

Francis Wilson Playhouse

Building a Foundation for the Future

Our Mission

To Entertain:

We are a not-for-profit (501(c) (3)) community theatre located on the azure waters of the intra-coastal waterway in Clearwater, Florida. The playhouse boasts a rich history of entertaining the community and beyond for seventy-eight (78) consecutive seasons. Today, the Francis Wilson Playhouse has 1,065 loyal members and during the 2007/2008 season 15,800 additional audience tickets were sold. The playhouse presents eight shows during a typical season, consisting of three or four musicals along with comedies, mysteries and dramas. Each show runs for 12 performances over two weeks in the 180 seat theatre, with occasional hold-over performances for popular musicals such as *Sweet Charity*, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *Oliver*. Classic dramas such as *The Miracle Worker* and Neil Simon comedies like *The Odd Couple* often play to sold out houses.

To Educate:

Children's theatre classes are offered twice each week, on Saturday mornings and Tuesday after school; additionally, three popular summer camps are offered. A total of approximately 100 young people, between the ages of seven (7) and seventeen (17) attend these classes, which culminate in the presentation of three or four shows annually to an estimated combined audience of six hundred (600) individuals. In 2008, the FWP Youth Theatre will be presenting shows based on *Tom Sawyer*, *Godspell* and Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*.

Our Current Demographic

For many years both the Playhouse's audience and front of the house volunteer demographic has been predominantly white and fifty (50) years of age and older. While the volunteer actors and actresses are widely distributed over all age groups, they are predominantly white. In comparison, the population of Clearwater has a demographic of thirty per cent (30%) between the ages of twenty (20) and fifty (50) and fourteen per cent (14%) non-white. This disparity reflects that a significant segment of the community is underserved by the Playhouse.

Our Vision For Change

The Playhouse currently enjoys a fresh perspective beginning with its newly elected officers and board of directors, which recognizes the importance and value of diversity within the community and embraces the development and implementation of an outreach program as a means to build a more racially, ethnically, and age diverse theatre and to encourage and foster involvement from members of all segments of the population. Specifically, we must change our vision from the myopic traditions of the past to focus on our promising future:

- We must reach out to a wider demographic for our audiences, our actors, our technical staff and our volunteers.
- We must provide more venues for local playwrights' works.
- We must offer show productions of more timely, artistically thought provoking content than those which have been our staple.
- We must offer productions of shows which have significant roles for African American and Latino actors.
- We must develop a year round youth theatre program with much wider appeal than our current offerings.
- We must partner with other community organizations to foster a true culture of outreach and inclusion.

The Partnering Challenge

Partnering programs with other community organizations must be thoughtfully planned and entered into with both parties willing to adapt and compromise. Successfully partnering organizations enjoy a culture of mutual respect for their different but equal needs and expectations; they recognize that change brings diversity and in diversity lays strength. We must embrace the process whole-heartedly.

Physical Structural Challenges

At present, it is not feasible to schedule many more activities at the Playhouse as we struggle today to satisfy the scheduling needs for rehearsals, classes, set building and actual productions. Constraints such as a single stage and one rehearsal hall often force us to conduct classes, auditions and other activities in the lobby.

To facilitate growth and enable us to transition ourselves into an organization which is more closely aligned with our community, we require more space!

Infrastructure in the Long Term

We are actively developing a plan to raise a substantial amount of private funding to construct a new playhouse with additional performance and rehearsal spaces, meeting rooms, classrooms and more efficient support spaces. In addition, this new facility will not be limited to traditional theatre, but will include facilities for other visual and performing arts. This plan to provide Clearwater with a privately financed Community Arts Center is long term and we anticipate that it will take some years to reach fruition.

The board of directors, as part of its strategic plan to achieve this goal, is actively compiling a *Request for Design* document that will form the basis of an architectural design competition for design of the new theatre. The competition will be launched in the late summer, and architectural students from schools in the south east will be invited to participate. The successful student will win a substantial prize.

Infrastructure in the Short Term

In the near term, in order to provide an environment where we can truly be a community resource for all members of our community, we must find a nearby facility where our visions for the future can be transformed into reality today. We seek a facility to which some of our existing programs can be relocated that can also accommodate additional programming to increase our reach. In itself, this will be no easy task.

One feasible option would be to purchase or lease a 5,000 to 8,000 sq. ft property in the Clearwater Redevelopment District. This should be a large open two story space which can be converted to a small (up to 100 seats) theatre with associated support spaces. The property should be capable of being zoned appropriately and eligible for being granted all required permits.

A possible alternative would be to find an existing public facility (such as a school) which is no longer used for its original purpose, and partner with the owner and other arts organizations to create a multiple use facility, perhaps modeled (in a smaller fashion) after the Fort Mason project in San Francisco (see www.fortmason.org). In an outstanding example of the effective re-use of public space, the National Park Service, performing artists, visual artists, the conservation corps, and many other groups have come together to provide that community with an invaluable resource.

Financial Stability

Annual revenues are approximately \$350,000 of which 85% is generated from regular and season ticket sales, the remainder being from hold-over and benefit performances, program advertising, snack bar and other donations. After season members have been accommodated, if all other theatre seats were sold at full price, and no shows were held over, the maximum ticket sales revenue would be \$310,000 annually. Currently seat occupancy averages 81%, which compares favorably with other community theatres.

The Playhouse has assets valued at approximately \$900,000 (\$750,000 in liquid investments, the remainder being property and equipment net of depreciation). The Playhouse enjoys the benefit of a 99 year land lease from the City of Clearwater, which will expire on December 17, 2034. Without the benefit of that support, expenses would be significantly higher.

According to the *Americans For The Arts* economic impact calculator, the Playhouse generates annually \$736,310 in local expenditures, 21.5 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) jobs, \$395,424 in local household incomes, \$32,156 in local government revenues and \$35,032 in state government revenues.

The Playhouse has a single full-time employee – the box office clerk. Other individuals are contracted part-time year-round.

Historical Notes

For 78 years, the Francis Wilson Playhouse has been serving Clearwater by providing a venue for high quality community theatre. In that time, the theatre has presented in excess of 4,000 performances of more than 600 shows. Many thousands of local residents have taken part in those performances, as audience members, actors and actresses, production staff and other volunteers. Some of those actors and actresses have found fame – Charles Napier, Liz Vassey and Flip Kobler are three of our local actors who went on to Hollywood and beyond. Most, however, stayed in Clearwater doing what they love – performing live theatre.

Francis Wilson Playhouse is fortunate to have hundreds of dedicated volunteers who donate their time and talents each season. Each year about 300 actors, actresses and technical staff volunteer their time directly in play production. In addition, another 200 volunteers take care of the front of the house and building maintenance, etc. In all, these 500 people contribute more than 30,000 hours annually to their community theatre, for which we are eternally grateful.