

Theatre Aurora aims to 'revitalize' Town's love for the stage

By Brock Weir

Summer is usually Theatre Aurora's quietest season – at least to outsiders.

The otherwise bustling stage is quiet, the well-worn lights are left to cool down, and actors are off reading their lines and rehearsing for a full slate of fall programs. But this is no ordinary season for the over 55-year-old Aurora institution. In fact, they are in the middle of energetic efforts to re-inspire, re-engage, and revitalize Aurora's love for the theatre.

Volunteers with Theatre Aurora, which is based out of Henderson Drive's Factory Theatre, are in the midst of a significant – and multi-phased – revitalization campaign through September 6, which has identified a new sound system as top priority.

To get this done, not only are they taking online donations but throwing open their doors, and their nearly six decades of costume wardrobes, open to the public.

'This is the first phase of it,' explains Theatre Aurora's Jennifer Dewar. 'Using the sound equipment, we can continue to produce great musicals for the community. The sound equipment not only helps with musicals, but supports all our plays, and our youth group as well, teaching young people in the community drama skills and technical skills associated within theatre.'

Theatre Aurora kicked off their revitalization campaign during their Annual General Meeting last month, beginning their appeal to theatre members and subscribers. Now that summer is in full swing, this is being extended throughout the community.

The campaign culminates on Saturday, September 6 with an open house at the Theatre Aurora. Part of the event will be a garage sale benefiting the fundraiser, selling off costumes, props, furniture pieces out of their archives, and anything else anyone might happen to want to sell. Outside of the garage sale, there will be a fundraising carwash as well as a 'fun run', where anyone dressed up as their favourite character from a favourite musical can put their Best Foot Forward for a shared love.

'During our season, it is a very busy time ensuring we are working on the shows and maintaining their quality,' says Dewar. 'We put on five shows a year from October straight through to May. We had an initial fundraiser at Christmas which went fairly well. It wasn't part of this overall project, but throughout the year it is fairly busy ensuring bums in seats, for lack of a better word, and making sure people are actually coming out to see the wonderful shows.'

'It has been a struggle in the past few years to get audiences out. It seems to go through phases where people are really interested in theatre in York Region and so, this year, it has been harder to get people out, not because of the shows we do, but because of the tough winter. With the off-season, we thought this was the best opportunity to leverage the time people have and the extra time to get them to come out and volunteer for September 6.'

Once Phase 1 of the fundraiser is complete, additional phases will roll out over the next two years to keep the stalwart institution fresh. But, at the end of the day, it remains about getting those 'bums' in seats. Sometimes it can be tough to make sure the public is as 'aware' as they could be of what is on offer at the Factory Theatre.

Dewar says they still get people who walk through their doors who have driven past the building every day for decades before taking the plunge to check the place out and, although she is based in Toronto, she works with people from Aurora who weren't even aware Aurora had a theatre before she came along.

'It is quite disappointing, considering the caliber of the shows we put on,' she says. 'It is quite good and we strive to bring people out in the community, new people to get involved and educate them on the theatre. It is disappointing sometimes to work really hard on a show and not really have a full house, which did happen a lot this year because of the weather.'

?Hopefully by creating a buzz around this project, and the fact we are really working to improve what we've got, hopefully it will increase awareness and that will be part of the idea around September 6. Hopefully we can get people coming in who have never stopped there before, always drive by, or have always wondered, but were afraid to knock on the door.?

To donate to the Revitalization Fund, visit app.arts-people.com/index.php?contribution=tthau.