

# New area playhouse floats original comedy

BY ALICE COLLINS  
STAFF WRITER

The Millennium Centre Theater — viewed by Southfield officials as a key in the rejuvenation of the area in and around Northland Center — opened with an original comedy production Oct. 27 before a full house.

The premiere of both the theater and "Life is a Beach" drew theatergoers from throughout the metropolitan area, among them local and state politicians, prominent business and government executives and others who heard about it and wanted to be a part of it.

Many dressed casually, but few went so far as to come in beachwear — "suggested attire" for the evening.

First came an hour of munching "beach foods and drinks," among them mini hot dogs and turkey burgers, pizza and a variety of fruit, beer, wine coolers, pop and coffee. The show, which integrates on-stage actors with a bikini

beach movie from the 1960s followed.

The Millennium, formerly the AMC Northland Theater on J.L. Hudson Drive next to Northland Center, is a redevelopment project of the Southfield Downtown Development Authority and the city.

Southfield Mayor Donald Fracassi described the opening as "a birth."

"Those of us who have been around long enough to remember the old Northland Playhouse (once a popular but now long-gone summer stock theater next to Northland Center) know what a great place this is for live theater productions," Fracassi told the audience in brief opening remarks.

"This is great for Southfield and surrounding communities, too," said Deborah Grant of Farmington Hills. She came to the opening with her sister, Loraine Burton.

"It's such a good location," said Grant. "It's near the freeways and

also the people in Southfield appreciate the cultural aspects of life. I think this theater will have a better chance of making it than those in some other communities, like the George Burns Theater in Livonia (which closed after a brief run)."

"I was just reminiscing about when this was the Northland movie theater," Burton said. "My husband and I saw 'Love Story' here. I remember I came out crying."

"The theater looks great now," she continued. "I'm hoping it will go as a live theater."

"This is a perfect place for live theater," said Frank DePetrillo of Sterling Heights. He and several other members of his family are involved with the Millennium

and the "Life is a Beach" production. His brother-in-law, Jeff Nahani, is the theater's development director.

His sister-in-law, Ann DePetrillo of Troy agreed. She was there with her children, Marie, 9, and Paul, 6. "The kids have been playing volleyball (part of the beach decor in the lobby) ever since we got here," she said during the social hour. "They're having a great time."

Kris Copeland of Livonia was working as a volunteer usher. "I got involved because I'm a friend of a friend," she said. "It was a chance to see a production like this and I couldn't pass it up. It's nice to see what they've done to the theater."

The opening of the Millennium

■ **Those of us who have been around long enough to remember the old Northland Playhouse know what a great place this is for live theater productions.**

Mayor Donald Fracassi

and its ability to attract theatergoers from throughout the metropolitan area are especially significant to Southfield and to the DDA, a quasi-governmental authority formed by Southfield to revitalize the southeast corner of

the city in and around the shopping center.

The theater, owned by Providence Hospital and leased to the DDA, is in the heart of the 468-acre development district that includes the shopping center, the hospital complex, two hotels, the AMC Southfield City 12 theater and a number of other office and apartment complexes and educational institutions.

Southfield loaned the DDA \$300,000 to make repairs and some minor renovations to the long-vacant theater building and to finance the production of "Life is a Beach."

Performances will continue on Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and on Sundays at 3 p.m. for a run of at least eight weeks.

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