

spotlight

November/December 2016 \$2.50

american association of community theatre



AACT NewPlayFest

Trending
Surviving
a Crunch

AACTFest
2017

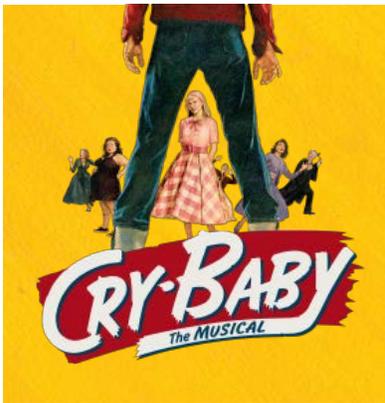
AACT
TEAM
Conference

How to Avoid a
Financial Crisis



MUSIC THEATRE
INTERNATIONAL

What's the next show playing on *your* stage?



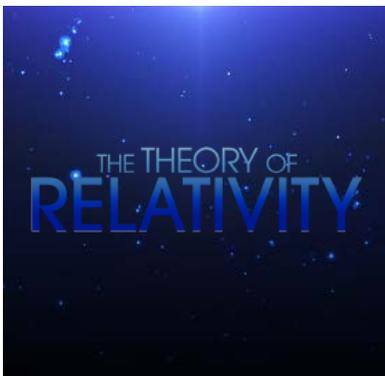
In 1950s Baltimore, the conservative squares face off against the leather-clad delinquents in this rockabilly musical based on John Waters' cult film.



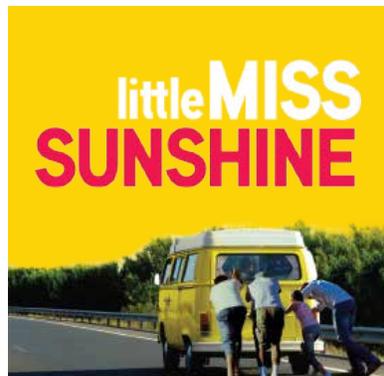
This feel-good comedy based on the hit film, follows a woman hiding in a convent who helps her fellow sisters find their voices as she rediscovers her own.



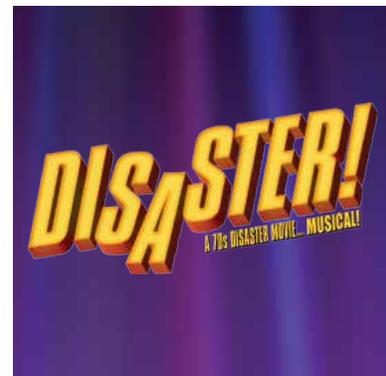
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Murray Chase
AACT President
2015-2017

Most of us have experienced the moment - personally or professionally - of a financial crisis. It's that moment when we realize that we need money - quickly - to survive. More theatres than not have arrived at that point, for a variety of reasons. Those who deal effectively with it live to fight another day and often thrive later because of it.

Others may have different ways to deal with the issue, but the list below is the only way I know to tackle the problem for long-term success. And the board of directors must be vocal and supportive of all these items:

- **What's the shortfall?** How much is really needed to achieve a real chance for solvency? Don't list two weeks of payroll costs only, especially if two weeks later the same problem will arise.
- **Why did it happen?** It could be lack of box office returns, which begs further questions (show selection, quality, marketing, etc.). It could be - truthfully - overspending. It could be that someone absconded with money. It could be external influences, such as a sudden and severe economic recession (sound familiar?). In any case, be honest and transparent about the reason(s) to those you approach.
- **What's the plan to fix it long-term?** A donor of any amount wants to know that he/she is not throwing good money after bad, that a fundamental fix will be in place. Again, be transparent.

- **Whom to ask?** We ask those who love us and believe in us. Those - in this order - are:
 - Board (must give)
 - staff (if you have staff, must give)
 - donors (those already giving)
 - volunteers (they love you the most)
 - patrons/audience (they want you to continue)

Obviously there will be some overlap between those categories in linkage and ability. But forget the "miracle grant." These gifts need to happen from within the organization.

- **Stewardship and Follow-up.** Congratulations! You raise enough to keep going. As you go forward, be sure to involve and inform all those donors who helped it happen. It's even a good idea to tell the story some years later about "the crisis" and how the theatre was saved.

Please do remember this: our communities will step up to save us: **ONCE.** It's up to us after that.

Heuer Publishing
www.heuerpub.com

The Day Before Christmas
by Ken Jones, Christine Jones, & Jamey Strawn

The Love Note
by Gail Phareuf

Gift of the Magi: The Musical
by Beverly Bremers & Faith Grant

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Brendan Murray (Leo) and Ted Culler (Norton I) in the AACT NewPlayFest 2016 world premiere of *The Emperor of North America* by Thomas Hischak at Silver Spring Stage in Silver Spring, Maryland. Photo by Linda M. Lee

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AACT welcomes *Spotlight* input and requests for advertising rates. Contact David Cockerell at david@aact.org to submit content. Contact Darlene DeLorenzo at darlene@aact.org for advertising rates and specs. David and Darlene are also available at the phone number above.



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DEATH BY GOLF

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- VII Donna Fisher
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- VIII Gil Savage
San Diego, CA
- IX Jon Douglas Rake
Tacoma, WA
- X Dane Winters
Germany (US Army)

Upcoming Meetings**AACT Winter Meetings**

February 9 - 12, 2017 • Las Vegas, Nevada

The AACT Board, Committees, and Task Forces will meet in Las Vegas for the AACT Winter Meetings 2017. Most meetings are open. Contact the AACT Office for more details.

Embassy Suites by Hilton Las Vegas - Reserve by January 10, 2017
4315 Swenson Street, Las Vegas, Nevada

More Info: aact.org/winter

Announcement

The AACT Bylaws are in the process of being revised. A draft of the revised bylaws will be posted on the AACT website by November 15 at aact.org/bylawsrevised. Member input and questions you have after reviewing the revision will be welcome.

AACT Staff

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Spotlight

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Seth Ghitelman, Thomas Hischak, Tim Jebsen,
Linda M. Lee, Twink Lynch, Karen Matheny, Jill Patchin,
Stephen Peithman, Frank Peot, Ken Roberts,
Mary A. Santana, Lauren Winter-Hansen, Ron Ziegler

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AACT organizational members are eligible to participate in property, liability, and other coverages of the AACT Insurance Program.



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Linda M. Lee

AACT NewPlayFest

Silver Spring, Maryland celebrated the latest AACT NewPlayFest world premiere. *The Emperor of North America* by Thomas Hischak opened on September 16 and the opening night festivities included an outstanding production and a joyous reception. The production ran through October 1.

Playwright Thomas S. Hischak attended the opening, and expressed his thoughts on AACT NewPlayFest, “Having one’s play selected and produced by AACT was a terrific experience for me. The community theatres that are chosen are among the best in the nation so one’s play is given a first-class production. My play was expertly directed and acted by Silver Spring Stage. The production was so well done that I am incorporating some of the director’s and actors’ interpretations into the script before it is published by Dramatic Publishing Company. The AACT NewPlayFest is an outstanding opportunity for both new and seasoned playwrights!”

The play tells the story of a middle-aged hack writer of novelizations of movies who is haunted by the ghost of “Emperor” Joshua Norton, an historical figure from 19th-century San Francisco, whom he is trying to write a biography about. The writer is also haunted by Leo Tolstoy’s novel *War and Peace* which is being made into a movie again by Hollywood and he is asked to write the novelization. The two subjects are entwined with his personal life until he suspects he is losing his mind. Three women in his life – his agent, his long-time lady friend, and his grown daughter – provide support in his time of crisis, even though they also keep showing up as characters in *War and Peace*. It looks like the only alternative to insanity is to assassinate the Emperor.

Thomas Hischak is an internationally recognized author, playwright, and teacher in the Performing Arts. He is the author of thirty-eight published plays which are

Opening Night of the AACT World Premiere of *The Emperor of North America* by Thomas Hischak at Silver Spring Stage in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Front seated: Brendan Murray, cast/Leo; Lena Winter, cast/Rita; Lenora Spahn, cast/Molly; Alex Adams, crew; Jackie Jackson, crew; Andrew Greenleaf, Set Designer/Master Carpenter
Standing: Scott Bloom, Director/Sound Designer; Thomas Hischak, Playwright; Pamela Northrup, cast/Sylvia; Ted Culler, cast/Norton I; Jerry Schuchman, Co-Producer; Jim Robertson, Lighting Designer; Erin Bone Steele, Costumer/Artistic Liaison; Kassie Stroud, Assistant Director/Stage Manager; Lennie Magida, Co-Producer/Properties; Cliff Lee, Jack K Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation; Julie Crawford, AACT Executive Director; Brad Lohrenz, Dramatic Publishing; Linda M. Lee, Jack K Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation

performed in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. His playwriting awards include the Stanley Drama Award (New York City) for *Cold War Comedy* and the Julie Harris Playwriting Award (Beverly Hills, California) for *The Cardiff Giant*. Hischak is also the author of twenty-four non-fiction books about theatre, film, and popular music, including *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical*, *The Rodgers and Hammerstein Encyclopedia*, *Broadway Plays and Musicals*, *Through the Screen Door*, *The Tin Pan Alley Encyclopedia*, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919*, *The Disney Song Encyclopedia*, *Broadway Lyricists*, *American Literature on Stage and Screen*, *Theatre as Human Action*, *The Film Composers Encyclopedia*, and *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*. The American Library Association has cited four of his books as Outstanding Non-fiction Books and *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical* was cited as an Outstanding Reference Work by the New York City Public Library in 2008. Since 1983 he has been Professor of Theatre at the State University of New York at Cortland where he has received such honors as the 2004 SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activity and the 2010 SUNY Outstanding

Achievement in Research Award. Hischak is also a Fulbright scholar who has taught and directed in Greece, Lithuania, and Turkey.

Seth Ghitelman, Silver Spring Stage Board of Directors Chair, stated, “We were honored to be part of AACT NewPlayFest. Presenting a world premiere was a natural extension of our revised mission to focus on contemporary theatre. It was a thrill to talk with playwright Thomas Hischak on opening night and to hear he was pleased with our production.

We are very grateful to the Jack K. Ayre & Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation for their support. The Foundation’s generosity helped us enhance the quality of our production. It was a special pleasure to have Linda M. Lee and her brother Cliff Lee from the Foundation with us on opening night along with AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford and Brad Lohrenz from Dramatic Publishing.

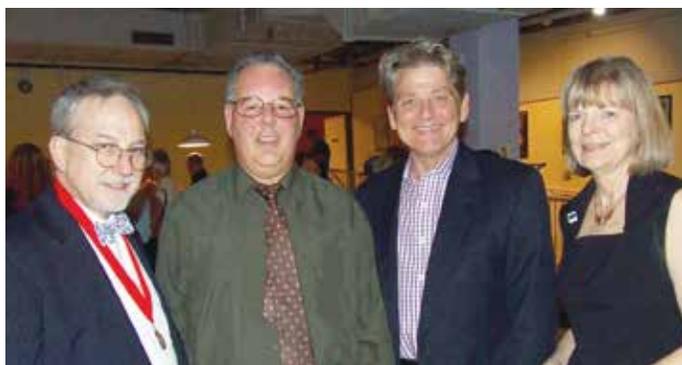
ran through October 30. Information and photos from the opening will be in the next issue of *Spotlight*.

Opening next for AACT NewPlayFest will be the world premiere of *Get Out of Dodge* by Jeanne Drennan at Venice Theatre in Venice, Florida November 3, 2016. Directed by Kathy Pingel, the production will run through November 20. Tickets can be reserved at venicestage.com.



The 2016 AACT NewPlayFest cycle began with the world premiere production of *Lighthouse* by William Baer at the Windsor [Colorado] Community Playhouse September 25 – October 10, 2015, continued with the world premiere productions of *Laguna Beach, Ohio* by Malcolm MacDonald at Stage Right Productions/2nd Street Theatre in Bend, Oregon March 25 – April 9, 2016, *Wash, Dry, Fold* by Nedra Pezold Roberts at Chicago Street Theatre/Community Theatre Guild in Vaparaiso, Indiana May 20 – June 4, 2016, *Gracefully Ending* by A.J. DeLauder at Theatre Arlington in Arlington, Texas July 1 – July 17, and *The Emperor of North America* by Thomas Hischak at Silver Spring Stage in Silver Spring, Maryland September 16 – October 1, 2016. ♦

Linda M. Lee



Director Scott Bloom, Playwright Thomas Hischak, Dramatists Publishing Company’s Brad Lohrenz, and AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford enjoy the opening night reception at Silver Spring Stage

The support and encouragement of AACT in producing new works is inspiring to Silver Spring Stage. We look forward to our continued affiliation with AACT and to producing more new plays.”

Director Scott Bloom explained how he and the cast were nervous having the playwright see the result of their work on his play, but shared that the playwright was also nervous that they would find good choices for many elements of the script. “Thomas Hischak was very impressed with the cast and the production, and both the playwright and I had the opportunity to answer some interesting questions at a talk-back session about how we researched our parts, staged the show, the choices we made, and the collaboration of playwright, director, designers, and actors. My congratulations to Mr. Hischack for the enthusiastic response to his play. We will all be watching, and will revel in whatever success it achieves down the road, knowing we were the first to bring it to an audience.”

The world premiere of *Shades of Valor* by Karen L. Lewis at Twin City Stage in Winston-Salem, North Carolina opened October 28. The production directed by Brook Davis

Dramatic Publishing Company will publish the seven AACT NewPlayFest 2016 scripts in an anthology and Dramatic is licensing production rights for the plays, a big boost to the launch of any new script! The six plays from the inaugural AACT NewPlayFest are available in an anthology from Dramatic Publishing (aact.org/dpc) and licensing rights are available through Dramatic Publishing.

AACT NewPlayFest 2018

Scripts have been submitted for AACT NewPlayFest 2018. Reviewers are currently reading plays and the winning plays and playwrights will be announced in the July/August 2017 *Spotlight*.

For more information visit aact.org/newplayfest

**New plays are exciting!
Participate in AACT NewPlayFest!**

The Road to AACTFest 2017



AACTFest is an exciting process, involving community theatres in every corner of the country, and on military bases in Europe. Enter your state festival and start on the road to the national festival - or mark your calendar and attend this great celebration of American community theatre! AACTFest 2017, the national community theatre festival, culminates June 26 - July 1, 2017 in Rochester, Minnesota.

State festivals are taking place now that will lead to the national festival. Check out the Moving On section (next page) to see theatres that have been selected to advance to Regional Festivals. And keep up with the AACT Calendar (page 34) or aact.org/calendar for upcoming state and regional festivals.

Join this invigorating theatre event by attending your state and regional festivals. Don't miss out on all the theatre, networking, workshops, and fun that is on the road to the national festival. Leading up to the excitement of the national festival are approximately 40 state festivals with more than 200



Rochester, Minnesota will be exciting for all attending the national festival. Rochester's Peace Plaza is a public park located in the heart of downtown and is a few short blocks from the Mayo Civic Center.



David Cockerell

Kay Armstrong with (l-r) Chris Serface, Gil Savage, Michael Fox, Sharon Burum, Jim Walker, Kris Geddie, Lynn Nelson, Lucinda Lawrence, Susanne Caviness, Bevie Lord drawing Region performance order for the national festival

theatre productions, followed by nearly 60 theatre companies performing in regional festivals.

The national festival will feature 12 productions that have received top honors in their respective state and regional festivals. All participating theatre companies adhere to a common set of rules documented in the *AACTFest 2017 Handbook* (available at aact.org/handbook).

Vice President of Festivals Kay Armstrong had representatives from AACT Regions draw numbers for performance order at AACTFest 2017 at the AACT Board meeting in NYC in June.

The performance order for the 2017 National Festival:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 - Region VII | 7 - Region IX |
| 2 - Wild Card | 8 - Region X |
| 3 - Region V | 9 - Region VI |
| 4 - Region IVb | 10 - Region IVa |
| 5 - Region VIII | 11 - Region I |
| 6 - Region III | 12 - Region II |

AACTFest 2017's national community theatre festival, also includes a theatre management conference, educational workshops, top vendor displays, social events, sightseeing, and networking opportunities, ending with a festival awards presentation. Workshops and meetings will be in the Mayo Civic Center, with performances in the Rochester Civic Theatre, also located in the Civic Center complex. ♦

aact.org/aactfest2017

Moving On

Theatres recently selected to represent their states in AACTFest 2017
Some states qualify to send two shows to the regional festival.

Region	Theatre	From		Production
I	The Warner Theatre	Torrington	CT	<i>Facing Backwards</i> by George Kelly
I	Nashua Theatre Guild	Nashua	NH	<i>Used Car for Sale</i> by Lewis John Carlino
I	Windham Actors Guild	Windham	NH	<i>The Most Massive Woman Wins</i> by Madeleine George
III	The Drama Workshop	Cincinnati	OH	<i>Unnecessary Farce</i> by Paul Slade Smith
III	CenterStage Players	Cincinnati	OH	<i>Acapulco</i> by Steven Berkoff
V	Lofte Community Theatre	Manley	NE	<i>Shakespeare's a Dick</i> by Mark Aloysius Kenneally
V	Beatrice Community Players	Beatrice	NE	<i>The Santaland Diaries</i> by David Sedaris, Joe Mantello
VI	Sand Springs Community Theatre	Sand Springs	OK	<i>Tomato Plant Girl</i> by Wesley Middleton
VI	OnStage Woodward	Woodward	OK	<i>A Case of Belonging</i> by Jan Alred
VII	Longmont Theatre Company	Longmont	CO	<i>Yankee Tavern</i> by Steven Dietz
VII	Theatre Esprit Asia	Aurora	CO	<i>Coming To America</i> by Maria Cheng, Peter Trinh

AACTFest Myths

to dispel common myths related to festival participation

AACTFest Myth #3 deals with On-Deck Space and Set-up. During the Colorado State Festival years ago, the festival chair had received a very disheartening message from a company that was withdrawing from the festival because no matter how much they had rehearsed, they simply could not perform their show in a 10' x 10' square. The Colorado festival took advantage of the confusion (after gently instructing the company) and opened the festival with a wonderful montage of a cutting performed in a 10' x 10' square...uproarious laughter ensued.

The On-Deck Space & Set-up (this is not a mystical/sacred space!): the on-deck space is to be 100 sq. ft; the host theatre determines the configuration. Production props and costumes may be left in the space or taken out during the show. The space does not have to be completely emptied prior to the show and items may be pre-struck to the space during the performance. All company members do NOT need to begin in the on-deck space prior to their rehearsal and performance. At the beginning of the rehearsal, the company members can be anywhere in the theatre; they

just can't be doing anything that would be construed as rehearsing. Everyone may communicate about their tasks, run fundamental light checks, sound checks, microphone checks, etc. And, if you need help keeping track of your 80 minutes of rehearsal time, there is no restriction on getting official updates from a timer positioned backstage.

Submitted by Nancy Eppert, AACT Education Committee member. Nancy is pleased to share what she has learned from participating in all aspects of AACTFest (workshops, shows, networking, etc.), and notes that her experience is assisted by the insights of many theatre friends she has acquired by attending every AACTFest since 2003. She looks forward to meeting you at AACTFest 2017.

From *AACTFest 2017 Handbook*, The Basics, page 6, Production Process – Technical and performance personnel need not gather in or near the on-deck area before and after set-up or before and after strike unless needed in consideration of time limit. Otherwise their location will be at the discretion of the performing company.

- Paid Media
- Board Development – how to build, develop, and cultivate relationships with donors, investors, and theatre patrons

The discussion around social media and diversity in the arts was engaging, extremely informative, and as we learned, very prominent for the success of the new Broadway production, *Hamilton*.

At the AACT Team Conference 2016 I was provided the critical tools and road map that is essential in expanding the vision for The Miracle Center/Center Theatre. I also gained strategies that would help bring in different streams of revenue for the innovative work we are bringing to Chicago. Our awesome facilitator, Nancy Brozek, brought a wealth of knowledge to all of the wonderful attendees. We not only explored the many different aspects of Marketing & Development, but we formed wonderful relationships.

If you are looking to take your theatre to another level in the area of Marketing & Development, be sure to sign up for next year's conference. You will not be disappointed!

*Mary A. Santana, Executive Director
The Miracle Center, Chicago, Illinois
themiraclecenter.org*

At the recent AACT TEAM Conference in Des Moines, it was easy to tell which room was filled with theatre educators; it was the room where people were throwing tennis balls. After all, teaching artists can find a way to use theatre games in any situation.



It was my first time attending an AACT event, and I wasn't quite sure what to expect as I found myself in a room with eleven other teachers and directors from theatres across the country. As we all started to share about the classes, productions, and other opportunities open to our students, the first feeling that washed over me was one of relief.

"Ah," I thought to myself, "These people get it."

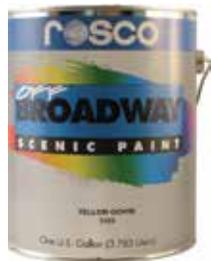
Even though we all came from unique theatres and unique communities, there were just some things that were universal to our experiences. Mainly, we shared an urgency to supply our students with opportunity, experience, and a positive learning environment. Each of us had the chance to present an obstacle we are facing in our own programs, and the group helped brainstorm solutions. I found myself scribbling notes as quickly as I could, enthralled by my colleagues' descriptions of programming for scholarships, special needs classes, programs for senior citizens, classroom technology – the list went on and on. It was a fantastic opportunity to collaborate, commiserate, and share.

continued on next page



Cran Dadds

John Pomeroy from Drake University leads the Technical Theatre Skills track in lighting equipment techniques



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Our facilitator, Kathy Pingel, challenged each of us to “make the program you wish you’d had.” I’m not sure anyone had ever described my job to me that way before. However, I am sure that I returned to my office feeling focused, refreshed, and ready to start building that kind of program in my community.

I also went out and bought a set of tennis balls. Look out, students; I have new theatre games to try.

*Kelsey Celek, Head of Education/Director of Student Theatre
Quincy Community Theatre, Quincy, Illinois
1qct.org*

Cran Dodds



Attendees at the AACT TEAM Conference 2016 had a great time gaining knowledge from the experiences of colleagues from across the country, the leadership of the facilitators, and the many networking relationships discovered at the conference.

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Spotlight Award Honors John Hanlon

The *AACT Spotlight Award* partners AACT with theatres to recognize individuals and organizations for long or special service that has had a significant impact on the quality of their local theatres. Any AACT member theatre may apply to present the Spotlight Award.

Lincoln [Nebraska] Community Playhouse (LCP) honored **John Hanlon** with the AACT Spotlight Award at a Picnic Potluck Dinner on July 17th. The Picnic Dinner was in celebration of LCP's 2015-2016, 70th season! Nancy Eppert, AACT Region V Representative, presented the Spotlight Award to John.

John has been a Lincoln Community Playhouse member since 2010. His wife, Susan, serves the Playhouse as a box office volunteer, and she encouraged John to lend a helping hand when he retired. Although he had no previous experience in theatre, John had done carpentry and metal work during his service with the United

States Coast Guard, and he knew these skills would be helpful back stage.

John began as a volunteer in set construction, working several afternoons a week, and he soon became a vital part of the Playhouse production team! In 2012, John was honored with LCP's Volunteer of the Year Award.

During its 70th season John volunteered over 378 hours designing and building sets, and 68 hours in the front of house

ushering and bartending. John currently serves on the Lincoln Community Playhouse Board of Directors as Vice-President of Buildings and Grounds.

Nancy Eppert shared that she visited with John for quite a while at the LCP Picnic, and then to his surprise she presented him with the Spotlight Award! Congratulations to John Hanlon for being such a dedicated volunteer, and to Lincoln Community Playhouse on its 70th season! ♦



John Hanlon accepts his Spotlight Award from AACT Region V Representative Nancy Eppert

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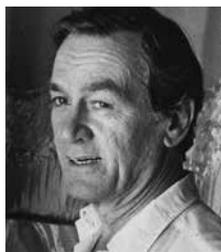
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AITA/IATA Connects Theatres from Around The World

For twelve theatres who participate in the AACT national festival, the end result is competing at the national competition. However, did you know that the origins of the national festival intended for these theatre companies to continue to perform and represent the United States at international amateur theatre festivals around the world?



Art Cole

Art Cole, the founder of Midland Community Theatre, was asked to represent the USA at the Mondial du Theatre in Monaco in 1965. On his way home from this event, Art came to the realization that there needed to be a process for selecting the theatres that represent our nation. Thus, the national festival of amateur theatre was born, and this process has evolved into our current

AACTFest which happens on every odd numbered year. AACT looks forward to hosting the best of American amateur theatre to Rochester, MN in June 2017.

The International Amateur Theatre Association (AITA/IATA) connects theatres from around the world while also hosting international festivals for amateur theatre. AACT is the national center for amateur theatre in the United States, and is a member of AITA/IATA. Every four years, the prestigious



Tim Jebesen (3rd from left) and Midland Community Theatre represented the USA at the AITA/IATA Festival in Trosomo, Norway in 2011

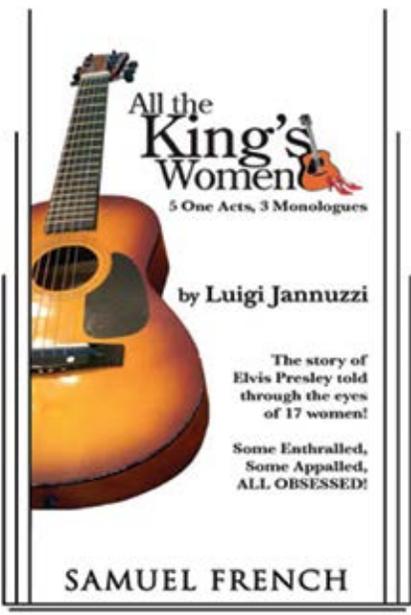
AITA/IATA Congress and Festival takes place during the Mondial du Theatre in Monaco, and the next Mondial will take place in August 2017. During the opposite odd years, the official AITA/IATA festival moves around the globe. Recent AITA/IATA festivals have taken place in South Korea (2007), Norway (2011) and Belgium (2015). Applications are currently being accepted, and the AITA/IATA council will select the location of the 2019 festival during the Monaco event in 2017.

International theatre festivals are a wonderful opportunity to showcase your theatre and connect with amateur theatre lovers from around the world. The main cost for participating in these festivals is travel, as performance troupes are expected to arrive at the designated airport by the host organization at their own expense. After that, the festival will provide your troupe with transportation, housing and meals during your visit. Surprisingly, taking a show to perform in an international theatre festival is less expensive than expected.

During the upcoming 2017 national festival cycle, the AACT board and representatives will be visiting with participating groups about the possibility of participating in upcoming international festivals. Although the USA representative for Monaco 2017 has already been selected, AACT will be seeking groups to represent the United States at the AITA/IATA festival in 2019 and other international amateur theatre festivals. As someone who has taken a troupe to one of these festivals and currently serves as the chair of the International Committee of AACT, I would be more than happy to answer questions or communicate with you regarding these options.

Tim Jebesen
 Executive Director, Midland Community Theatre
 Vice President, International Amateur Theatre Association
 AITA/IATA
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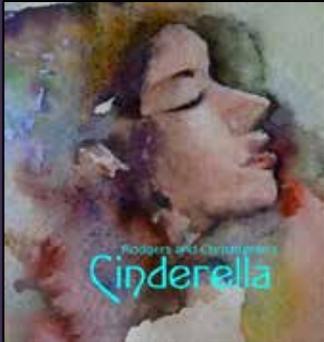
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How To Avoid A Financial Crisis

By David Cockerell

Many theatre companies, from small to large, have faced financial challenges. Economic downturn, loss of donors, mismanagement, natural disasters, and other circumstances can cause an arts organization to work at keeping it financially healthy.

It's not uncommon to discover that the "writing was on the wall," but no action was taken to prevent the crisis. A non-profit's board of directors is fiscally responsible for the organization, and should always look ahead and make predictions for the organization's financial well-being. Don't wait until you are at a breaking point: if a financial crisis is foreseen, change and action needs to happen now. This is not always easy, since many may want everything to remain as it always has been. Change can be difficult, but there are times when it must occur.

Twilight Theatre in Greensburg, Kansas experienced a natural disaster when a tornado destroyed the theatre.

Frequently, theatres struggle to meet increasing production costs, or marketing expenses needed to expand their audience base. And choices for a strong artistic season do not always pan out for a strong season of ticket sales. These are

ongoing issues with any theatre, but what happens when an organization faces a significant financial shortfall?

In our recent Theatre Trends Survey, theatres gave information on facing a severe financial crunch, and explained what they have done and are continuing to do to keep their theatres thriving. [See page 20 for the survey results.]

An economic downturn was listed as primary cause, but there are those who experienced mismanagement and even natural disasters. Twilight Theatre in Greensburg, Kansas saw its theatre destroyed by a tornado. By comparison, poor ticket sales for a play you selected for its artistic merits would seem a minor problem.

Mismanagement can range from inaccurate accounting and reporting that masks a serious problem to fraudulent bookkeeping and employee theft.

Begin by determining whether the financial crunch has been created by a short-term issue or a long-term problem. Improper artistic programming or a downturn in production quality can lead to poor ticket sales. Ticket sales alone won't support all of the operations, and will make it difficult to maintain those operations when the play selection committee chooses a play that doesn't sell tickets.

Development is a major focus of any board of directors, to secure sufficient resources to fulfill the organization's mission. Grants from government entities and private foundations have become staples for many organizations. Grant writing is a delicate craft. Designate who in your organization is writing grants, and give them the support they need. Proper grant solicitation requires all board members to participate by writing letters of support, and networking with those on the boards of foundations, and with leaders in city, state, and national government. Board members, as community leaders, are the face of the organization and must represent the organization in all fundraising activities. Board members should be very active in individual giving. Know your patrons, and solicit memberships, season ticket sales, special project support, and

participation in fundraising events. And always thank them for their support.

Improper planning was also listed as the cause of financial problems. Weathervane Playhouse in Akron, Ohio reported, “The board created a two-director executive leadership model without planning to fund it. The board then approved a budget that included an expected income of more than \$100,000 from a program that was already expected to not come through.”

Examine how you contribute to the framework of your community, and make sure that you are fulfilling a need.

To maintain a financially healthy organization, create a balanced budget! It is an annual task usually overseen by the treasurer and finance committee. A strong budget takes into consideration the artistic choices made for the season and the projections of funding from grants. The operative word is projections: grants are awarded, and are not always definite income. Be prepared to adjust your budget when grants are, or are not, awarded. The finance committee needs procedures to re-evaluate the budget throughout the fiscal year. Utilize a system of financial checks and balances. The board treasurer, the finance committee, and staff must all participate in maintaining healthy cash flow, which includes all income and ensuring all bills are paid on time.

Have a healthy long-term organization by knowing your mission, and consider the possibility of a re-evaluation of your mission statement. Examine how you contribute to the framework of your community, and make sure that you are filling a need. Create a strategic plan that will support your mission within your means. Include a short-term, five-year plan, plus a long-term plan to insure financial stability. Set goals and procedures, and follow them. Examine your facilities, equipment, and assets--be realistic about what needs to be repaired and/or replaced, and set goals that can be budgeted.

The good news is that even disasters can be dealt with. Despite the tornado, Twilight Theatre came up a winner. It took four years to plan, and four years to rebuild, but thanks to personal contributions by board members, a fundraising campaign, and identification/solicitation of specific donors and vendors, the company’s new facility reopened in 2015.

David Cockerell is the AACT Marketing/Communications Director. He has held positions as Artistic Director and Executive Director at the Hill Country Arts Foundation/Point Theatre in Ingram, Texas, and has participated in the management of many nonprofit organizations.

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What's Trending: Financial Crunches

By Julie Crawford, AACT Executive Director

Trends can help you understand what is happening or assist you in preparing before a trend impacts your theatre.

The Board's role in fundraising was the subject of a Trends survey distributed in September. As I was developing the survey, we were hearing from a number of theatres that are struggling to make ends meet. A severe financial crunch can hit a theatre suddenly and challenge the board to find funds to literally keep the doors open. So I asked in the survey if the theatre had faced a severe financial crunch, and if so, how did the board cope? Real solutions from real theatres that might be very helpful to your theatre now or in planning for the future.

That increased the length of the survey, so this issue will cover financial crunches, and the January-February issue of *Spotlight* will cover the board's role in fundraising during more ordinary times.

Responses to the survey were received from board members or staff who work directly with the board of 75 theatres in 33 states. 56% of theatres reported they had faced a severe financial crunch. They included a wide range of theatres, with budgets from \$4,000 to almost \$4 million. Most theatres responding to the survey, however, were small. The median budget of theatres responding "Yes" to the financial crunch question was \$107,500. Despite small budgets, 61.9% of these theatres report paying some staff; 38.1% are all volunteer.

Almost 20% of financial crunches reported hit theatres this year, 2016. However, close to 62% occurred in 2007-2012. See sidebar for year-by-year listing.

As you might expect, economic downturn was the primary cause of financial troubles for 35.71% of theatres. Mismanagement was checked by 26.19%; 14.29% had facility or equipment failure; 7.14% experienced a natural disaster or severe weather. Community loss of jobs or businesses hit 9.52% and loss of sig-

nificant donor(s) effected 4.76%. None of the theatres in the survey checked theft or embezzlement, though one theatre wrote in that it could have checked several boxes, including theft. It appears it is hard to manage a theatre, but most involved are trustworthy.

Surviving a bad thing sometimes leads to good things.

Some theatres that suffered from economic downturn included other issues in the details they shared. Broken Arrow Community Playhouse in Oklahoma said the economic downturn resulted in "major loss of oil related jobs." Kokomo Civic Theatre in Indiana checked the loss of jobs category and related, "There was a large job loss in the automotive industry in our community."

Cheyenne Little Theatre Players (Wyoming) shared, "Our theatre took a large financial hit [in 2008]. We were significantly overstaffed to handle the loss of funding." CenterStage North Theatre in Marietta, Georgia described, "change in board, low subscriber base, poor expense tracking - revenue targets missed." Central Wisconsin Children's Theatre in Wausau, Wisconsin noted that a downturn this year resulted in low ticket sales, "Our community was saturated with performing groups and many in our community not spending money on extras." In Baltimore, Maryland, Spotlighters Theatre observed, "Individual giving dropped by 22% (oddly, number of donors increased, but the amount of donations decreased sharply)."

Details provided by theatres checking "mismanagement" pointed to poor jobs done by previous managers, but one pointed out, "I'm not sure that prior management could have avoided the

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long term effects of a tough economy..." Another noted the lack of board oversight of a poor manager and another noted bad board decisions and budgeting.

Those checking "facility or major equipment failure" cited major repairs to complete loss of their facilities. Several mentioned major roof issues. Duncan Little Theatre in Oklahoma, said, "...our facility... built in 1960s needed a new roof, electrical work, inside remodel, and new AC units." Shreveport Little Theatre (Louisiana), experienced "Fire that burned entire structure down--caused by a welder's torch when rebuilding the backstage areas lost in a 1986 fire."

The LampLighters Community Theatre in La Mesa, California, cited "Lost facility provided by city." Ignite Community Theatre in Spokane Valley, Washington had a similar issue, but checked "loss of significant donor" explaining, "We used to have a haunted house fundraiser that would bring in \$20k per year, but the venue was owned by the parks department. When they chose to renovate the park, the building was no longer available." Village Players of Fort Thomas, Kentucky cited, "Excessive storms caused flooding throughout the theatre, ruining the carpeting. Insurance would not cover the replacement."

Recovering from a severe financial crunch doesn't happen quickly.

Some theatres coped with multiple issues. Cumberland Players in Vineland, New Jersey indicated a loss of jobs in the community as the cause, but also noted other issues: "Tickets were not selling. The cost to heat and cool the building, building repairs, and replacing equipment was very high. Some folks on the board at that time were not very mindful of keeping within the budget." The loss of jobs didn't cause all those things to happen, but it significantly increased the impact of them.

So what did these theatres do to cope?

Board members dug into their pockets, making personal contributions in 52.38% of the theatres. Fundraising campaigns were conducted by 45.24%. In 35.71% the board responded with identification/solicitation of specific donors, vendors, or other resources. Bank loans eased the cash flow for 23.81%. Programing was reduced by 16.67% of theatres and 14.29% laid off staff. PR campaigns to regain trust were launched by 9.52% of theatres. One theatre hired a crisis management consultant.

Weathervane Playhouse in Akron, Ohio "Cut all department budgets by 10% and left 2 staff positions vacant." The Barn Players in Mission, Kansas, "Tightened our budget and spending. Increased ticket and tuition prices." The Duncan Little Theatre "wrote a lot of grants and received several grants for our remodel." Theatre Suburbia Inc. in Houston, Texas and Aberdeen Matawan Repertory Theatre, Inc. in Matawan, New Jersey dipped into cash reserves/savings.

Recovering from a severe financial crunch doesn't happen quickly. It took a year for 30.95% of theatres. Several years were needed by 35.71% and a third are still recovering. Twilight Theatre in Greensburg, Kansas lost its building in 2007; "Tornado destroyed theatre, took 4 years to plan, and 4 years to rebuild. Reopened new facility in 2015."

Surviving a bad thing sometimes leads to good things. Theatres have learned from their experiences. Goals to broaden their base of donors have been set by 57.14% of theatres. More financial checks and balances were created by 54.76% and 28.57% have created a policy for maintaining a reserve or rainy day fund. Safety, maintenance, or other policies were created by 23.81%. And 16.67% have established endowment funds.

Continued on next page



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The Music Theatre of Wenatchee in Washington has made lots of changes: “Created a new membership committee, which has increased memberships and member satisfaction. Gave decision making and purchasing power to facilities chair and concessions chair, which increased profits in concessions and improvements in safety and audience comfort. Got tax advice which reduced our tax burden. Created box office procedures with appropriate checks and balances and reporting.”

Stage III Community Theatre in Casper, Wyoming is “assessing the effectiveness of past fundraising events and revising/shifting focus of planned events to increase gains.” Kokomo Civic Theatre has “Tried to broaden programming to reach a wider audience. Has spread our story to other businesses through things like Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce to increase support from local businesses.”

Theatre Baton Rouge in Louisiana recovered from major indebtedness, but is now facing the effects of major flooding affecting approximately 100,000 homes and businesses. “We are starting to see a drop off in contributions and are reworking our financial plan to determine how we will cope.” Wildish Community Theater in Springfield, Oregon sums it up, “Management is the single most important tool in creating a positive or negative financial reality for a theater - now and into the future.” ♦

Check out “What’s Trending” in the January-February issue of *Spotlight* for more on the Board’s role in fundraising.

Years when Financial Crunches Hit Theatres

% of theatres reporting	
2016	19.51%
2015	4.88%
2014	12.20%
2013	0.00%
2012	12.20%
2011	4.88%
2010	9.76%
2009	14.63%
2008	14.63%
2007	7.32%

Choices did not include years prior to 2007

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AACT Moves Into New Offices

The AACT national office in Fort Worth, Texas has moved. The new location is in the same building as before, the Fort Worth Community Arts Center at 1300 Gendy Street, and the mailing and physical address remains the same. The move from one side of the building to the other makes the new AACT offices much more accommodating for the AACT employees working out of the national office, and there are windows! ♦



David Cockerell

Member Engagement Director Cran Dodds



David Cockerell

Executive Director Julie Crawford



David Cockerell

Office Support Manager Karen Matheny



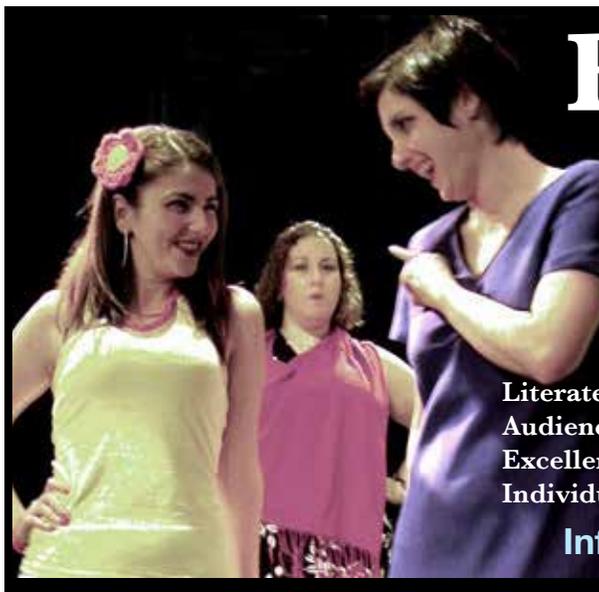
Cran Dodds

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Careers in Theatre

Highlighting professional staff changes in theatre

Kalamazoo, Michigan – **Kalamazoo Civic Theatre** is thrilled to announce **Stephen Carver** as its new Executive Director. For the past 12 years, Stephen has lead the Longmont Theatre Company in Colorado, where his accomplishments included an increase in ticket sales, leading successful advancement campaigns, and implementing long range corporate goals and business objectives. Carver also previously served as the Artistic Director/Manager at the Hidden Hills Playhouse in California and was Co-Founder/Artistic Director of Chicago's Skyline Theatre Co. with Steve Carell. A graduate of Denison University with a degree in fine arts and theatre, Carver has deep and lasting ties to Kalamazoo Civic Theatre. Carver grew up observing Civic productions on the backbench of the historic theatre when his father, James C. Carver was Managing Director. He is also the grandson of the Civic's first Managing Director, Norman Carver.

Stephen Carver will lead the 38-person Civic staff and the hundreds of volunteers who make the Civic one of the largest, most successful and prestigious community theatres in the country. Congratulations!

Kansas City, Missouri – **ArtsKC-Regional Arts Council** has announced **Bruce W. Davis** as the organization's new President and CEO. Davis brings more than 30 years of nonprofit administrative, fundraising, and arts advocacy experience from the San Francisco Bay area. For 18 years he served as the Executive Director of the Arts Council Silicon Valley. "I am excited to play a role in Kansas City's arts renaissance," said Davis. "What is going on in all genres of arts in Kansas City is history-making, and I'm thrilled to become part of it." Congratulations, Bruce!

Montgomery, Alabama – **The Cloverdale Playhouse** is proud to announce that **Sarah Walker Thornton** has joined the Playhouse as Artistic Director. Sarah has a wealth of theatre knowledge from her experiences in Montgomery and New York City. While spending seven years in New York City, she co-founded the Bama Theatre Company with fellow alumni from the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's Master of Fine Arts graduate program. Sarah joins Cloverdale Playhouse to continue providing exciting theatre opportunities to Montgomery audiences, volunteer actors, crews, and students. "I am truly honored and grateful for this opportunity. I am thrilled to play a part in the future of the Playhouse." Congratulations, Sarah!

Montgomery, Alabama – **The Cloverdale Playhouse** welcomes **Joe Collins** to the new position of Technical Director. A dedicated volunteer at the Playhouse since his role in 2014's *It's a Wonderful Life – A Live Radio Play*, Joe coordinates production and facility maintenance at the former church-turned-theatre. Our hats are off to you, Joe!

Paducah, Kentucky – **Market House Theatre** is excited to welcome **Emily Parker** as the new Education Assistant. Emily grew up at Market House Theatre, performing in her first show there at the age of six! Since that time she has acted, worked crew, and choreographed at Market House. After graduating from Murray State University, she began teaching school in Florence, Kentucky. Emily is now back in Paducah with her husband and with her theatre family at Market House Theatre and loving every moment of it! Congratulations, Emily!



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Volunteer Milestones

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OCTA (Oklahoma Community Theatre Association) would like to acknowledge long-term service to OCTA:

- Sharon Burum**, 20 years: served as President and Vice-President
- Diane Chapel**, 19 years: served as Vice-President and Secretary
- Martha Cherbini**, 15 years: served as President and Treasurer
- Tom Cowley**, 28 years: served as President and Advisor
- Shonda Currell**, 21 years: served as President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Advisor



Olivia Shea has been a proud volunteer for Olympic Theatre Arts in Sequim, Washington for 36 years and counting!



Alton Little Theatre in Alton, Illinois is proud of **Kevin Franks** for his 42 years of service!
The theatre also salutes **Lee Cox** for 44 years of volunteering!



The Okeechobee Community Theatre, Okeechobee, Florida honors three VERY dedicated and deserving volunteers. Each has paid their dues both on

stage and behind the scenes, and each is equally talented in either spot.

- Shirley Bush** - 21 years
- Joanie Moffatt** - 20 years
- Cathy Womble** - 16 years

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Photos by Cran Dodds



AACT Festival Chair Kay Armstrong shares a moment with Duncan Little Theatre Board Member and AACT Member at Large Sharon Burum while celebrating OCTAFest in Stillwater, Oklahoma, July 29, 2016



OCTA Festival Commissioner and AACT Festival Committee member Wanda Schenk advises OCTAFest participants at the festival Barbeque picnic in Stillwater, Oklahoma, July 29, 2016



AACT OCTAFest Adjudicator Lynn Nelson shares information with OCTA Festival Commissioner and AACT Festival Committee member Wanda Schenk in Stillwater, Oklahoma, July 29, 2016



AACT Membership Engagement Director Cran Dodds, and Town and Gown Theatre Board Member Janice James celebrate the Awards Night at OCTAFest in Stillwater, Oklahoma, July 30, 2016



AACT Member Engagement Director Cran Dodds, enjoys a visit with Artistic Director of Ankeny Community Theatre Cheryl Clark in Ankeny, Iowa on August 17, 2016

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Cran Dodds



Ames Community Theatre volunteer Stanley Rabe enjoys conversation with AACT Member Engagement Director Cran Dodds during a rehearsal at Ames Community Theatre in Ames, Iowa August 18, 2016

Cran Dodds



Newton Community Theatre Board member and Treasurer Sue Beukema enjoyed a wonderful visit from AACT Member Engagement Director Cran Dodds at the Newton Community Theatre in Newton, Iowa on August 18, 2016



Bay Area Harbour Playhouse founder Bennie Nipper visits with AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford and AACT Board Member at Large Chad-Alan Carr in front of a portrait of Harbour Playhouse co-founder Oscar Nipper after the Harbour Playhouse Anniversary celebration in Dickinson, Texas on August 13, 2016

Photos by Linda M. Lee

AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford visits with and presents the AACT David C. Bryant Outstanding Service National Award to Zada and Earl Jahnsen at S.T.A.G.E. (Spotlight Theatre Arts Group Etc.) in Bulverde, Texas on August 14, 2016



AACT Board Member at Large Chad-Alan Carr (tux, green vest) participates on-stage at the Anniversary celebration of Bay Area Harbour Playhouse as they recognize the lasting efforts of founder Bennie Nipper in Dickinson, Texas August 13, 2016 (Chad-Alan grew up at Harbour Playhouse and directed the 2016 Anniversary celebration production.)

More On the Road on page 29

Hilarious Comedy Plays!



'Twas the Fight Before Christmas!

Cast: 4 Female, 2 Male Length: Two Acts
Think your family is complicated? Meet the most dysfunctional family you can imagine as they try to navigate Christmas. Peace on earth and good will to all men? Not likely! Ever since her husband died, Mary's horrible adult children have been ruining Christmas. This year, with the help of a suicidal French psychiatrist, Mary is determined to take Christmas back. Hilarious and uplifting Christmas comedy.

My In-laws are Outlaws!

Cast: 5 Female, 2 Male Length: Two Acts
Annie discovers her in-laws are outlaws... and her mother-in-law has hired a mad group of assassins to kill her! How will Annie, a mild mannered Librarian, outwit the best of the Italian, Russian and Irish contract killers? This is outrageous, laugh out loud comedy at its best.

The Old People Are Revolting!

Cast: 5 Female, 2 Male Length: Two Acts
Hilarious comedy about seniors seeking revenge! The residents of the Sunshine Retirement Village have had enough: they're revolting! Bursting with eccentric characters and crazy shenanigans the play is great fun to stage and a huge audience pleaser.

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Each year, the Southeastern Theatre Conference invites theatre lovers of all kinds — actors, singers, dancers, designers, technicians, stage managers, directors, playwrights, teachers, students, professionals, academicians, etc. — to gather together in celebration of the art of theatre. The annual SETC Convention brings over 4,000 members of the theatre community together for three and a half days of workshops, keynotes, performance festivals, auditions, college recruiting, job interviews, and more.

Early Registration Deadline: December 16, 2016, Noon ET
Advanced Registration Deadline: January 27, 2016, Noon ET

setc.org/convention

**Neil Simon Festival
7th Annual New Play Contest**

The Neil Simon Festival
Cedar City, Utah

Plays must be full length (80 - 120 minutes) character-driven American comedy. Musicals accepted. No previous professional production.

The winning script will receive a staged reading on July 28th, during the 2017 Neil Simon Festival in Cedar City, Utah (July 12 - August 12). The selected script will also be considered for full production in the 2018 season. The winning playwright will be invited to be a part of the staged reading process and will be offered a stipend to help him/her attend.

Deadline: March 1, 2017

Electronic submissions only

Submission fee: \$25. Fees are used to cover the stipend for the winning playwright.

See the website for more details:
simonfest.org/new-play-contest.html

Southern Playwrights Competition

Joy Maloney
Department of English
Jacksonville State University
700 Pelham Road North
Jacksonville, Alabama 36265-1602

The Southern Playwrights Competition seeks to identify and encourage the best of Southern play writing. Entries must be original, full-length plays. No musicals or adaptations will be accepted. Playwrights must be native to or a resident of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, or West Virginia. Plays must deal with the Southern experience.

Deadline: January 15, 2017

No electronic submissions

An annual award of \$1,000 will be presented to the first-prize winner, as well as a consideration for production by the Jacksonville State University Department of Drama

See the website for more details:
jsu.edu/english/southpla.html

AACT Web Power

Promote your company's productions on AACT's online "Local Events" calendar. Get the word out about upcoming shows—or even your whole season! Go to aact.org, click on "Festivals & Events," then "Local Events," then "Post Your Event."

Watch for AACT Web Power in every issue of *Spotlight*—and learn how to get the most from the AACT website.



AACT State Contact for Ohio Dawna Kornick takes a break from the action with Ohio Community Theatre Association (OCTA) Administrative Assistant Aara Wise between sessions of the Ohio Convention and Festival. The event took place Labor Day weekend, September 2-5, 2016 in Independence, Ohio.



Photos by
Ron Ziegler

Jim Merillat from Music Theatre International gets a quick hug from AACT Vice President for Festivals Kay Armstrong during the MTI Sing-along at the Ohio Convention and Festival, which occurred September 2-5, 2016 in Independence, Ohio. Kay was serving as Festival Commissioner for the event.

I was the only employee at a small community theater in Pennsylvania. Belonging to AACT and attending an AACT Festival was important because I always found answers to questions and solutions to challenges I was facing. Working alone can be very isolating, but AACT took that isolation away. I returned from every AACT Festival full of new ideas and enthusiasm. My husband attended festivals because he loves people, and theater people are so friendly, and so much fun.

*Jackie Cavanaugh
Greensburg, Pennsylvania*

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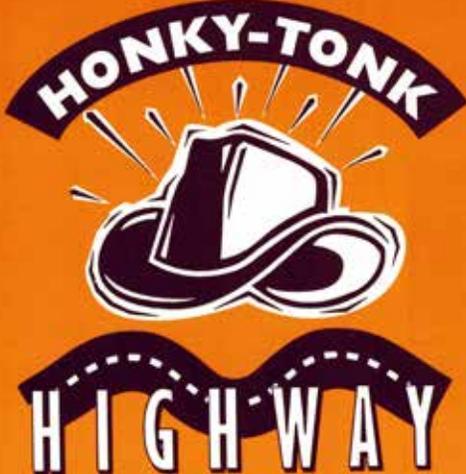
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Full Disclosure: *Always the best policy!*

by Ken Roberts



While attending a panel discussion at this year's Texas Nonprofit Theatres Conference it occurred to me that we in the theatre business are truly a wonderfully unique lot. The insurance companies that protect our theatres usually know and understand the unusual exposures that they might encounter when covering us, but in many instances, there may be risks that even the most astute underwriter wouldn't associate with theatre operations. As a result, it is imperative that we disclose all aspects of our operations to avoid any possibility that a claim could be denied because an uncommon exposure wasn't divulged to the insurance company.

We cannot afford to adopt a "don't ask, don't tell" policy when applying for our insurance

Theatre insurance underwriters might expect to see claims related to ladders, stairs, ropes, construction tools, live animals, and pyrotechnics, just to name a few. While they expect the varied and atypical aspects of our operations, it is crucial that we make our agents and insurance companies aware

of every single facet. Outdoor amphitheatres provide many examples of exposures that would be considered extraordinary to any underwriter who is accustomed to protecting indoor venues. For example, the average indoor theatre provides for parking that doesn't require GPS tracking to get to the front door, but many amphitheatres, which have seating for hundreds and even thousands more patrons, provide transportation from the parking lot for those needing assistance. That transportation might be in the form of a golf cart or a shuttle. Neither of those would automatically come to the mind of an underwriter, which makes it vital for us to make them aware of the exposure. Claims can be denied and policies can be non-renewed if a patron is injured falling out of a golf cart that the underwriter didn't even know the theatre had. Some outdoor theatres require a fair amount of maintenance equipment that is not typical to indoor venues, such as tractors, mowers, and ATV's, all of which constitute additional liability exposures.

My point to all of this is that we should never wonder how to cover these kinds of exposures or even whether they are covered or not. Our job is to make sure that our agents and our insurance carriers are fully aware of everything it takes for us to do what we do, then let them get it covered properly. We cannot afford to adopt a "don't ask, don't tell" policy when applying for our insurance if we expect every accident to be fully insured. Without a doubt, full disclosure will always be the best policy to ensure peace of mind when it comes to our theatres. ♦

"A Farce of modern mythological proportions. Very fun!" – Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Casualty of Cupid's Arrow

by David Dietz

When a perpetual loser in the game of love mysteriously finds himself back in the home of "the one that got away" — on the eve of her impending nuptials, no less — things are bound to get awkward! Especially when the fabled "Goddess of Love" appears to be pulling the strings! A delightful romantic fantasy comedy of love, loss, and letting go...

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To learn more about AACT's Legacy Society, visit aact.org/legacy

Please contact Julie Crawford, AACT Executive Director, for more information at julie@aact.org

Has your theatre experienced a significant financial crunch?

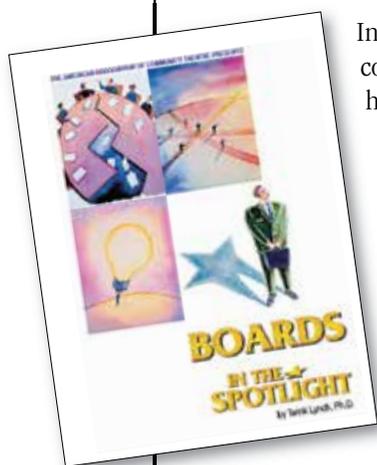
What caused it, and what did you do to overcome it?

Response from LinkedIn ([linkedin.com/groups/3666930](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3666930))

Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre is a tiny outdoor community theatre with no paid staff. We experienced a bit of a crunch in late 2013-early 2014 because of show selection for our summer 2013 season. One of our productions, although it was very well done, was not well received by our audiences. It was a show about writing and producing a show, and we think it was too "inside baseball" for our patrons, the majority of whom are not "theatre people" but people who wish to be entertained in the summertime. Because we have no paid staff, we were able to manage expenses and weather it well, and we recovered (and then some) the following year. The experience helped us better understand our patrons and what they want to see. It also reminded us that show selection is SO important--especially for a group like ours that only produces three shows a year. We've had excellent turnout ever since, with this summer being one of our best ever.

*Lauren Winter-Hansen, Board of Directors
Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre, Annapolis Maryland
summergarden.com*

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The Play's the Thing!

by Twink Lynch

The courts have described three basic standards of conduct for Board Members in carrying out their duties to their nonprofit organizations: the duty of care (sometimes referred to as the “prudent person” rule), the duty of loyalty or faithfulness to the organization, and the duty of obedience (ensuring the organization remains obedient to its central purpose). This article deals with the loyalty issue and its converse, conflict of interest.

The danger is that a theatre could lose its tax-exempt status.

For years, John Wray Young of the Shreveport Little Theatre preached that every community theatre ought to have a sign above the door reading “The Play’s the Thing.” He was cautioning players and Board Members to put the theatre organization first and not to let selfish personal needs become more important than the good of the theatre itself. In a recent publication, *The Legal Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*, Jacqueline Leifer and Michael Glomb state that the duty of loyalty means Board Members must give undivided allegiance to the organization when making decisions for it. Board Members are not allowed by law to put personal interests above the interest of the organization, and this includes the interests of family members and business associates as well.

Conflicting personal interests could include issues like:

1. Nepotism - For example, when a member of the Board Member’s family is considered for a staff position. In a theatre without a paid staff, this could also surface when a Board Member’s relative is considered as a director for a production. This could be further complicated if the director and the play he proposes to direct are part of a “package deal,” and therefore the season lineup is affected by the choice of director as well.
2. Dual Board service - For example, when one person also serves on the Board of another nonprofit organization and solicits donations for both organizations from the same source(s). In some smaller communities, Board Members often serve simultaneously on two arts Boards (the theatre and the arts council or the symphony or the museum or the

performing arts center). This is very difficult, but sometimes it can’t be avoided.

3. Vendor relationship - For example, when a theatre Board Member sits on the Board of a bank that the theatre uses as a depository; when a theatre Board Member owns a company that provides goods or services to the theatre.
4. CEO as a voting member of the Board - Robert Andringa and Ted Engstrom believe senior staff have too much at stake to be objective stewards of the organization at the governance level. “While the practice is not illegal, watchdog and umbrella associations are recommending against these ‘inside’ directors, a common practice in the corporate community (*Nonprofit Board Answer Book*, 1997).”

Board consultant Tom Wolf states that because nonprofit organizations are so clearly mandated to serve a broad public purpose and not to serve the self-interests of Board or staff members, it is essential that conflict of interest policies be developed (*The Nonprofit Organization: An Operating Manual*, 1984). The danger is that a theatre could lose its tax-exempt status. The key to dealing with it is DISCLOSURE.

I have been involved with several conflict of interest issues.

Our first policy should require disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest from all Board Members when they join the Board and every year thereafter that they serve, since lives and relationships change from time to time. Other policies should include:

1. A requirement that Board Members absent themselves from voting when there is a potential conflict;
2. A requirement for getting bids from several sources if Board Members or their family members or business associates stand to benefit from a vendor relationship with the theatre; and
3. A prohibition against staff members using organizational time and resources for personal gain.

It should be noted that Wolf points out that it is not always inappropriate for people to be involved in decisions that may benefit them or a family member as long as the situation is clear to everyone else voting on the matter.

I have been involved with several conflict of interest issues. When Topeka Civic Theatre wanted to buy an elementary school from our local school district, and there was a competing bid, one of the School Board Members who had grown up across the street from the school and whose parents still lived there and were opposed to our buying the school, not only did not vote, he actually left the room during the discussion. Another situation arose when, in order to sell our old facility, we needed an appraisal. Even though we had an appraiser on the Board who would have done it pro bono, we gave the job to another local appraiser to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. Keep in mind that perception is reality for many people.

Let's get our conflict of interest policies written down, formally adopted, and made known to all the current and incoming Board Members.

When I was treasurer of the AACT Endowment Fund and my sister's husband was among those being considered to manage the Fund, I was not only not at the meeting at which the discussion and decision occurred, I even put into writing the nature of my relationship and the fact that I would not be participating at all in this decision.

Forethought is better than hindsight when it comes to conflict of interest. A theatre once shared with me this Conflict of Interest form that all Board Members sign.

1. "I agree to readily disclose any potential conflict of interest, making it a matter of record, either through an annual procedure or when the interest becomes a matter of Board action.
2. I agree that I will not vote or use my personal influence on any matter that might constitute a conflict of interest. I will ensure that the minutes of any meeting where this might occur duly show that I have abstained from voting due to the potential of or occurrence of a conflict of interest.
3. I understand that I may state my opinion or position on any matter described above, or answer pertinent questions to which I may lend my expertise, so long as I absent myself from a Board vote on the matter."

The form is then signed and dated and placed on file for future reference, as needed.

I know legal issues are not among the sexiest for community theatre people, but non-compliance with applicable laws can really hurt our theatres. So, let's get our conflict of interest policies written down, formally adopted, and made known to all the current and incoming Board Members. Create a disclosure form

and get it signed by all Board Members each year. By doing so, we will demonstrate our faithfulness to our theatre organizations, and our communities will have faith in our leadership. ♦

Reprinted from Boards in the Spotlight, page 75

Twink Lynch wrote a regular column on boardmanship for Spotlight for many years. Many of her articles are compiled into a relevant book for boards: Boards in the Spotlight, available at aact.org/store.

AACT Conflict of Interest Policy is available at aact.org/990 Policies. It can serve as a model for your theatre, and is available as a PDF and in MS Word for easy editing/adoption to your theatre.

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Nov 3-20	AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere <i>Get Out of Dodge</i> by Jeanne Drennan Venice Theatre	FL Venice	941-488-1115 venicestage.com aact.org/newplayfest
Nov 4-5	Arkansas Community Theatre Assn Annual Conference *Arkansas State Conference and AACTFest 2016	AR Little Rock	501-259-9311 thestudiotheatre-lr.org
Nov 4-6	Illinois Theatre Assn Community Theatre Festival *Illinois State AACTFest 2016	IL Streator	312-265-5922 illinoistheatre.org
Nov 5	West Virginia Theatre Assn Community Theatre Festival 2016 *West Virginia State AACTFest 2016	WV Buckhannon	304-599-7025 wvtheatre.org
Nov 11-12	Kentucky Theatre Assn Community Theatre Festival *Kentucky State AACTFest 2016	KY Lexington	270-584-4306 theatreky.org
Nov 12-13	South Carolina Theatre Association 2016 Convention *South Carolina State AACTFest 2016	SC Charleston	843-343-6560 southcarolinatheatre.com
Nov 18-20	Theatre Association of New York State Festival 2016 *New York State AACTFest 2016	NY Auburn	585-749-5637 tanys.org

* Indicates festival in the 2017 AACTFest Cycle

For dates farther ahead, check the website: aact.org/calendar



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