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spotlight

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRE

**Venice Theatre
Rebuilds**

**National
Awards
2024**

**AACT NewPlayFest
2026 Producing
Theatres**

**Managing
Things, Leading
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**Countdown to
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President's Letter

Kristi Quinn
AACT President

Recently, I was going through old snapshots my grandmother had saved. (For those who are not as old as I am, a snapshot is a photo taken with a camera that looks like the icon on your cell phone.)

My grandparents loved to take pictures and grandma would always write little notations on the back of each print, in the margins, or across chests of photographed individuals, like "Uncle Tom, he drank," "Aunt Myrtle, she was always crabby," or "Here are Marian's bunch, Kristi, Karen, John, Paul. John is holding the baby, Beth." Sometimes the captions had dates or identified special occasions. Some were insightful or funny.

I never thought much about those photos, or the stories they contained, until the day I was rummaging through them, and it occurred to me how much they meant. Grandma had taken the time to record her thoughts about the photos, even if brief. She wanted to convey something to her family about them and herself. She was thinking of us, and I never told her how much I appreciated what she'd done. Now, I can't tell her that little gesture means so much, so many years after the fact.

As I approach the end of my term as AACT President, I don't want to miss the opportunity to give my thanks. I am honored to have been given the privilege of this office, and I value everyone who is a member of this glorious organization. Thank you!

I am forever grateful to those who applauded my efforts, and even more appreciative of those who told me I was wrong and helped me learn from my mistakes. Thank you!

With guidance and understanding, the AACT staff (every one of you) have aided me in being the best I can be. Which is an insurmountable task. Thank you!

I also thank those who went before me, providing both leadership and courage to help AACT grow and prosper, as well as those who will continue to find new avenues for AACT.

More than anything, thank you all for being part of the amazing world of community theatre. The creativity, magic, and exhausting work that goes into making theatre for our families, friends, and communities is the greatest reward of all.

The Celebration of Aging

- No sad songs!
- No f-bombs!
- No Depends jokes!



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AACT welcomes *Spotlight* input and requests for advertising rates. Contact David Cockerell at david@aacct.org to submit content. Visit aacct.org/advertise for advertising rates and specs.

On the cover: *Alyssa Goudy as Olympe De Gouges in The Revolutionists, Venice Theatre, Venice, Florida, September 2022. Her character's lines, "A story begins" were the final words said on the Jervey Theatre stage before Hurricane Ian tore down the walls of the theatre. Story on page 9*

Photo: Renee McVety Photography

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Spotlight

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Design and Layout: Jim Covault

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Upcoming Events

AACT Webinars

aact.org/webinars

AACT NewPlayFest 2024 Premieres

Tennessee Wet Rub, by Kim E. Ruyle
Cottage Theatre, Cottage Grove, Oregon
August 9 - 25
cottagetheatre.org

The China Shop, by Richard Manley
Lincoln Community Playhouse, Lincoln, Nebraska
November 8 - 17
lincolnplayhouse.org

AACT NewPlayFest 2026

Scripts Accepted Through June 30, 2024
aact.org/newplay26

AACT Board of Directors and Committee Summer Meetings

Grand Rapids, Michigan
June 21- 22, 2024
aact.org/summer

AACT Summer Series

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aact.org/summer-series

AACT Executive Committee Meeting

Nov 15 - 16, 2024
Des Moines, Iowa

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The Road to Recovery in Venice, Florida

Kristofer Geddie, Executive Director, Venice Theatre

*“Who are we without a story?
Lost at sea, in search of land...
We survive the roughness of glory
By passing the beat of the beat of the heart.
From hand to hand.”*

As the blade of the guillotine falls – Olympe de Gouges’ last words ring out ... “And a story begins.”

From Lauren Gunderson’s brilliant play, *The Revolutionists*, these were the last words spoken on Venice Theatre’s Jervey stage on September, 26, 2022. Two days later, Hurricane Ian hit Florida and slammed into the 100-year-old back wall of the main stage, destroying everything between it and the lobby.

In the aftermath, staff, volunteers, and onlookers stood in the shadow of Ian’s wrath, curtain fragments rippling delicately in the calm after the storm. There were sobs, weariness, and a sense of futility—for 15 minutes. Then, laughter at the seeming absurdity of the situation.

Hurricane Ian’s destruction may have been enough to put a weaker organization out of commission, but Venice Theatre began planning for the future 15 minutes after that gut punch. Drawing on the creativity, innovation, and resilience of the community, we have continued our mission during rebuilding.



Renee McVety Photography

First Venice Theatre volunteer clean-up day after Hurricane Ian, September 2022



Renee McVety Photography

Tearing down the old to make way for the new

continued on page 10 ▶



Renee McVey Photography

Replacing 432 seats is necessary, as they were ruined by the torrential rains after the theatre wall collapsed. All seats have been removed. New seating is twice the cost of when the theatre last renovated

Only 56 days after the hurricane, we reopened with our festival production of *Hamlet POV*. This hour-long, one-woman tour-de-force of Shakespeare’s play was presented in the Raymond Center, a former office building set to begin renovation into our Arts Education Center. With that project now on hold, our production team built a temporary 130-seat thrust theatre, using seats from our black box Pinkerton Theatre, plus borrowed chairs from our friends at Manatee Performing Arts Center. Until the Jervey Theatre is rebuilt, the Raymond will serve as our main stage. It’s two thirds smaller than the Jervey, with sightline and sound challenges, but audiences love being close to the action and appreciate the creative use of the space.

Two months after inaugurating the Raymond Center, we reopened the Pinkerton Theatre on the west side of our main building. Our production of *The Cemetery Club* got us back on schedule, using temporary power lines, borrowed seating from our friends at Theatre Winter Haven, rehabilitated lighting and sound equipment, and temporary dressing rooms.



Renee McVey Photography

The temporary 130-seat stage in Venice Theatre’s Raymond Center, just north of the main building. The theatre was fortunate to have purchased this building (most recently used as the temporary Venice Library) in November 2019

are still active with us, including Board President, Jean Trammell. Venice Theatre, originally Venice Little Theatre, has evolved and grown through steadfast leadership over the decades, including 26 years of Murray Chase’s vision and guidance. Now, instead of retirement, Murray is overseeing the rebuild, so we can reach greater heights.

We are producing in two stages on our campus. Our popular concert series has been moved to larger venues in the community. As we work to reopen the Jervey Theatre, we still hear, “Didn’t you have insurance?” Of course, we did (and do) have insurance for the bank-appraised value of the building, plus \$1 million in business interruption coverage for a total of \$5.5 million. But full



Venice Theatre

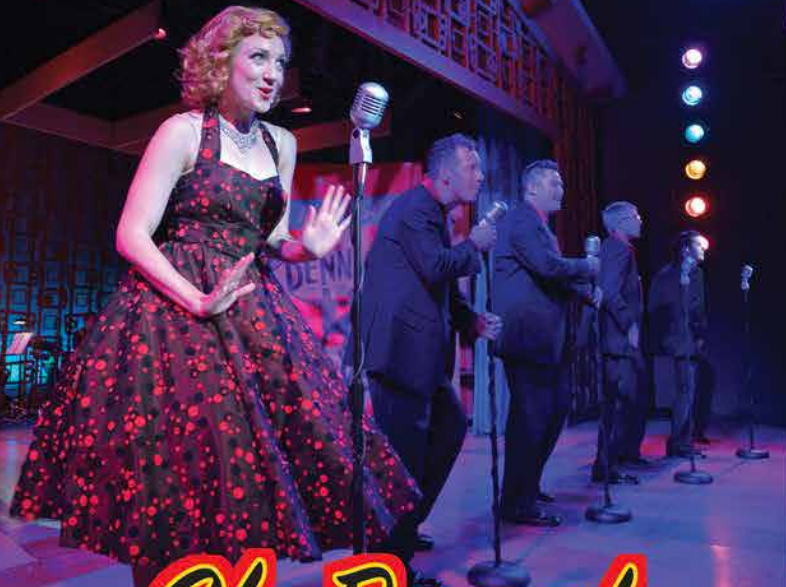
The box office on opening night of The Torch-Bearers in 1950

For 74 years the community has wrapped loving arms around Venice Theatre. From the first performance of *The Torch-Bearers* in 1950, in a hangar at the Venice airport, community—in every sense of the word—built this theatre. Our move in the early ‘70s to the vacated Kentucky Military Institute gymnasium and gun range on Tampa Avenue was the result of the sweat, tears, and love of many volunteers. More than a few of them

continued on page 12 ▶

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Los Angeles Times



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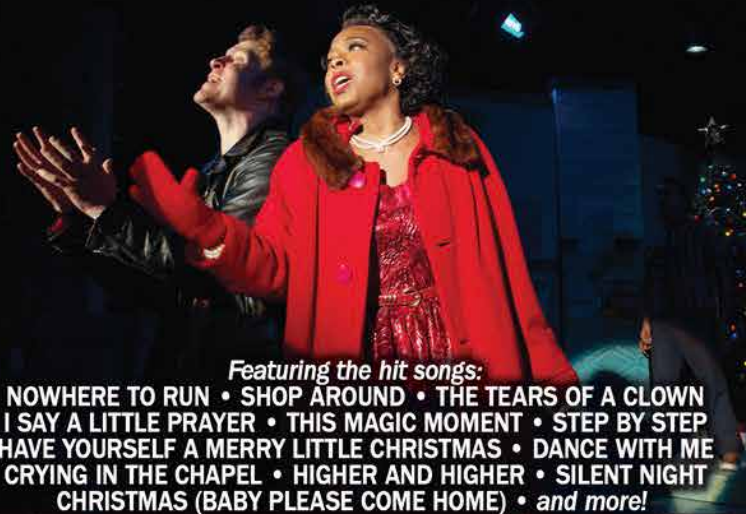
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NOWHERE TO RUN • SHOP AROUND • THE TEARS OF A CLOWN
I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER • THIS MAGIC MOMENT • STEP BY STEP
HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS • DANCE WITH ME
CRYING IN THE CHAPEL • HIGHER AND HIGHER • SILENT NIGHT
CHRISTMAS (BABY PLEASE COME HOME) • and more!



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Among other things, the Jervey stage floor needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. Water damage on both sides of the building required 266 roof patches just to allow us to use the west side of the building. Approximately \$4 million has already been spent on:

- water mitigation
- replacing dry wall and floors
- IT, phone, and alarm systems
- temporary and now permanent electric runs
- and the roof repairs.

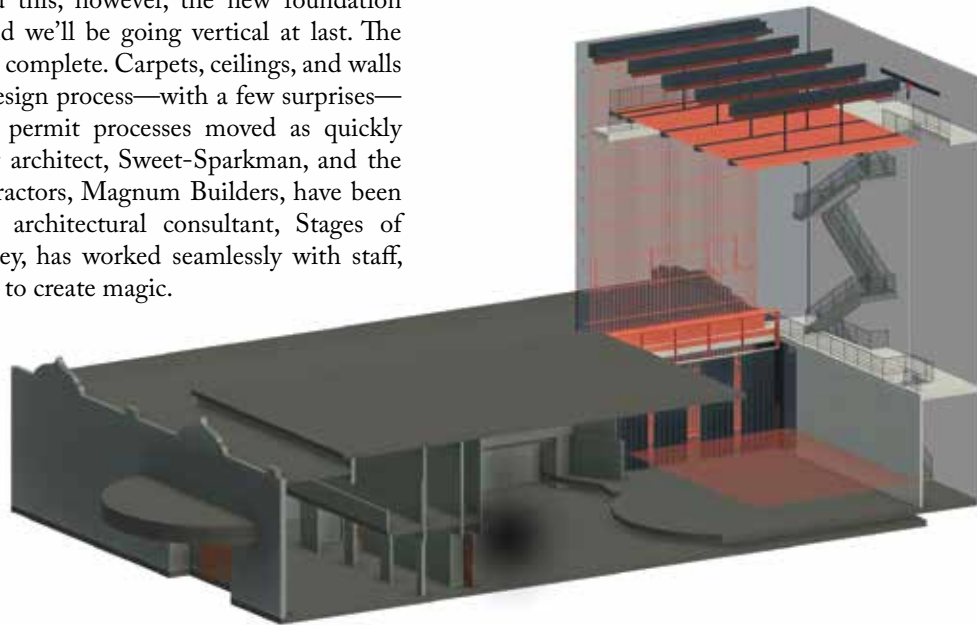


Renee McVey Photography

Extensive damage was revealed during the cleanup after Hurricane Ian. The Jervey stage floor needs to be rebuilt from the ground up

All of this took place before we began rebuilding the stage house itself.

By the time you read this, however, the new foundation will have been poured and we'll be going vertical at last. The restoration of electricity is complete. Carpets, ceilings, and walls have been restored. The design process—with a few surprises—has moved forward. The permit processes moved as quickly as possible, thanks to our architect, Sweet-Sparkman, and the City of Venice. Our contractors, Magnum Builders, have been tireless, and our theatre architectural consultant, Stages of Highland Park, New Jersey, has worked seamlessly with staff, contractors, and architects to create magic.



Theatre architectural consultant, Stages of Highland Park, New Jersey, worked seamlessly with staff, contractors, and architects to create the future plan for the Jervey stage house and flyloft.

As we restore, we will upgrade to meet safety and industry standards. Improvements will include:

- a 10-foot expansion of the backstage area
- raising the height of the fly loft to 70 feet, to improve visuals, as well as staff and volunteer safety
- raising the height of the backstage area, so scenery can roll off, unimpeded
- providing a “load rail” for counterweights, which used to be done with lots of people, rope, and hope
- adding a backstage wheelchair lift

- adding a cargo lift against the backstage wall
- providing stairs, not ladders, to access higher levels
- reimagining the shape of the stage opening for better visibility and operation
- replacing the rickety orchestra loft with an orchestra room in the former scene shop
- replacing lighting, sound, and A/V systems with more efficient technology.

continued on page 15 ▶

In Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Bohemian Rhapsody*

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Photo by Krzysztof Bielinski,
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Girls' Weekend

By Karen Schaeffer

Dot, Carol, Meg and Ellie travel to Dot's Northwoods cabin for a girls' weekend. Unknown to one another, Carol, Meg and Ellie each have a man hiding outside with a special porchlight signal planned for them to enter. The only obstacle is Dot, so they make sure they ply her with plenty of party favors, and Dot proceeds to pass out. The chaos comes to a head when Dot wakes up and discovers her girls' weekend is full of men!

Cast size: 4m., 4w.

www.dramaticpublishing.com/girls-weekend



The Bachelorette Party



By Karen Schaeffer

Dot, Meg, Carol and Ellie are back in Dot's Northwoods cabin for Meg's bachelorette party, but Meg and Sheriff Tom Lane have other ideas—a secret plan to elope at the cabin that night while everyone else is still out for the party. Carol and Ellie make similar secret plans to rendezvous with their respective men, Rick and Bubba, making the cabin a bit more crowded than Meg and Tom had anticipated. Throw in Dot's stash of "special" cookies, an ex-lover and a B and E, and you have a full-blown night of hilarious chaos.

Cast size: 5m., 5w.

www.dramaticpublishing.com/the-bachelorette-party



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On April 24, Donna and Jim Boldt signed a gift agreement of \$1 million that will propel Venice Theatre's recovery from Hurricane Ian into the next phase. The couple answered the call to make a transformational gift that will be a legacy for the community and their family for generations. Donna Boldt, a proud third-generation Venetian, is excited to add the Boldt name to a building that helps bring the arts to people from age five to 95. "To have our name on a building that our grandchildren can see whenever they visit Venice is awesome and it reminds people that families and individuals can make a difference. Every little bit counts. Everyone who makes a gift, regardless of the amount, can say they helped to bring the theatre back."

Our 75th anniversary season has been announced—an essential milestone. After all, since 1950, from relocation, to pandemic, to hurricane, there has never been a season where Venice Theatre hasn't entertained, educated, and engaged the community.

Follow our progress and help us reach the finish line with a donation at venicetheatre.org. We'll see you back in the Jervey Theatre and can't wait to welcome you to Venice for aactWORLDFFEST in June 2026.

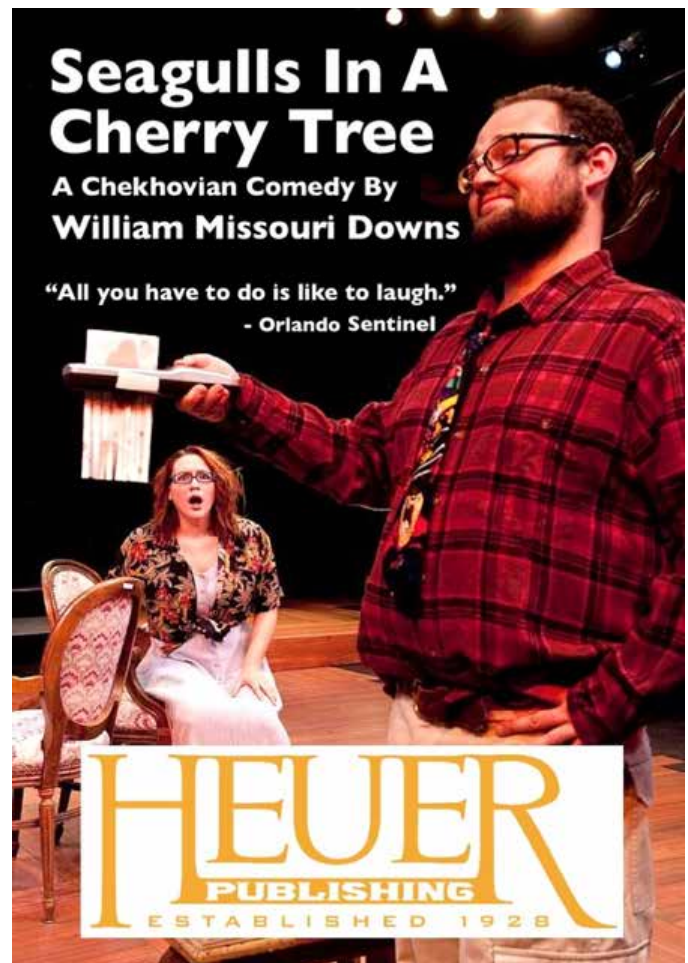


Kristofer Geddie is Executive Director of Venice Theatre in Venice, Florida. Geddie worked as the theatre's General Manager from 2016 to 2023. He first came to Venice Theatre in 2010 to play the role of Coalhouse Walker in Ragtime. He was hired shortly thereafter as the organization's first Director of Diversity. Under Geddie's executive leadership, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) will continue as a priority for the theatre, as well as its commitment to community engagement. Geddie also serves on

the Ambassador Circle for Embracing our Differences; the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Access+ committee for Southeastern Theatre Conference; is treasurer of the Florida Theatre Conference; a member of Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative, Squeaky Wheel Theatre Group; and Executive Vice President of AACT.



A rendering of the exterior design. The Venice City Council has approved the rezoning of the theatre from the "Venice Avenue Business District" to the "Downtown Edge District," the site-and-development plan, and the height exception for a taller fly loft. The Historical and Architectural Preservation Board (HAPB) has approved the exterior redesign



Network, Educate, and Save with Your AACT Membership!

For over 35 years, AACT has been dedicated to providing theatres and individuals with the best, most timely resources to help you succeed in your theatre journey. If you are a current AACT Member, we thank you for your support and participation in the AACT family and network and hope you will renew and join us for the 2025 membership year. If you are new to AACT and not familiar with our offerings, welcome!

Annual AACT memberships are valid September 1 through August 31. Monthly AACT memberships are also available. For more information, see below and visit aact.org/fees.

Here are just a few of the perks of AACT membership:

Discount on AACT Events

- AACT Member Roundtables – *Free, members-only webinars*
- AACTFest 2025, June 25-28, 2025 
- AACT YouthFest, June 22-24, 2025

Individual members receive

- Discounted or free professional development programs, events, and conferences
- Access to members-only online library and resources
- A digital and/or printed copy of *Spotlight* magazine, plus weekly digital communications
- Peer-to-peer networking with theatre professionals nationwide

Organizational members receive

- 20% off of rental packages with MTI (Music Theatre International). Many members cover the cost of their membership (and more) with these savings alone!
- Discounted or free professional development programs, events, and conferences
- Access to member-only online resources and library
- Member-only discounts on scripts, rentals, and theatre services
- 30% discount on ASCAP License (available for purchase May-September).
- 5% discount on BMI License (available for purchase May-September; combine with ASCAP for even more savings!).
- Access to the Church Mutual Insurance Program
- A digital and/or printed copy of *Spotlight* magazine, plus weekly digital communications
- Peer-to-peer networking with other organizational members, and with theatre professionals nationwide
- Use of AACT membership logo and decal

Learn more about the many benefits of AACT membership: aact.org/benefits

How to Join or Renew

To join or renew your membership, go to aact.org/join or scan the QR code below.



If you or your theatre are having financial difficulties, reach out to Karen, AACT Membership Coordinator, at karen@aact.org to discuss a payment plan that is right for you.

If you require assistance finding details on our website, please let us know by calling 817-732-3177. Paper invoicing is available by request and can be requested by contacting karen@aact.org.

Special Offers for First-Time Members!

- First-time organizations can receive a 50% discount on a second year when joining.
- Join *before* September 1, 2024, and receive the remainder of the 2023-2024 membership year for free.
- New Individual Members can join for only \$50.

2024-2025 Membership Fees

Individual Annual Fees	Individual Monthly Fees
Individual: \$85	Individual: \$10
Senior/Retired Military: \$70	Senior/Retired Military: \$8
First Time Individual: \$50	
Youth: \$15	
Couple: \$135	
Military/ Wounded Warrior: Complimentary	

Organization Annual Fees	Organization Monthly Fees
Under \$10,000: \$100	Under \$10,000: \$11
\$10,000-\$24,999: \$140	\$10,000-\$24,999: \$15
\$25,000-\$99,999: \$210	\$25,000-\$99,999: \$25
\$100,000-\$249,999: \$340	\$100,000-\$249,999: \$37
\$250,000-\$499,999: \$455	\$250,000-\$499,999: \$50
\$500,000-\$999,999: \$645	\$500,000-\$999,999: \$70
\$1 Million and Over: \$1,070	\$1 Million and Over: \$120
State Associations: \$100	

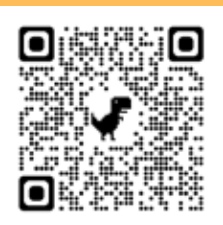


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Creating World Premieres: NewPlayFest 2026 Producing Theatres

The following organizations have been selected as AACT NewPlayFest 2026 Producing Theatres. They will read all scripts in the final round, select the winning plays, and produce world premiere productions between June 2025 and December 2026.



Waterville Opera House

Waterville, Maine (Region I)
watervillecreates.org

Since its construction in 1902, to celebrate the City of Waterville's centennial, the Waterville Opera House has hosted countless events, including plays, musicians, vaudeville acts, dancers, poets, circuses, and more. In 1973, the Waterville Opera House Improvement Association was founded with the mission of maintaining and preserving the space. The association raised millions of dollars and eventually oversaw a massive renovation in 2012.

Today, the Waterville Opera House has a thriving community theatre program that produces four mainstage productions, three weeks of theatre camp for students, and four touring productions for school-aged children. In addition to theatre programming, it also presents nationally touring musicians, comedians, authors and other live performances, and co-hosts the Maine International Film Festival. Often referred to as a "hidden gem" by those who see it for the first time, the building's architecture never fails to impress. Most important, it has continued to follow the vision laid out by community leader Frank Redington during his address at the June 23, 1902, building dedication: "Here we may laugh, and here we may cry. Here we may listen to the voice of the oratory and the charms of the oratorio. Here thousands may be swayed by the power of eloquence, and questions of great movement considered, debated and determined."



Westchester Collaborative Theater

Ossining, New York
(Region II)
wctheater.org

Westchester Collaborative Theater (WCT) was founded 14 years ago as a company focused on developing and presenting new plays. Since then, it has broadened its outreach to welcome member artists from the Tri-State area (NY/NJ/CT) who have a similar interest in incubating new works for the theatre. As a result of this partnership, the company's black box theatre has found an enthusiastic, dedicated audience who appreciate the concept of welcoming new work to the stage.

Each year, WCT presents at least two mainstage productions, several play readings, and its foundational, bi-monthly Lab Workshops. Committed to furthering theatre arts in the community, WCT is also involved in various youth theatre and outreach programs to local senior residences and arts organizations.



Players de Noc, Inc.

Escanaba, Michigan (Region III)
playersdenoc.org

Players de Noc is an all-volunteer community theatre with a mission of creating high-quality theatrical experiences that entertain, enrich, and educate people of all ages. Approaching its 60th season, Players de Noc produces an average of five productions each year, in addition to theatrical events such as historical cemetery walks, radio programming, and readers theatre in local schools.

Players de Noc takes pride in being a place for artists to grow and develop. Throughout the years, it has produced a large number of original works and has received several awards at the state, regional, and national levels, including Outstanding Achievement in Technical Direction at AACTFest 2021 for its original production of *Jerry's Brain*.



Theatre Salina

Salina, Kansas (Region V)
salinatheatre.com

Founded in 1960, Theatre Salina is a nonprofit educational organization whose mission is to enrich the lives of people in Salina and the surrounding region by creating a broad range of quality theatrical programs for their entertainment and education, and to provide people of all ages and backgrounds an opportunity to participate in play production and other theatre activities.

Theatre Salina currently offers 14 productions each season, including its seven-show subscription series, Center for Theatre Arts youth productions, the After Dark series, and original dance productions. Theatre Salina was the National

Winner at AACTFest 2001 with its production of *Wit*, and is the recipient of the Governor's Arts Award for organizational excellence, and the Twink Lynch Organizational Award from AACT.



Vortex Theatre

Albuquerque, New Mexico
(Region VI)

vortexabq.org

Founded in 1976, Vortex Theatre is New Mexico's oldest continuously producing black box theatre. For 48 years it has produced more than 500 plays, many of them new works and world premieres. In addition to nine mainstage productions, it also partners with Albuquerque Public Schools to produce Wrinkle Writing, a program where students at all grade levels work together to create plays based on personal experiences (thus enhancing individual literacy, confidence and teamwork skills), as well as monthly play readings for local playwrights.

Vortex Theatre is excited to produce a NewPlayFest winning script in its 50th anniversary season, as it did in 2018 with its NewPlayFest world premiere production of *Mynx & Savage*, by Rebecca Gorman O'Neill.



Kenai Performers, Inc.

Soldotna, Alaska (Region IX)

kenaiperformers.org

Kenai Performers has produced high-quality, live theatre on the central Kenai Peninsula since 1967, where it promotes education in the performing arts, demonstrates the power of live theatre to enrich the community, and awards scholarships in the arts. Kenai Performers provides hands-on production experience in backstage theatre craft and protocol, and its performances invite community-wide participation in the live theatre experience.

In addition to four or five mainstage productions each year, the company hosts a summer youth drama camp, annual swing dance workshop (followed by several social dance opportunities), costume and prop support for local school productions and other performing groups, plus ongoing education and training for volunteers in all aspects of theatre. It strives to be a creative home for the imagination—providing an open venue for the vibrant arts of our community.

Laugh Your Butts Off

An Interview with the Man Behind *Nunsense*



Dan Goggin, the affable, hilarious, brilliant man behind the *Nunsense* musicals, turned 80 this year. To celebrate Danny's landmark birthday, we sat down with the composer/lyricist/librettist to discuss his career in the theatre, the origins of *Nunsense*, his many amazing collaborators and the secret of success for his little musical that became a global phenomenon.

(continue reading online!)

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Submit a Script to NewPlayFest 2026

Playwrights may submit scripts for AACT NewPlayFest 2026 between May 1 and June 30, 2024. Only non-musical, full-length plays will be accepted. Scripts must be unpublished and must not have received a full production. (If selected, the AACT theatre's production is to be a world premiere.) Only one script per playwright. No fees for AACT-member playwrights; non-members pay a \$10 script processing fee.

For script submission, more information, and script formatting guidelines, visit aact.org/newplay26.

Be a NewPlayFest 2026 Reviewer

AACT is seeking individuals with the time, interest, and theatre expertise to review and score the scripts submitted to AACT NewPlayFest. If you'd like to be a part of this exciting AACT festival as a Reviewer, apply and find more information at aact.org/newplay26.

Sex Please, We're Sixty!
A comedy by Michael and Susan Parker

Love, Lies & the Doctor's Dilemma
A comedy by Michael and Susan Parker

Sandy Toes & Salty Kisses
A comedy by Michael and Susan Parker

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A COMEDY BY MICHAEL AND SUSAN PARKER

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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 makers why they are part of AACT.



WILL RAGLAND
Mayor of Pelzer, South Carolina
Founding/Executive Artistic Director of
Mill Town Players
Pelzer, South Carolina

How does a small-town mayor and former teacher end up on the national stage with an award-winning play? AACT!

And how does Will Ragland describe being involved with AACT? “Life-changing!”

As head of a growing theatre company celebrating its 10th anniversary this July, Will has strong feelings about what AACT can do.

“I joined AACT, I think, because of the ASCAP discount program,” he says, “but there’s so much more. With as busy as I am, I can’t take advantage of all that AACT offers, but I know it’s there.”

Will, like many across the country, took part in “zooms” during the pandemic, noting that “Often in our jobs we feel like the lone wolf, but through AACT, we find our wolf pack. Through all the people involved in AACT, the resources available to us across the country are endless.”

It has been five years since Ragland’s company performed at AACTFest in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, but the experience remains fresh in his memory.

“It was such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that company members got tattoos to help memorialize the experience,” he says. The theatre’s production of *Romeo and Juliet* inspired the tattoo’s design—stars with intertwined tails representing the star-crossed lovers.

“You can’t find any other experience in the world like AACTFest,” he adds. “When people from a small town, most of whom have never crossed the Mason-Dixon line, appear on a national stage, it’s really something. It reminds us that talent knows no zip codes.”

AACTFest was an incredible learning experience for his company members as they met colleagues from across the country who had never met someone from the South. “Our *Romeo and Juliet* was set in the Appalachians with a Hatfields and McCoys kind of sensibility,” he explains. “The accents took the crowd by surprise and they were actually laughing until Mercutio was shot.”

Will says that if someone asked him why they should be an AACT member, he’d say, “Do your research. Learn about all the great programs, discounts and opportunities that exist, like AACTFest. Then I’d explain my personal journey. It may have been the ASCAP discount that got me in the door, but AACT keeps me there!”



TRAVIS GROSSMAN
Executive Director of Theatre Atchison
Atchison, Kansas

“AACT’s National Directors Conference changed my life,” said Travis Grossman, Executive Director of Theatre Atchison, a 40-year-old community theatre. (AACT’s National Directors Conference

is a biennial program hosted by AACT for full-time administrative and artistic leaders of community theatres.)

“Ideas I gathered and suggestions I took from that first conference I attended nearly 20 years ago are still in practice here today.”

Two major takeaways from that first experience were the value of adding youth programming to the theatre’s portfolio of activities—something that has been a huge part of Theatre Atchison’s growth ever since—and the importance of having goals and targets to work toward.

“It’s the most gratifying thing to be with others, sharing ideas, helping one another.”

“I still have the notebook I filled from that conference on the shelf in my office,” he says. “I should probably dust it off and take a look at it again.”

Grossman believes there’s nothing more fulfilling than attending conferences and festivals with others who talk the same language.: “It’s the most gratifying thing to be with others, sharing ideas, helping one another.”

One simple but valuable fundraising/development idea he picked up from a colleague was to send donors random, personal thank-you notes throughout the year.

Grossman says it was exciting for his company to participate on the national stage. “Taking part in AACTFest 2023 in Louisville brought lots of goodwill, influence, and money to our theatre. I also shared my design work at the festival. For a community of just 12,000, this was a huge event for us.”

That, and the impact of the National Directors Conference, have been important to him and his theatre. The conference, in particular, he says, has provided great value: “For the cost of the program, you will get back every penny from what you take away from that weekend. Learning about children’s shows, career paths, and so much more from other professionals has influenced my 20+ years greatly. I encourage everyone to join AACT!”

AACT Announces 2024 National Awards

AACT is proud to announce the recipients of the 2024 AACT National Awards.

David C. Bryant Outstanding Service Award



Mary Lou Britton
Grosse Pointe Michigan

Mary Lou's love affair with community theatre began nearly 60 years ago when she found herself painting shadows on Aunt Eller's front porch for Michigan's Grosse Pointe Theatre's [GPT] production of *Oklahoma!* Since then, she has held

just about every position in front of and behind the curtain, including several terms as President. Active in the Community Theatre Association of Michigan for 50 years, she has served as President and more recently as Editor of the association's newsletter. An accredited adjudicator in Michigan, she also has chaired a state AACTFest and a Region 3 Festival. She has been a first-level reader for the AACT NewPlayFest, and is Executive Producer of GPT's Take Ten Festival for ten-minute plays, now in its 11th season. She also helps lead a workshop that encourages GPT members to explore playwriting as an extension of their theatrical experience.



John Rich
Pullman, Washington

John began theatre work as a professional child performer and later moved into directing and producing. He received his B.F.A. in Directing/Theatre Management from USC, and has won international awards for his work. After retiring to

the Palouse region of Washington, he began a second career, leading and fostering a rich and vital theatre community and forming the Regional Theatre of the Palouse (RTOP).

Countless hours of directing, set building, prop garnering, costume designing, teaching, and running a non-profit organization have proven invaluable to the community. In particular, he was instrumental in the design and remodel of the new RTOP theatre--a lifelong dream. He is now mentoring a new generation to carry on his goal of quality theatre. As he passes on his expertise, he also has implemented a new RTOP program--exemplifying how involvement in the performing arts enriches both individuals and communities at large.



Albert J. (A.J.) Kalanick
Billings, Montana

A.J. has been involved in community and professional theatre for nearly 40 years. He is Executive Director Emeritus of Billings Studio Theatre (BST), having previously served as head of the company, beginning in 2011. His past work with BST also included terms as board treasurer, board vice president, and two terms as board president. A.J.'s prior theatrical endeavors include Company Manager for The Illustrious Virginia City Players, Executive Director of The White Chapel Theatre, and International Tour Director and performer for The Missoula Childrens Theatre. BST's longevity in the Billings area, its dedication and commitment is in large part due to the sense of family it brings to everyone involved, says Kalanick, who adds, "If for one moment we can make someone forget about their problems, and make them smile or laugh, then

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by **Londos D'Arrigo**

writer for JOAN RIVERS, PHYLLIS DILLER and LILY TOMLIN

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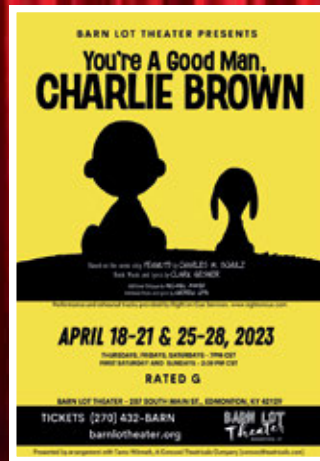
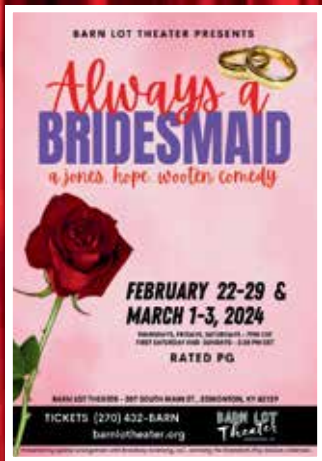
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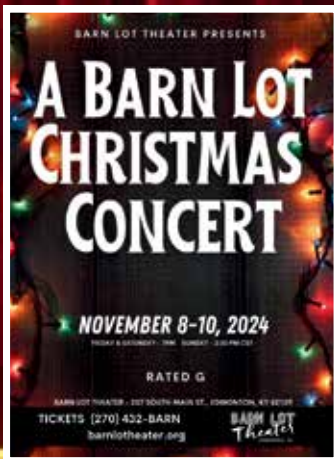
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Robert E. Gard Superior Volunteer Award



Stan L. Harr
Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan

Stan is a retired choral director with 150 shows in his theatre resumé, dating back to 1960. He began his community theatre career in 1986 with CTM Productions in Madison, Wisconsin, where he worked on 15 shows. Subsequent moves brought him to the Detroit area in 1996, where he has provided music in 13 different venues, most notably Grosse Pointe Theatre, with 54 productions. In each case, Stan says that he is always looking for a way to make the music special, so it heightens the audience's appreciation of a show. (He has also appeared on stage and done sound, as well.) "I continue to be awed that institutions like church choirs and community theatre survive, even thrive, being done by volunteers on the leftover time and energy they find at the end of a long day," he says. "It's the love of the art and the sense of family that make the magic happen—very special, indeed!"



Dr. Rebecca Whited
Huntsville, Alabama

Rebecca has been involved with the arts since childhood. First introduced to the theatre through church plays, she continued her involvement during her school years, and later connected with community arts organizations, volunteering as needed. She worked in many areas of theatre, particularly musicals, but eventually began working solely with children's theatre. In 2021, she assisted in the founding of Around the Curtain, a community theatre company focused solely on

children. Its mission is to keep the arts as an affordable and accessible option for all children in the community, including classes, workshops, and summer programs. Rebecca volunteers as the company's Artistic Director, directing the majority of the shows and also serving as Music Director. In addition to work on productions, she teaches the majority of the company's classes, in order to keep costs down and make the education program available to more students in the Huntsville area.



Rick Johnson
Helena, Montana

Rick has been involved with Helena's Grandstreet Theatre for 27 years, working in almost every area of the theatre's operations. His associates say that each experience has shown him to be an individual who cares, listens, and proves how involvement in local theatre better the community as a whole.

He has served as light board operator, stage manager, camp assistant, set crew, actor, and usher, as well as hosting guest artists in his home and giving rides to those who need transportation to and from the theatre. He also sponsors the Spirit of Grandstreet Scholarship, a \$1000 award given to a senior in high school. Says Grandstreet's Director of Education Marianne Adams, "He has a large heart, especially towards the young actors in our community that may have a tough life outside of the theatre. He always comes with a smile and never wants to be made a fuss over or be in the spotlight."



Arlene Schoenherr
Grosse Pointe, Michigan

Arlene's love of theatre is evidenced by her impressive resume of over 50 years at Grosse Pointe Theatre (GPT). She has been active onstage, backstage, in the board room, and in the ticket office.

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Arlene has served as a director, stage manager, choreographer, makeup artist, set dresser, and props person, and appeared in many featured dancing roles over the years. She is considered one of the theatre's best ambassadors in the community, often coordinating the sharing of GPT's props and costumes with local schools and other community theatre companies, and also serves as manager/organizer of the theatre's storage units. Arlene takes particular pride in the theatre's 76-year history, and spends considerable time as company historian, maintaining and updating its library and archives. With the skills gained from all these experiences, she mentors younger members of the theatre and students at local high schools with the goal of encouraging young people's involvement in the arts.

Distinguished Merit Award



Steve Lyons

Bellingham, Washington

As a working playwright, in 2010 Steve wrote to then-AACT president Rod McCullough, expressing frustration with the difficulty of encouraging the production of new plays in community theatres. This led Rod to create a Playwrights Task Force to tackle the issue, and appointed Steve and Murray Chase (Venice Theatre) as co-chairs. The result was the AACT NewPlayFest, which continues the work they began. Steve was instrumental in designing the festival's selection process, with plays selected by AACT-member theatres from a pool of finalists, as opposed to a single person or committee. Steve also wanted the plays to have a life beyond the NewPlayFest, and convinced Dramatic Publishing to publish an anthology of the winning plays. Steve is modest about these achievements: "The true heroes of AACT NewPlayFest," she says, "are the theatres that volunteer to include one of the winning plays in their season. Now, that is faith in the arts!"



Tracey Williams Sutton

Ojai, California

Currently Artistic Director of California's Ojai Art Center, Tracey has been a driving force in both community theatre and theatre education for most of her life. She has a master's degree in theater and direction, and has performed in many touring Broadway productions. She has won numerous awards in Ventura and Los Angeles as an actress, director, costumer, and music director. At Ojai, she has directed at least one play a season since 2007 and has appeared on stage, as well. She coordinates costumes for each production, as well as designing sets. Instrumental in the direction of the theatre as it celebrates its 85th year, Tracey says she remains inspired by the words of its founder Dr. Charles Butler: "We must keep [theatre] alive, vital, and a force for good. . . . It is not what we can get out of this place, but what we can put into it."



Cody Colvin

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Cody founded Colvin Theatrical in 2020, with the goal of helping performing arts companies weather the pandemic through the use of film and broadcast. His most defining and rewarding work came in 2021, when he and his company created a digital solution for AACT's pandemic-impacted National Festival. Rather than the traditional in-person event, Cody worked with AACT to film all of AACTFest's outstanding production winners in their own theatres. The result was a once-in-a-lifetime, 27-day journey from coast to coast, recording 11 U.S. productions for streaming release on Broadway on Demand. Cody is proud that Virtual AACTFest 2021 helped prove the unshakeable resilience of theatre and its makers—and that new forms of media could help grow artists' reach. He has since produced a number of impactful film, television, and commercial projects, but says his relationship with AACT has remained the highlight of his professional career.

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Shining Star Award



Katy Merriman

Des Moines, Iowa

Katy is Artistic Director of the Des Moines Playhouse, but before her arrival in Iowa in 2013, she appeared as a concert soloist with the Indianapolis Men's Chorus, the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir, and chorus member with the Indianapolis Opera.

She also served as interim managing director for Summer Stock Stage during her time in Indianapolis. Since moving to Des Moines, she has performed in numerous roles on stage with local theatres, and directed many productions for the Des Moines Playhouse. Katy served as an adjudicator for the Monologue Competition at AACT's 2023 National Festival, and is a member of AACT's Education Committee. She is a staunch advocate of the Playhouse's participation in the Penguin Project, which provides a safe and inspiring theatre experience for young people with special needs. "We are so happy to host young artists and give them the chance to take to the stage," she says. "There is a place for everyone in the arts."

Special Recognition Award



Dale and Dianne Pegg

Grosse Pointe, Michigan

Dale became a member of Grosse Pointe Theatre (GPT) over 50 years ago, when a friend asked him to help him with lighting a show. "The hook was set and I was reeled in," he says. He has served GPT as a board

member and as President five times, but says his true calling is backstage, building sets, and designing both sound and lighting. He is also the company's chief photographer, and edits photographs for GPT programs and marketing efforts. He is particularly proud of helping GPT in acquiring and renovating a former nursing home to create a rehearsal hall, scene shop, and office space. Dianne has been equally active, beginning in the scene shop before being tapped for props and set dressing. She then moved into creating sound effects, where she met her husband-to-be, and began lighting shows, and "truly found my creative niche, choosing the gels and lighting angles to support the story by painting the set with subtle color and emotions." She also helped establish GPT's, Studio Theatre, leading to many productions of groundbreaking plays.



Julie Price

Paducah, Kentucky

Julie has been part of Paducah's Market House Theatre (MHT) for nearly 30 years. She's worked backstage, helped raise money for the theatre, and served in its Board of Directors (including serving as President). She's also appeared onstage, returning this year as Chelsea in MHT's production of *On Golden Pond*. This comes after 15 years of entertaining children through MHT's traveling Story Theatre program for elementary schools, and its PlayTime program for preschoolers. In that capacity, she has visited countless elementary schools and performed for thousands of children in the quad-state region, including the most rural of locations. Julie says she loves that, even when children face hardships in their lives, they can relax and experience a few minutes, watching the unfolding of a wonderful story and moral. It serves to remind her that we each have a story and something special and unique to offer this world.



Alka Sharma

Buffalo Grove, Illinois

Alka is the founder of Mandi Theatre, which produces traditional Hindi theatre in the Chicago area. By producing the classics of Indian dramatic literature, Mandi Theatre aims to increase awareness of various social issues, as well as Indian culture. It performs plays in Hindi, English, Sanskrit, and other South Asian regional languages. Alka's efforts include an annual theatre festival that brings together performing groups from across the country to present traditional Indian plays and adaptations. In 2023, she launched the Theatre for Young Audiences, which added to the company's existing children's programs, introducing young people to theatre and taking part in it as a way to express themselves and develop self-confidence. Mandi Theatre also performs at various community events and fundraisers, totally

free of cost. Alka's leadership and innovative staging techniques have brought performances to both theatres and informal performance spaces throughout the Chicago area, establishing Mandi Theater as a true community theatre.

Mort Clark International Achievement Award



Theatre33
Bellevue, Washington

Theatre33 is a bilingual non-profit community teaching theatre, currently celebrating its 10th anniversary season. From contemporary plays to beloved classics, Theatre33 strives to challenge its volunteers and audience to tackle the complex matrix of human relationships. As a teaching theatre, it offers youth and adult drama classes throughout the academic year. Its special focus is providing a platform for transplanted immigrants and next-generation Americans to retain and maintain a connection to their history, literature, and language. They then share their rich cultural heritage with the community at large. Theatre33 incorporated in 2013, playing in living rooms and venues around the Seattle area for the first few years. In 2016, it leased its own 35-seat black box theatre, and in 2023, moved into its new performing arts facility in the heart of the BelRed Arts District. It offers new productions every month, with shows running almost every weekend September to July, plus free community events.

Twink Lynch Organizational Achievement Award



The Mass Arts Center
Mansfield, Massachusetts

The Mass Arts Center provides a cultural home for artists, audiences, and aspiring performers of all ages. At its core is a rich schedule of theatre productions, performing arts education, art exhibits, and live entertainment. Beginning as a small company in 1993, today it includes the newly renovated 100-seat house of the Reservoir Stage, the Morini Art Gallery, and The Academy at Mass Arts, all housed in a large facility it acquired in 2020. The Center strives to present events that reflect and educate the broad nature of the surrounding communities. The result is a wide array of education, programs, performances, and other opportunities for patrons from as far north as New Hampshire and as far south as Rhode Island and Cape Cod. Audiences know they will see exceptional productions on the Reservoir Stage at a fraction of the cost of a ticket in Boston or Providence. Programs are also supported with grants from Massachusetts Tourism, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and local cultural councils

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Twink Lynch Organizational Achievement Award



Studio 1

Burlington, North Carolina

A performing arts center located in Burlington's Holly Hill Mall, Studio 1 takes pride in creating a culture built on encouragement, inclusion, and acceptance. Its intimate 100-seat black box theatre focuses on thought-provoking content and an immersive theatre experience, in tandem with transformative, performing arts education. The company has worked diligently to learn about its community and how it can partner, support, and reflect all those who live there. This has led to ASL Shadowed productions, free tickets for recently incarcerated women, and sensory-sensitive performances, among other initiatives. This mission-driven approach is indicative of the company's philosophy that theatre is about coming together to create something larger than ourselves, and not just on stage. In the words of the theatre's Vision Statement, "Through the performing arts, we grow and stretch our own abilities. Taking risks in the classroom and on stage makes us better people. Through mentorship and collaboration, we give our community permission to take those risks."

Corporate Award

Paducah Bank and Trust

Paducah, Kentucky



For more than half of its 60 year-history, Market House Theatre (MHT) has benefitted from the support of Paducah

Bank and Trust. The bank is a top-tier sponsor of MHT's programming, and has been instrumental in its capital projects to expand arts and arts opportunities in the area, as well as in the restoration and preservation of historic downtown properties. Paducah Bank was one of two lead investors in MHT's campaign to create offices, classrooms, scene and costume shops and a studio theatre, and later in adding six more classrooms. Notably, each member of the bank's Board of Directors also made a significant personal contribution. In 2020, Paducah Bank purchased nearly \$150,000 in historical tax credits from the theatre, a major boost to its capital campaign. During the pandemic, the bank helped MHT secure government funding that allowed it to resume operation when many other organizations remained closed.

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Out and About in Des Moines

AACTFest 2025 National Festival, Des Moines, Iowa



Katrina Ploof, AACT *Spotlight* Editorial Team

In a little more than a year, AACT members will be packing their bags and heading to AACTFest 2025 in Des Moines, Iowa, to celebrate the accomplishments of the 12 advancing national festival companies, not to mention some much needed R&R with colleagues and friends from around the country. Spotlight Editorial Team member Katrina Ploof recently grabbed a minute with the staff of the AACTFest 2025 Host Theatre, Des Moines Playhouse, to get insider tips on their town—its great food, terrific nightlife, and magical outdoor spaces—along with a short Iowa vocabulary lesson.

Any advice on communicating with Iowans? The only real experience most of us have is a certain classic musical with the song “Iowa Stubborn.”

Executive Director David Kilpatrick: Well, start with pronouncing the town correctly - the letter “s” in Des Moines is silent. So, it’s “deh moyne”—rhymes with “coin.”

Since you’ll all be here in the summer, you probably need to know a little bit about corn:

- The phrase “knee high by the 4th of July” refers to the height of the corn that predicts a successful crop
- “detasseling” is the removal of the tassel at the very top of the corn plant to prevent unwanted pollination.
- and you can probably expect the Iowa version of a traffic jam, which is 10 cars waiting to pass a tractor.

Artistic Director Katy Merriman: “Iowa nice” is a real thing (along with Iowa stubborn). Folks here are kind and pleasant and are happy to chat and pass the time of day, so don’t plan on doing things in a hurry. Hurry doesn’t generally happen in Iowa.

Kathy Pingel, the theatre’s retired Director of Education and Youth Programming: I’d like to share the correct use of the term “gidda,” as in “when do we gidda go to the fair?” Substitute this word for “get to” and you’ll fit right in.

Moving on to favorite food and libations in Des Moines, what are your favorites?:

Associate Artistic Director Angie Lampe, Director David A. VanCleave, Marketing Director Lee Ann Bakros, along with Katy and Kathy, respond:

- Star Bar: late night food and our favorite bartender, Job.
- Lucky Lotus: the best Asian fusion in town
- A Dong: Vietnamese, with a very memorable name
- Big Tomato Pizza: late night slices, famous for their service
- Fong’s: famous for their Crab Rangoon Pizza. It’s a must-try!
- Black Cat Ice Cream: just three words—ice cream nuggets
- Zombie Burger: enjoy your burger with an “adult milk shake” and the undead...
- Manhattan Deli: perfect for fans of “The Bear” (yelling included)
- High Life Lounge: great spot for late night drinks and bar food
- Crème: a locally owned bakery that understands sugar cravings at all hours—open till midnight on the weekends.

While you’re an honorary Iowan, we suggest you try a Scotcheroo, Maid Rite, tenderloins bigger than your head,

continued on page 30 ▶

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and Potato Ole's from Taco Johns (with both cheese and guacamole). Don't turn down an opportunity to enjoy cheese curds, and make sure you pay a visit to The Cheese Shop, just steps away from The Playhouse.

How about nightlife? Any suggestions?

Catch some jazz at Noce, downtown's sophisticated music venue, with terrific bartenders and the best entertainers in Des Moines. Also drop in at Louie's Wine Dive for live music happy hours, and piano jazz, or El Bait Shop, with 250 beers on tap, or Juniper Moon for a softer vibe, great conversation, and creative cocktails.

Final question: What are Des Moines' best-kept secrets?

- Jester Park, where you can walk in the woods, and hang out with bison and buffalo
- Other amazing park spaces like The Greenwood, the trails around Grey's Lake (magical at night), and hiking in The Ashworth
- The PappaJohn Sculpture Park, which isn't really a secret, but you don't want to miss it, and it's open from dawn to midnight
- The Des Moines Art Center, which houses a world-class modern art collection
- Terrace Hill, and the South of Grand neighborhood, whose tree-lined streets are home to beautifully restored Victorian homes, perched above the river
- The Great Ape Trust, a research and care facility that is home to a family of bonobos and the smartest primate in the world, Kanzi



catchdesmoines.com

There's always something to explore at the Greater Des Moines Botanical gardens, an urban oasis and living museum in the heart of the city

Any last thoughts you think AACT members should know before they arrive?

David Kilpatrick: Iowa has more pigs than people, at a ratio of 7 to 1. So, if you love bacon, this is your town!

Catch Des Moines also has a plethora of fun visitors planning tools, blogs, videos, and guides for you to use and to craft a unique "Deh Moyne" experience of your own! Visit Catchdesmoines.com

AACT is thrilled to be back in the town that was pivotal to the start and advancement of the organization. It is safe to say that Des Moines is a city that is going to keep our hearts, minds, and stomachs full. Thanks to all of you at Des Moines Playhouse for the insider tips. We can't wait to see you in the summer of 2025!

Registration for AACTFest 2025 opens this summer with the VIP Registrations. VIP registrations get you exclusive perks and privileges to AACTFest and city events. General registration opens September 1, 2024. For more information and to register visit aact.org/aactfest-2025.

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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 she 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 adjudicated theatre festivals 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.

Managing Things; Leading People

Stage Management Essentials Virtual Masterclass with Jay Sheehan

Jay Sheehan's AACT Masterclass, "Stage Management Essentials," last fall covered some of the things one would expect from a stage management webinar—how to write rehearsal reports, prop tracking templates, blocking notation tips, etc. But it was Jay's leadership tools that made a lasting impact on attendees. Here are his top five leadership tips that can benefit stage managers, directors, producers, and anyone who is leading a production.

We Manage Things, But We Lead People

There are good stage managers, and then there are great stage managers. What makes the difference is the way you lead your team—not just the physical production. Everyone looks to the stage manager for leadership in times of crisis, so it's important to know how to lead people effectively. How do you do that? Lead with empathy, respect, integrity, and honesty. We tell the truth with transparency and kindness. These really are life skills, not just stage management skills. There's a reason we learn kindness in kindergarten.

Listening With Intention

Stay present and focused on the person who is speaking. Don't think about other things, or let your eyes wander, while someone is speaking to you. Doing so tells the person speaking that you are not interested in what they have to say. Don't try to finish their sentences. We all have the tendency to think we know what they're saying, so we try to help, but are really just interrupting them. Let them get their words out!

Please and Thank You

Our industry is all about relationships, so it's important to focus on maintaining positive relationships with everyone involved. One of the simplest ways to do this—which is often the easiest to forget—is simply saying "please" and "thank you." Understand that stage managers are always needing something—from the shops, box office, marketing departments, etc. By asking for things with kindness and thanking others for their work, we solidify the relationships that not only improve that production, but could get us future work.

Owning Our Mistakes

Everybody, even stage managers, make mistakes. If you make a mistake, you have to own it. The best leaders will own it, correct it, and do better the next time. We cannot be afraid of mistakes. The biggest secret to success is actually failure. Failures can quickly turn to opportunities when you acknowledge what you did wrong and learn from it. Never underestimate the importance and power of the word "sorry."

Be Proactive, Not Reactive

As much as we learn from mistakes, it's a smoother process without them. A friend always told me, "Proper prior planning prevents poor performance." Good stage managers, and good leaders in general, will anticipate any problems and immediately implement corrective action. This means never going into panic mode, which just burns up all our energy. Proper prior planning also helps establish an environment of enthusiasm and effective relationships.



Jay Sheehan has been overseeing the production management and stage management areas for the School of Theatre, Television, and Film at San Diego State University for 23 years and leads the Certificate in Entertainment Management Program for the School. In addition to leading the production management area, Jay teaches stage management, production management, event planning, and live concert production. A published author, Jay co-wrote the first

textbook about production management in the United States. The Production Manager's Toolkit has been an international bestseller in the Routledge Press Toolkit series. The second edition of the book was released in March, 2023. In addition to the textbook, Jay has had several articles on leadership published in theatre industry magazines including Theatre Design and Technology and Stage Directions Magazine. He is also the owner of his own production company, Cue One Productions, whose event list includes the NFL Super Bowl, and Major League Baseball's All-Star Game special events. He also produces many charity galas and corporate events across the United States.



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Regionally Speaking

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 9 Representative is Jon Douglas Rake, Founder and Managing Artistic Director at Tacoma Musical Playhouse in Tacoma, Washington, who reports on the challenges and successes he's seen in his Region.



Jon Douglas Rake

Living in the Northwest was the best decision I ever made. I accepted my role as Region Rep when my predecessor suddenly decided to leave. I didn't know exactly what I was getting into, but I knew I wanted to be active with AACT. As I began to meet and speak with Region 9 community theatres, I knew this was going to be an enjoyable job.

Among other things, I found that my state of Washington had a very active state organization, Washington State Community Theatre Association (WSCTA), and almost 40 community theatres. However, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska did not have state organizations, and so that was one of the first tasks I decided to take on.

I am proud of the quality of theatre that is presented in AACT Region 9

Oregon now has a state organization, Oregon Community Theatre Alliance (OCTA), with more than 20 theatres involved, and has hosted State and Regional Festivals. Next, my attention turned to Idaho, which, I am pleased to say, now has the Idaho Association of Community Theatre (I-ACT), which has eight very active community theatres, and is growing. Idaho has also hosted State Festivals, and this year will host our Regional Festival in March or April of 2025.

Alaska is an enormous challenge. At 586,000 square miles, it's the largest state in the U.S., and so spread out that it's difficult to get to every corner. Fortunately, I was able to visit three of the Alaskan theatres while on an Alaska cruise. It is my goal to have more theatres involved with AACT so they can learn what our organization can do for them.

I am proud of the quality of theatre that is presented in AACT Region 9. We hosted two National Festivals, first in 1983 in Haines, Alaska, and again in 2009 in Tacoma, Washington. Our region has had many award-winning productions at AACTFest, and I am hoping that we'll have another winning production this next cycle. State Festivals are all set, and everyone is working hard to present a fun-filled experience of high-quality theatre. I encourage you to participate or attend AACT State and Regional festivals. I promise you, it is well worth it!

A colorful poster for the play 'Peaches en Regalia' by Steve Lyons. The title is in large, stylized blue letters. Above it, it says 'A New Comedy By Steve Lyons' and 'HORSESHOE cafe'. The central image is a large ice cream sundae with a cherry on top, served in a glass dish. Below the sundae, there are two red banners with quotes: '...a treat from beginning to end.' - San Diego Playbill and 'Cute and quirky...' - KPBS Radio. At the bottom, it says 'Four opening monologues become one beautifully intertwined story of lives merging at a critical juncture' - Ventura County Reporter. The bottom section is yellow and contains the text 'Free Evaluation Scripts EVERGREEN PLAYS www.EvergreenPlays.com'.

Friends We'll Miss - Roger Ellis



Roger Ellis accepts the 2022 Mort Clark International Achievement Award from AACT Board members Chris Serface and Jon Douglas Rake during aactWORLDFFEST 2022 in Venice, Florida

Through his work, Dr. Roger Barry Ellis inspired an entirely new generation of performance artists who are now making their mark all over the world.

Roger passed away peacefully at his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 13, 2024, with his family by his side. He was 80 years old.

Born May 18, 1943, to Mary and Daniel Ellis in Chicago, Illinois, Roger spent his early years on the shores of Lake Michigan before moving to San Jose, California, at the age of eight.

As a young man, Roger loved classic literature, from the dramatic flair of kingly soliloquies to the wailing tragedies of Greek heroes. This inspired his pursuit of performing arts, earning him a Bachelor's and a Master of Arts degree in Drama, and a Doctorate in Theatre from the University of California. He would eventually take a position as a communications and dramatic arts professor at Grand Valley State University, relocating to West Michigan.

Roger's imprint on the world of performance art expanded significantly when he founded the largest and longest-lasting Shakespeare theatre festival in Michigan, served on several boards and festival committees across five continents, and continued appearing in performances himself.

He founded the Cultural Diversity Program in theatre at Grand Valley State University in 1991, and led students on four study-abroad experiences as director of the School of Communications' International Conference on theatre great

Augusto Boal, presenting performance workshops in movement and acting in Germany, Greece, France, the Caribbean, Switzerland, and Canada. He served as President of the Theatre Alliance of Michigan, and as Vice-President for World Theatre for the International Amateur Theatre Association (IATA). He was also the U.S. representative for amateur theatre at international conferences in seven countries and was Chair of IATA's Artistic Development Committee.

Roger served on AACT's International Committee and was awarded the Mort Clark International Achievement Award in 2022.

For more about Roger and his work, visit his professional website: ellisart.net.

The image shows the cover of a book titled "All the King's Women" by Luigi Jannuzzi. The cover features a large, detailed illustration of an acoustic guitar. The text on the cover includes the title "All the King's Women" in a large, stylized font, with a small illustration of a woman's face integrated into the letter 'o'. Below the title, it says "5 One Acts, 3 Monologues" and "by Luigi Jannuzzi". At the top, a quote reads "FROM CALIFORNIA TO AUSTRALIA, this play rocks!". At the bottom, it says "A CONCORD THEATRICALS COMPANY" and "SAMUEL FRENCH". The publisher and playwright information is listed at the very bottom: "Publisher: ConcordTheatricals.com" and "Playwright: LuigiJannuzzi.com".

Emergency, Disaster, and Catastrophe Planning

Michael Cochran, AACT Board of Directors

Theatre is a place where drama happens—in more ways than one. The main actor may suddenly take sick and there's not an understudy, or the toilets in the theatre are backed up and we have no restrooms 30 minutes before the first act, or the power goes out during a performance, or a tornado siren goes off in act one, or a hurricane causes widespread damage to your venue, or a pandemic causes a community to stay home.

The Performing Arts Readiness group defines events like these in different ways [performingartsreadiness.org].

- *An emergency* is a smaller situation and can usually be handled by one or two people.
- *A disaster* is a larger event, often unexpected, that seriously disrupts your usual operations.
- *A catastrophe* is a community-wide disaster, and therefore on a much larger scale.

Every theatre should have a Disaster Plan to help guide you through the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” as Hamlet would say. I recently heard a writer in an interview talking about his new book. His statement was roughly, “It’s important to imagine the worst things that could happen and then the resources you need to recover from them.”

According to statistics, 40% of small businesses don’t immediately open after a disaster, and of those, 25% close within a year, and 75% fail within three years.

That’s why every theatre should have a Business Continuity Plan, which walks you through the possible challenges that your group might face from a disaster or catastrophe. Below are the key elements of such a plan.

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Facilities Planning

If you were unable to perform in your space for an extended period of time, are there other theatres or spaces where you could perform? Having a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with another group can provide at least a start for how to move forward. That way, if a community-wide catastrophe does happen, and there are many other groups looking for space, an MOU puts you first in line to access that particular space. A separate MOU could also help provide office space, production spaces like scene and costume shops, and even rehearsal space.

People Planning

I was serving on a local board this year, when the Executive Director unexpectedly passed away. Fortunately for the organization, we had just worked on an Emergency Succession Plan that lays out the daily and weekly tasks that need to be done, and who should do them if something happens to the director. However, what we *hadn't* thought of was that our staff and board would have to figure out the passwords on the director’s computer and the passcode on their work phone. We’re familiar with stories about a sudden death that leaves spouses or family unable to access accounts because they don’t have passwords or authorized access. Having an Emergency Succession Plan (and a place where all passwords and passcodes are safely stored) are critical for your organization after the loss of a key person.

Financial Planning

If you should face a disaster or catastrophe, do you have money set aside in a reserve budget, or have a line of credit at a local bank that you can draw on? Even a relatively short business interruption can stress your finances. Do you have an adequate number of signatories authorized to spend funds in case one or more persons are not available? Are you able to access remote banking? Do you know where your insurance documents are and can you access them if you can’t get into your building? Do you have a ticket refund policy that is clearly articulated and communicated?

IT Planning

Do you have a policy if your website or ticket database is hacked? What are you going to tell your ticket buyers and donors if that happens? Do you routinely back up your information to secure offsite or cloud storage? Have you done a restore test of your data in the past year to make sure that your backup system works? Do you have a designated place on your website for crisis communications, and have you assigned a person to be responsible for posting/authoring those communications?

Emergency and Evacuation Plans

Do you have clearly posted and updated Emergency Plan for hurricanes, tornados, winter storms, power failures, and so on?

Fortunately, since Covid threatened all of us, a number of resource organizations have developed templates and guides that

can help you create plans that will get through the tough times. Websites like **Performingartsreadiness.org**, **ArtsReady.org**, **dPlan.org**, and not only offer guidance on how to respond to an emergency, but also how to plan for such events. The cost to create an account with dPlan is \$59.40 a year or \$4.95 a month, and it walks you through all the steps for disaster planning.

FEMA also has resources, including one of my favorite templates—the Vulnerability Assessment Analysis Form. It asks you to list types of emergencies, then to rank the probability of each from one to five, with one being the lowest probability. Then you rank each of the following: human impact, property impact, and business impact, from one to five, as well. Finally, you rank both internal and external resources from one to five, with one being a weak resource and five being the strongest resource. When you add up all the numbers, you'll know the most important areas you need to plan for. In so doing, it's important to understand that a large water pipe break, or a fire, or a flood might have a much higher probability but with a more moderate impact, and so would score higher than a major catastrophe that has a very low probability of happening. Visit **aact.org/fema**

In the end, taking time now to develop a plan—or at the very least, an outline of a plan—will save you valuable time when a disaster hits and you don't have the time or the resources to start from scratch.



Michael Cochran is Executive Director at Market House Theatre (MHT) in Paducah, Kentucky. Now marking his 40th year with MHT, he also serves on the AACT Board of Directors, and is a past board member of Arts KY and the Kentucky Theatre Association.

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**

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Curtain Up On Safety: Avoiding slips, trips, and falls

Adam Bell, Risk Control Specialist – Nonprofit + Human Services at Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer)¹

The magic of live theatre thrives on captivating performances and a welcoming atmosphere. But behind the scenes, community theatres face a real risk: slips, trips, and falls. Incidents like these can cause injury to patrons, volunteers, cast, and crew, leading to lost time, financial burdens, and a potential tarnish on your theatre's reputation.

To help avoid slip, trip, and fall incidents, we'll turn the spotlight on common causes within theatre spaces, along with actionable tips to prevent them.

Why slips, trips, and falls are a top concern

Slips, trips, and falls are a leading cause of injuries in public spaces, and theatres are no exception. Uneven floors, cluttered walkways, poor lighting, and improper footwear all contribute to the risk. These incidents can range from minor bumps to serious injuries, which could lead to:

- **Medical expenses:** Treatment costs for fall-related injuries can be significant, impacting both individuals and the theatre, if held liable.
- **Lost productivity:** Injured volunteers, cast, or crew members may be unable to fulfill their roles, jeopardizing rehearsals and performances.
- **Lawsuits:** If a patron suffers a fall due to negligence on the theatre's part, a lawsuit could result in hefty settlements and legal fees.
- **Negative publicity:** News of a significant slip, trip, or fall incident at your theatre could damage your reputation and deter future patrons and participants.

Identifying high-risk areas

By pinpointing the areas that are most prone to slips, trips, and falls, you can take targeted preventative measures to reduce the risk.

- **Backstage:** Wet floors from spilled drinks or cleaning solutions, loose cables, and cluttered storage areas pose significant risks.
- **Loading docks and ramps:** Moving heavy items during load-in and load-out can create the potential for injuries to crew members.
- **Stage:** Uneven stage surfaces, misplaced props, and poor lighting during setup and rehearsals can be hazardous.
- **Audience areas:** Spilled food or drinks, uneven carpeting or steps, and inadequate handrails in walkways pose hazards for patrons.
- **Restrooms:** Wet floors, slippery surfaces, and poorly lighted areas are common concerns.
- **Entrances and exits:** Uneven pavement, wet or icy sidewalks, and poorly lighted access points can be dangerous, especially during inclement weather.

Actionable tips for a safer theatre

Here are some practical steps your organization can take to minimize the risk of slips, trips, and falls:

- **Implement a culture of safety:** Foster safety awareness among all volunteers, cast and crew, and patrons. Conduct regular safety briefings and training sessions to educate everyone on potential hazards and preventive measures.

- **Maintain a clean and organized environment:** Develop a cleaning and maintenance schedule for all areas of the theatre. Promptly address spills, leaks, and wet floors with proper signage and cleaning protocols. Ensure all walkways are free of clutter, loose cables, or misplaced props.
- **Improve lighting conditions:** Ensure there is adequate lighting throughout the theatre, particularly in backstage areas, dressing rooms, and restrooms. Install dimmers for gradual lighting changes during rehearsals and performances.
- **Utilize cargo elevators:** If your theatre has both ramps and elevators, encourage crews to use cargo elevators for larger and heavier items.
- **Address uneven surfaces:** Inspect floors for unevenness, cracks or raised edges. Repair damaged surfaces promptly or consider adding non-slip mats in high-risk areas.
- **Enact footwear policies:** Encourage patrons and crew members to wear sturdy, closed-toe shoes with good traction. Consider providing crew with slip-resistant shoe covers for backstage areas during rehearsals and set changes.
- **Install handrails and signage:** Install sturdy handrails along staircases and in high-traffic areas. Post clear signage warning of potential hazards such as wet floors or uneven steps.
- **Conduct regular safety inspections:** Assign a dedicated individual or committee to conduct regular safety inspections of the theatre facility. Maintain a log of inspections, with documented actions your theatre has taken to address any identified hazards. This can be invaluable should there ever be a question about your commitment to safety.

By prioritizing these safety measures, you can significantly reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls at your theatre. Remember, a safe environment not only protects your participants and patrons but also fosters a positive atmosphere for everyone involved in bringing the magic of live theatre to life.



Adam Bell is a Risk Control Specialist in the Nonprofit + Human Services Center of Excellence at Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer)¹. He has nearly 25 years of nonprofit leadership experience, with knowledge in risk management, operations, program development, facility management, board relations, fundraising, customer service, and more.

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Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Jon Montgomery, AACT Board of Directors

Transgender and non-binary representation in theatre and media is on the rise, with trans and non-binary performers taking on diverse roles. Recognizing the importance of learning from others' experiences, I initiated discussions with fellow performers to help theatres foster understanding and create safer spaces. Their responses reflect a shift towards inclusivity and empowerment within our theatre communities.

Robin Buckingham, an 18-year-old transgender male using he/they pronouns, began his theatre journey at 12, finding self-discovery through portraying various genders/sexes. Despite some negative experiences, he emphasizes that theatre remains a personal pursuit.

Shai Duffy, 18, identifies as non-binary/genderfluid with they/them pronouns. Introduced to community theatre at age 12, they have overcome disappointments and found support within community theatre.

Aria Huizenga, a transgender female using she/her pronouns, also started theatre at the age of 12 and struggled to find her place after transitioning. Aria is currently performing the role of Lucille in the production of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, at the Des Moines Playhouse. Aria recalls that at first, she could not see a space for her after her transition. It was through her first experience with the Des Moines Playhouse, where she was cast as Sour Kangaroo in *Seussical*, that she realized that her talent could land her integral feminine roles.

Maia Talarico, transgender/non-binary with they/he pronouns, began theatre in college and navigated their transition during the pandemic, and as a black man in the theatre community. Maia is currently performing the role of Drifter/Ensemble in the production of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* at the Des Moines Playhouse.

During interviews with these performers, I explored various aspects of their experiences and perspectives. One experience they had in common was unease during auditions. Robin remains uncertain about working with directors unfamiliar with trans talent. Shai echoed this sentiment, and advocates for more open-mindedness in trans/non-binary auditions. Aria's apprehension often leads her to present herself as hyper-feminine at auditions. Maia's experiences prompt them to extensively research directors and their past productions, and the host theatre's casting practices.

When discussing their attraction to community theatre, each spoke of overwhelmingly positive and uplifting experiences. Robin expressed enthusiasm for the sense of community, where diverse individuals come together, offering social acceptance. Shai shared this feeling, and has found their own support system within community theatre. Aria feels comfortable, accepted, and affirmed at the Des Moines Playhouse, where she works most often. Maia has felt welcomed and celebrated, highlighting the community's willingness to embrace them during their transition, and overcoming bias barriers.

I sought advice from each performer for directors lacking experience with trans/non-binary talent. Robin underscores the importance of transparency, and advises directors to clarify expectations of roles before auditions. Shai advocates for giving diverse talent opportunities to shine, emphasizing talent over identity. Aria highlights the dedication of trans/non-binary talent, and urges celebration of their contributions. Likewise, Maia stresses the importance of respecting trans/non-binary talent, and ensuring a safe space for all individuals in the theatre community.

My final question: What advice would you give to trans/non-binary talent?

Robin: "Embrace yourself and dive in. The supportive community of community theatre outweighs any negativity."

Shai: "Be unapologetically yourself. Present yourself authentically to the world."

Maia: "There's always a place for everyone. It's about finding the right space. The theatre world benefits from the contributions of trans/non-binary talent."

Aria: "Persist and believe in yourself. If you can't find a space, create one. You are powerful. You are strong. You are loved."

Doesn't that sound like something we all share?



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

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AACTFest 2025 Handbook

Bob Frame, AACT Vice President for Festivals

The *AACTFest 2025 Handbook* is now available at: aact.org/handbook. A whole crew debated and proofread many drafts to clarify and further simplify what we have worked with in the past.

Revisions include updating the technical sections, defining who is in the room when balloting for the festival's winners take place, requesting that companies resubmit forms to the AACT Office as they move up, and other issues that AACT commissioners have encountered during the past cycle(s).



Rest assured that—other than the tweaks mentioned above—the *AACTFest 2025 Handbook* is essentially the same as in past years, with two notable exceptions.

First, AACT staff members Festivals/Engagement Coordinator Mary Jo DeNolf and Office and Events Assistant Winston Daniels have created a “Festival Chair Checklist”—a timeline to assist festival chairs as they go through the steps needed to host a successful festival. It does not change the requirements discussed in the Handbook, but rather clarifies when different tasks should be accomplished. This will certainly be helpful to first-timers, but even the “old pros” may need a reminder now and again. The checklist will be invaluable in both cases.

The second major change is that all Regional Festivals are expected to be concluded before April 15 of a festival year. Having this date announced well before the Regional Festival dates will allow states time to plan their own festivals, so that everything moves smoothly to the next level. The April 15 deadline will also give AACT staff the time needed to prepare for hosting and publicizing the National Festival. Advance publicity is essential, since it gives the regional winners a boost as they fundraise for their appearance at the National Festival.

It can't be said too strongly: If you have any thought of entering a show in the festivals, or hosting a festival, you must read the Handbook. If there are requirements in the Handbook that you either cannot fulfill or must modify, reach out to us via the contact information below. Waivers are possible in some cases, but you'll need to provide an explanation as to why the waiver is requested.

It's important to remember that everything in the Handbook is geared toward establishing and maintaining an even-playing field at each level. The shows and the companies may be different, but the performance facility and experience must be the same for all.

As always, if anything in the Handbook is unclear, or does not answer your question, please reach out to us.

Finally, I want you to know how honored I feel to step into former VP for Festivals Jim Walker's footsteps as Vice President for Festivals. They are awfully big shoes to fill, and he has made it look so easy. But Jim hasn't really left—I have his cell and

continued on page 40 ▶

A promotional poster for the musical "SATB: The Musical". The title "SATB" is in large, bold, black letters with a red heart shape behind it. Below it, "THE MUSICAL" is in smaller black letters. The text "NOW AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING" is in red, followed by the website "www.satbthemusical.com" and the price "\$599" in large red font. Below that, it says "Unlimited Shows - Unlimited Seating" and "License by May 1, 2024, close by February 28, 2025". It also lists "Includes digital script, tracks, and production resources" and "Accessible ensemble musical with 4 treble and 5 tenor/bass parts". At the bottom, it says "Versatile for either black box or main venue". There is a logo for "OFFICIAL SELECTION AACTE 2022" and "BOOK AND MUSIC BY DANA LAMB-SCHAUBROECK". At the very bottom, a red banner says "Don't you wanna join the choir and sing along?"

email—and he has been a wonderful resource to bounce off ideas and past practices as I learn the job. Former Festival Commissioner Chair Kay Armstrong has also been a rock and guide. I look forward to creating as strong a team in the future, working with Mary Jo DeNolf and current Festival Commissioner Chair Chris Serface as we move forward to AACTFest 2025 in Des Moines, Iowa.

AACTFest 2025 Contacts:

Bob Frame, Vice President for Festivals
phone: 315-406-2139, email: Framer@cayuga-cc.edu

Chris Serface, Festival Commission Chair
phone: 360-556-5735, email: chris@tacomalittletheatre.com

Mary Jo DeNolf, AACT Festivals/Engagement Coordinator
phone: 616-822-0006, email: maryjo@aact.org

AACT 2025 Design Competition

Calling all designers!! The AACT Design Competition will return in 2025, so now is the time to begin thinking about the work you would like to enter, and start gathering picture and documentation. Bob Frame, who has been instrumental in the development of the competition, says more information will be shared in the future as a new committee takes the reins.

2024 Years of Service

AACT is truly grateful for the contributions and commitment of our Board, Volunteers, Committee Members, and Staff. We are grateful for the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication they bring to their roles and work towards support Community Theatre in America.

The following volunteers have served AACT as Board members, on committees, and as State Contacts. Those with 25 years or more, have volunteered continuously since AACT was founded in early 1986.

5 Years

Gai Jones, Ojai, CA

10 Years

Steve Hughes, Kokomo, IN

Vickie Trickett,
Morgantown, WV

Brad Moore, Glenwood
Springs, CO

Winston Daniels, Euless, TX

15 Years

Lori Chase, Venice, FL

Sharon Burum, Duncan, OK

Lynn Nelson, Tupelo, MS

Chad McDonald, Cookeville, TN

20 Years

Jon Douglas Rake, Tacoma, WA

30 Years

Ginger Heath, Monroe, NC

Linda Miller, Phoenix, AZ

Stephen Peithman, Woodland, CA



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I Left My Heart – A Salute to the Music of Tony Bennett
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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

Time for Action on Federal Theatre Funding

If ever was there a time to take an active role in our government it's now ... and I don't mean with November's elections on the horizon.

A new bill recently introduced by Senators Welch, Fetterman, and Reed—the “Supporting Theater and the Arts to Galvanize the Economy Act” or the “STAGE Act”—may be a big help to community theatres, but here's why it may not, and what we need to do. (Please don't start reaching out to legislators without reading this article completely.)

This new bill would provide \$1 billion per year for five years to help theatres with payroll, basic theatre expenses (costumes, sets, marketing), and facility improvements. Federal 501(c)(3) status and at least three years in business are some of the basic requirements.

The bill creates a Professional Nonprofit Theater Grant Program to provide eligible entities with funding for the purposes of supporting employment and economic recovery; stimulating economic development; strengthening community-based arts organizations; and improving theater facilities.

Unfortunately, this new bill contains language that may eliminate many community theatres from eligibility. Like similar federal pandemic aid programs that were not available to many theatres because they had no paid staff, this new bill has restrictions, as well. One line in particular is the biggest sticking point, namely that it “compensates all professional performers and related or supporting professional personnel at a rate that is not less than the prevailing minimum compensation for persons employed in similar activities as described in section 5(m) of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 954 m).”

Of the 10,000+/- nonprofit theatres in the US, at least 8,000 are community theatres that often use volunteer performers and other personnel, but are still major economic engines. As AACT members are well aware, nonprofit community theatres are businesses. We employ people locally, purchase supplies and services from nearby businesses, and engage in the marketing and promotion of our cities and regions. The very act of our doing business—creating, presenting, exhibiting, engaging—has a positive economic impact and improves community well-being.

Our theatres, in communities from major cities to rural villages, have an estimated combined budget of \$250 million and engage more than 1.5 million volunteers, expressing creativity through the art of theatre and engaging a combined audience of over 8.5 million theatre goers of all ages.

Therefore, The STAGE Act needs to be amended as was the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG), which extended eligibility to thousands of community theatres. SVOG language said that provided the events staged by such an organization are produced and managed primarily by paid employees, the use of volunteers in the production casts would not disqualify it. Additionally, the grant description should be changed to just Nonprofit Theater Grant Program.

We need to reach out to all federal legislators and let them know that community theatres have a huge impact in our communities. And that while many of our performers are volunteers, we are responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars in wages paid to musicians, directors, choreographers, lighting, set and costume designers, technical directors, house staff, box office managers, executive staff, and more. Additionally, we pump millions of dollars into local economies through purchase of production supplies for sets, costumes, props, and more.

Start small...aim big! Speak to your local legislators—they likely have contact with your state legislators who, in turn, can reach your state's federal delegation. (Does this sound like a pyramid scheme for a positive result? Yes!)

We must act fast, though. We want senators to agree to support the bill with the caveat of changing the eligibility rules to include support for all community theatres. For a sample letter, you can send (and urge your patrons to send) go to the AACT website (aact.org/letter).

This is a perfect example of what AACT is all about: Helping Theatres Thrive. Any questions? Send me an email at lou@curtaincallinc.com.



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

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New Roles



Cottage Theatre, Cottage Grove, Oregon, is excited to welcome **Rhodec Erickson** as its new Technical Director. Rhodec joined Cottage Theatre's staff in March 2024. Rhodec has been active in the Lane County theatre community from a young age and has had the opportunity to work in most local venues. For the last 12 years he served

as Technical Director at the Wildish Community Theater in Springfield, where he focused on integrating new technology into the facility. He stage-managed and production-managed with Ballet Fantastique for two years at Eugene's Hult Center for the Performing Arts, and on tour. Rhodec is an active member of I.A.T.S.E. Local 675, where he works with touring shows that visit Oregon. He also teaches stage craft classes at local high schools. Outside of theatre work, Rhodec is passionate about photography, model trains, and 90s printers.



Morgan "Taylor" Meyers joins **Georgetown Palace Theatre**, Georgetown, Texas, as Technical Director. Taylor has spent over a decade working in the arts, showcasing his talents as a musician, writer, actor, and stagehand since the age of 12. His focus solely on backstage work and technical arts led to a B.F.A. in theatre from Texas State University.

Taylor began his professional career with large arena and concert work at the University of Texas Frank Erwin Center, focusing on lighting design. While still actively pursuing theatrical projects, he worked for StageSpot, a stage lighting company that provided him with opportunities to explore technical work beyond stage lighting, helping him become a more well-rounded stagehand. The last five years of his career have been spent working with the Texas A&M Corpus Christi Performing Arts Center, where he managed every aspect of every event they hosted while also developing a community of artists. Taylor joined the Georgetown Palace Theatre in February 2024, and is excited to work on fostering the theatre community in Central Texas.

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TwistedPlays.com




Maralee Maldavs is the new Costume Designer at **Lincoln Community Playhouse (LCP)** in Lincoln, Nebraska. She will be the theatre's first full-time costume designer in 29 years. Maralee has over 65 credits as costume designer for various Lincoln-area theatres, including 12 shows at LCP. She has 18 years

of experience designing countless costumes for competition dance, musical theatre groups, and individual dancers, including designing 12 productions of *The Nutcracker*.



Another addition to **LCP's** staff is **Jeff Maldavs**, the company's new Technical Director. Jeff has been the Designer and Technical Director for the city's annual outdoor musical theatre, Pinewood Performing Arts, since 2017, and will be using his experience there in building big shows at the Playhouse. Before turning to theatre, Jeff co-owned

Progressive Automotive and is experienced with budgets, scheduling, and staff management.



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To learn more about the script and music, go to **Liberty-Calls.com**.

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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: Theatre Management

Managing a theatre can be a challenge, but the resources below can help make things go more smoothly. The AACT website should be your first stop. Elsewhere, you'll find help on those websites devoted to the arts in general, or to nonprofit management. We've also included some highly rated books that shed light on the management process and help you navigate through the inevitable hurdles.

Online Resources

AACT

- **Webinars:** AACT offers virtual educational programs that benefit theatre organizations, regardless of location or budget size. Topics include management, marketing & community outreach, education and youth programming, and volunteers: aact.org/webinars
 - Roundtables: Monthly, panel-based discussions available to AACT members only
 - Virtual Masterclasses: In-depth explorations of specific skills or topics
 - Industry Connections: Presentations from theatre resource providers that showcase their services and support.
- **AACT's Resource Library** provides articles on a wide spectrum of topic, including administration and management, advocacy, boards & governance, business & legal forms, fundraising & grants, insurance, job descriptions, and more: aact.org/library (To view, you must be signed in.)
- **More:** On any page of the AACT website (aact.org) go to the drop-down menu's "Making Theatre" section, where you'll find a number of management topics, including Theatre People (basic job descriptions), Rights and Royalties, Finance and Budgeting, and Fundraising and Grants, among others.

Americans for the Arts

On the main menu, click on "By Topic" to find resources on advancing arts locally, arts & business, arts & economy, arts education, arts marketing, cultural equity, disaster preparedness, funding resources, and professional development. americansforthearts.org/by-topic-0

National Council of Nonprofits

On the main menu, click on "Running a Nonprofit" for resources on budgeting, business planning, compliance, filling state and federal forms, finance, strategic planning, tax issues, employment & HR, fundraising & resource development, governance & leadership, marketing & communications, and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). councilofnonprofits.org

TechSoup.org

TechSoup offers nonprofits a variety of technology solutions that serve operational efficiency and outreach. Resources include articles and educational tools on the best use of technology for an organization, as well as discounted products and services from various software partners, including Microsoft, Norton, and Intuit. As an example, through TechSoup, Adobe grants 501(c)(3) Nonprofits free access to Adobe Express Premium, with video creation tools, social media content scheduling, PDF editing, royalty-free photos,

and document templates. TechSoup also offers discounts on computer products from Lenovo and Dell, as well as companies that offer IT services. techsoup.org

The Printed Page

Building the Successful Theater Company, by Lisa Mulcahy. Using interviews with leaders from 19 diverse and innovative theatre companies, Mulcahy explores what makes for success in funding and finances, using social media, working with corporate sponsors, and establishing artistic collaborations. Theatre leaders provide advice on locating performance space, developing a business plan, and even rehearsing and publicizing productions. [Allworth Press, 2016]

Managing Arts Organizations, by David Snider. Starting with the premise that arts organizations must be flexible, adaptive, and nimble to survive and thrive, Snider shows how arts managers can best engage, adapt, and innovate. Each chapter focuses on a specific topic, with related principles, stories, advice, and best practices. The appendix includes case studies regarding financial management, marketing, programming, DEI efforts, and accessibility. [Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022]

Running Theaters: Best Practices for Leaders and Managers, by Duncan Webb (Second Edition). Based on surveys and interviews with theatre managers and experts, Webb provides insight into managing regional, campus, and community theatres. Chapters focus on front- and back-of-house operations; building and working with a board of directors; financial management; and the necessary skills and attributes of a successful theatre manager. This second edition also includes recent programming trends, marketing in the digital age, and the evolving role of theatres in economic and community development. [Allworth Press, 2020]

The Stage Producer's Business and Legal Guide, by Charles Grippo (Second Edition). The author—an attorney, producer, and playwright—provides advice on managing a nonprofit theatre company; crowdfunding a production; new opportunities to raise money; self-production; licensing and producing plays; collaborations; creating jukebox musicals; theatrical insurance; negotiating contracts; and using third-party intellectual property. [Allworth, Press 2019]

Theatre Management: Arts Leadership for the 21st Century, by Anthony Rhine. Designed as a textbook, this would be of most use to someone moving into an administrative position for the first time. Rhine covers a wide range of topics for both commercial and nonprofit theatre management, from developing a mission statement to communicating with stakeholders, from marketing and promotion to fund development platforms, from governance structures to community engagement. [Bloomsbury, 2018]

Calendar of Events

Dates	Event	St	City	Phone	Web Site
June 12	AACT Industry Connection: ThunderTix		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/webinars
June 21-22	AACT Summer Board Meetings	MI	Grand Rapids	817-732-3177	aact.org/calendar
July 10	AACT Industry Connection: On The Stage		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/webinars
August 9-25	AACT NewPlayFest Premiere: <i>Tennessee Wet Rub</i> , by Kim E. Ruyle	OR	Cottage Grove	541-942-8001	cottagetheatre.org/tickets
August 14	AACT Industry Connection: Broadway Plus		virtual	817-732-3177	aact.org/webinars
August 15-18	Florida State Festival	FL	Winter Haven	941-584-0639	flatheatre.org/
August 30 - September 2	Ohio State Festival	OH	Newark	740-403-8969	midlandtheatre.org

Advertisers

<i>Assisted Living: The Musical</i>	3	Evergreen Plays <i>The Fun in Funeral</i>	27
<i>Assisted Living: The Musical</i>	30	Evergreen Plays <i>Peaches en Regalia</i>	32
<i>Assisted Living: The Musical</i>	34	Heuer Publishing <i>Going Going Gone</i>	2
<i>Assisted Living: The Musical</i>	41	Historical Emporium	31
Barn Lot Theater	23	Luigi Jannuzzi <i>All the King's Women</i>	33
Ruth Tyndall Baker <i>Liberty Calls</i>	43	MTI <i>Tootsie</i>	6
Roger Bean <i>Sh-Boom</i>	11	Nonsense Shows	19
Buddy Worldwide <i>The Buddy Holly Story</i>	35	Parker Plays	20
<i>Bully No More</i>	47	Pioneer Drama Service <i>Rainbow Fish</i>	24
Church Mutual Insurance	37	Pioneer Drama Service <i>Mystery Plays</i>	28
Peter Colley <i>I'll Be Back Before Midnight</i>	26	<i>SATB: The Musical</i>	39
Concord Theatricals <i>Dreamgirls</i>	5	Joe Simonelli Plays	42
Londos D'Arrigo <i>Harris Cashes Out</i>	38	StarCenterTheatre.....	17
Londos D'Arrigo <i>Spreading It Around</i>	22	Summerwind Productions	40
Dillette Strategic Consulting	25	Tobins Lake Studios	29
Disney Theatrical Group	8	TRW <i>We Will Rock You</i>	13
William Missouri Downs <i>Seagulls in a Cherry Tree</i>	15	Twisted Plays <i>Hamlet Jones</i>	42
Dramatic Publishing <i>Girls' Weekend & The Bachelorette Party</i>	14	<i>Twelfth Night: A Rap Musical</i>	47



a New Musical

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email: bullynomore.musical@gmail.com

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