future.

Goal One

Expand programming to increase attendance, appeal to diverse audiences, and engage with our community partners.

Strategic Objectives

1. Build new relationships and steward current relationships with community partners.
2. Experiment with new programming to test attracting diverse audiences.
3. Develop the methods to better identify audiences, track programming performance, and use that data to drive future programming.

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Goal Two

Assess, prioritize, and implement facility improvements to the 1903 Theatre that will maintain the integrity of the building, improve the physical appearance, and allow for expanded programming.

Strategic Objectives

1. Create a list of discrete projects with estimated budgets.
2. Prioritize the list based on safety and functional concerns for programming.
3. Identify potential funding sources, including state and federal sources, other grants, and individual support.
4. Secure funding and proceed with projects.
5. Build awareness during project implementation, growing momentum for future improvements.

Strengthen connections.

Steward conservation.

Systemize a culture of philanthropy.


These principles are the foundation for the goals that will help The Colonial maintain its mission and advance in the immediate future.

Goal Three

Ensure organizational sustainability by deepening a culture of philanthropy, increasing contributed revenue, and investing in the resources paramount to The Colonial's success.

Strategic Objectives

1. Improve branding and communications around our 501(c)3 non-profit status and the importance of philanthropy to improve The Colonial's impact as an arts and culture destination.
2. Increase fundraising to diversify sources of contributed revenue to support The Colonial's mission and expand its impact in the community.
3. Grow the organizational capacity by developing staff, board, volunteers, and system resources.



**“Concerts bring people together,
regardless of background or differences.
It’s a celebration of unity through music.”**

Beyoncé

*Killer Queen concert, March 2023.
Photo by Lauren Ariel.*

Board of Directors

The passion and commitment of our 2023-2024 board members is complemented by their diverse skills and experience, which range from law and finance to marketing and philanthropy.

Jocelyn S. Harris

President

Susan Berry-Gorelli

Co-Vice President

MaryLouise Sterge

Co-Vice President

Matt Carberry

Treasurer

Pauline Monson

Secretary

Ronald J. Arena

Rebecca H. Bradbeer

Janice Janka Hartmann

Richard A. Kunsch Sr.

Kenneth B. Mumma

Meghan E. Sutherland

Management Staff

Our diligent 2024 staff totals 27 people, nine of whom we employ full-time.

Jennifer L. Carlson

Executive Director

Drew Boardman

Events Director

Kristine Connolly

Advancement Officer

Drew Kocher

Facilities Manager

Cameron Munson

House Manager

Kathleen O'Reilly

Concession Manager

Carly Polizzi

Marketing Manager

Ginger Rausseo

Production Manager

Melissa Tapley

Assistant House Manager

Bob Trate

Director of Programming

Ryan Wilson

Director of Operations

Creative Thinkers

Strategic Planning Committee

Pauline Monson

Strategic Planning Committee Chair

Jennifer L. Carlson

Jocelyn S. Harris

MaryLouise Sterge

Kenneth Mumma

Janice Hartmann

Ron Arena

Ryan Wilson

Drew Boardman

*A portion of the venue rental fee was
graciously donated by **Platform 1 Events**.*

We thank facilitators Mary Beth Simón and Terri Luna,
as well as each workshop participant:

Jason Arbacheski

Doug Brouder

Joan Cadigan

Cathy Calhoun

Shawn Cephas

Kristine Connolly

Peter Fey

Charles Francisco, Jr.

Sean Maher

Ginger Rausseo

Viviann Schorle

Emily Simmons

Meghan Sutherland

Theresa Thornton

Bob Trate

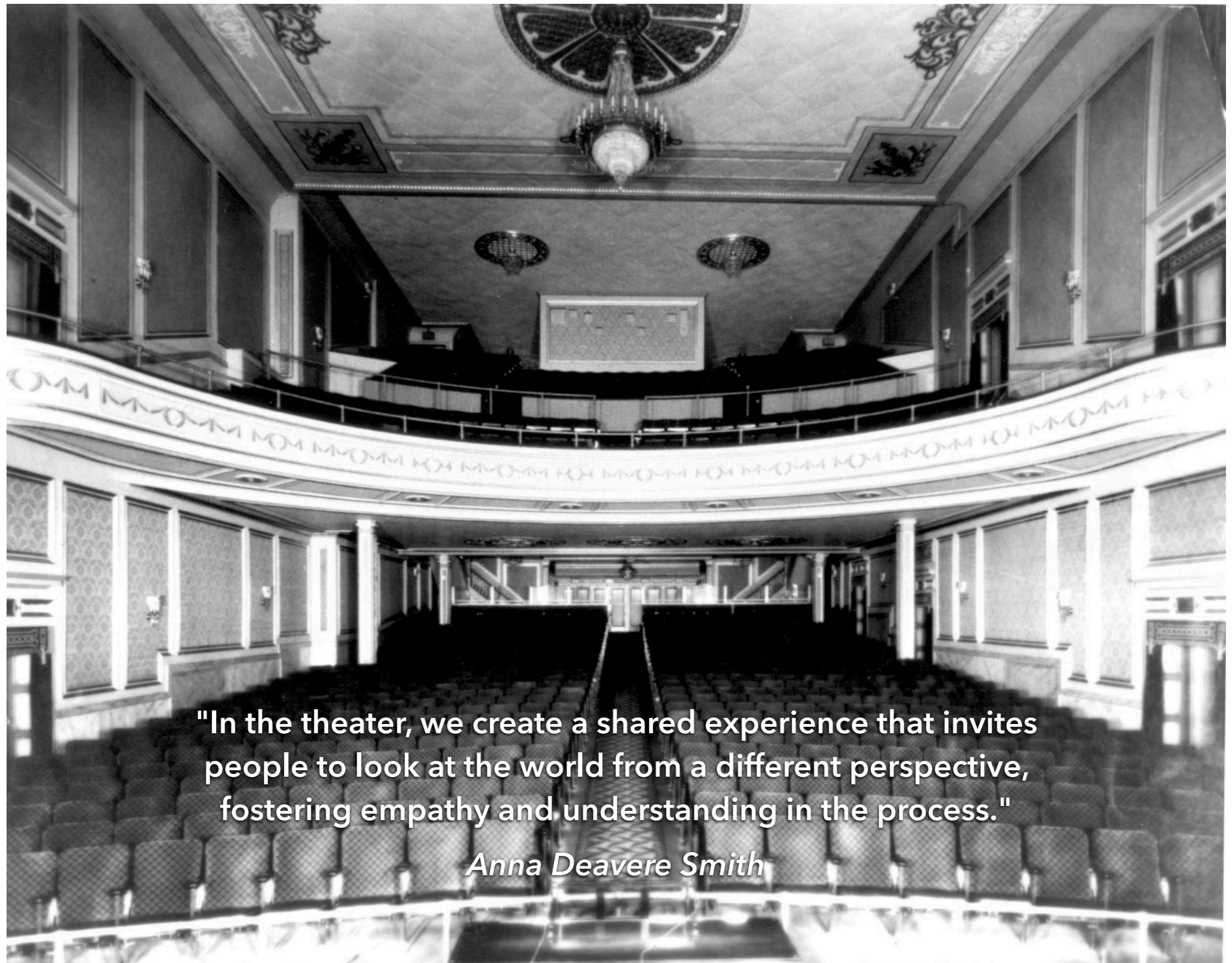
Duane Zehring

Stakeholders

Previous survey participants and current
community associates:

William M. Andersen
Scott Bauman
Susan Berry-Gorelli
Beth Harper Briglia
Robb Cadigan
Jessica Capistrant
Brendan Carr
Jim Fry
Johanna Gilbert
Nina Guzmán
Stephen H. Kalis
Michal Kortsarts

Jean Krak
Ken Metzner
Marian D. Moscovitz
Suzanne V. Norris
LuAnn Roth
John Spurlino
Robin Spurlino
Jack Warren
Mark Weber
Le Roy Whitehead
Dolores Winston



"In the theater, we create a shared experience that invites people to look at the world from a different perspective, fostering empathy and understanding in the process."

Anna Deavere Smith

View from the stage of the 1903 Theatre, date unknown.

We thank you.

For additional information, please contact:

Kristine Connolly, Advancement Officer

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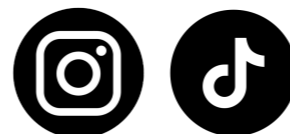
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The Colonial Theatre



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