

Broadway comes to Birmingham

Broadway will come to Birmingham starting Sept. 6, if the dreams of one local businessman are fulfilled.

George J. Nahas, president of the newly-formed Birmingham Development Company, Inc., announced this week that he will start a live theater in the Birmingham Theater Building. He signed a long term lease for the use of the building last week.

"We will not have Broadway quality performances in Birmingham," he said. "But we will bring shows straight from Broadway or on their way to Broadway to the city."

Nahas said performances will be held seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.

Pierre LaMarre, a veteran theater producer in Michigan and on the east coast, will be the executive producer of the new company.

Nahas has been conducting private negotiations in the city for the past 11 months.

James Zeder, executive director of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce, said, "We have been working many months on this project. This is the quality organization that we like to attract to Birmingham. It will help to keep the downtown area attractive and lively. It will make help make downtown a wonderful place for people who live and work here."

Birmingham city officials learned of the plans late last week.

"We are delighted," said Mayor Dorothy Conrad. "This is all part of

our (city commissioners) dream of having life in the downtown area after dark."

THE THEATER COMPANY will take over a building that was opened on Dec. 23, 1927. It was started as a vaudeville theater and was later turned over into a movie theater.

The Birmingham Theater will require extensive renovation before it is ready for live performances. Glass doors will be erected in the front of the building. Plumbing and carpentry work will be done backstage.

Producer Pierre LaMarre said that in looking over the building he discovered the original orchestra pit was still intact, although it had been covered over by cement. He will have the cement removed and then will restore the pit.

The theater group will take over the building on June 1 and will immediately begin renovations.

LaMARRE SAID after he meets with the Birmingham City Commission on May 2 that he will fly to New York to sign performers to contracts to appear in Birmingham.

He said he had several informal agreements for well-known stage personalities to appear in plays. LaMarre promised to announce part of the first-year schedule when he returns from New York.

LaMarre said shows would come directly from Broadway and some would be produced in Hollywood and include theater stars.

In addition, he said the Birmingham Theater will have its own company.

"We will be holding auditions for local people for this group," he said. Another plan is for a children's theater.

LaMarre has done extensive work in the theater. For 10 years he was employed by Music Fair Enterprises, Inc. While working for that company he was treasurer of Painters Mill Music Fair in suburban Baltimore and Shady Grove Music Fair in suburban Washington, D.C.

He later managed the Westbury Music Fair in Westbury, Long Island.

While working for Music Fair he produced shows which featured Andy Williams, Judy Garland, Harry Belafonte and Jack Benny. He either produced or directed "Kismet," "Do, I Do," "Carnival," "Pajama Game," "Damn Yankees" and the "Fantasticks."

Monday through Saturday, with special programs every Sunday. Plans now call for a ballet to be featured on the first Sunday of the month, a symphony on the second, a Pop Series on the third and a Great Artists Program on the fourth.

Sunday performances will be at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

"We will bring top New York ballet and symphony music to Birmingham in these Sunday programs," LaMarre said.

Ticket prices will be scaled down from about \$15 for a Saturday evening musical. Prices during the week will probably be in the \$7-\$9 range.

"Our emphasis will be on family entertainment," LaMarre said. "We will not produce anything which would embarrass someone taking his children."

Nahas said his company will use people from Birmingham as much as possible.

"If our leading lady gets flowers after opening night, they will come from a Birmingham florist," he said. "When we need a plumber, we will hire one from Birmingham."

He said the theater company would need many items including draperies, carpets, chairs, wallpaper and staples. They will try to purchase them all in Birmingham.

"When you figure the cast and crew will be stay here throughout the week and the people we will draw for eight performances every week, you can imagine the effect of the theater on the economy of the city," Nahas said.

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Private school may buy vacant building

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

The former Valley Woods Elementary School may be sold after all but it will be Wednesday before a final decision is made.

The full board of the Yeshivah Beth Yehuda Corp. will meet Wednesday to act on the recommendation of the steering committee for the Southfield-based school that the corporation proceed with the purchase of Valley Woods.

The school was closed by the Birmingham Board of Education in June 1975 because of declining enrollment.

Whatever action is taken next week will climax several months of interest in the property by the Beth Yehuda Schools.

Indecision over whether Valley Woods was sold or not arose after Birmingham Board of Education acceptance April 19 of the Beth Yehuda Schools March 15 purchase offer.

CRAIG MERCIER, realtor with Proctor Homer Warren Inc., handling sale of the school for the Birmingham board, said Tuesday, "From all indications everything looks good."

The Beth Yehuda offer is for \$350,000 cash or \$500,000 on a land contract for 7.58 acres of land.

The school's initial offer of \$550,000 was made last August. At the time, a second offer for the same amount, from the Valley Woods Retirement Apartments Associates, was accepted by the board but a request for a zoning change was turned down and a special use variance also was denied by the zoning board of appeals.

The Beth Yehuda girls' school will locate in the building if the sale is approved.

Within a short time after the March 15 offers were made for the vacant school, the for lease sign on the Birmingham schools administration building was removed.

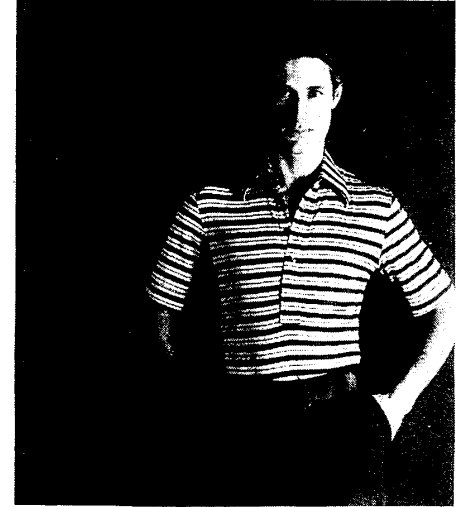
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