

# Dedicated volunteers work to restore Wayne Theatre

**BACKSTAGE  
PASS**

**ANN  
DELSI**

Few things in life can evoke a feeling of desolation like an abandoned theater. Perhaps because it's not difficult to imagine a time when the marquee gleamed, town folk gathered, and memories of a lifetime were formed.

Sometimes I can quell that awful tumbledown turmoil by reminding myself of the many successful renovations of aging theaters that have ushered in

exciting new eras as performance and cultural centers. Of course, with ample financial backing, any old lonesome prairie can be turned into a glittering entertainment district.

## Major obstacle

But, more often than not, available cash is the major obstacle. As a result, theaters become dry cleaning outlets or

pharmacies, or have an eventual date with a wrecking ball.

At the risk of sounding like tabloid TV or one of those best-seller of the moment self-help books, there are fascinating stories that fuel every restoration project. It is a case of "Theater... and the people who love them too much." You'll see that kind of devotion in the renovation effort of a long-neglected theater in an edition of Detroit Public TV's BACKSTAGE PASS, airing at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, July 25.

The Wayne Theatre dates back to the 1920s, when it served as a showplace for vaudeville performers and film shorts. When the silent movie era had passed,

it became the first movie house with sound in a stretch from Detroit to Jackson, according to Bob Welch, one of the passionate members of a volunteer organization intent on renovation.

Virtually unused for decades, the dream of turning the Michigan Avenue structure into a cultural center is kept alive by an annual fund-raiser. Fittingly, it's a haunted house that thrives on performance rather than gore and special effects.

"I would love to bring in \$50,000 from our haunted theater show, but competitors with advertising dollars are making it difficult to raise the support that we have in the past. Our show is

different than others because it's more theatrical and family oriented," says Welch.

One thing that makes the volunteer effort so noble is that there are no expectations that the Wayne will someday be a huge profit center.

## Performing arts center

"My dream is that we can provide a performing arts center that can be used by the many colleges and high schools in the area. In addition to staging high quality productions, it could also be a venue for the visual arts," says Welch.

He adds that grants are being

sought to move the project along. Volunteers and fund-raisers can only take you so far.

It's easy to root for the folks who have worked to create a future for the Wayne Theatre.

"Sadly, Detroit architecture tends to be disposable. With so much work that remains to be done, the dedication of the members of the organization to restore the Wayne is admirable," says Lex Kuhne, who hosts the BACKSTAGE PASS segment about the theater.

Its destiny may not be as money machine or a money pit. A niche as a center where young artists can develop and showcase their talent would be just fine.

## Thespians from page E1

giving students new skills, although some kids do become professional actors."

Participating in theater, Morehouse believes, helps children learn to work together as a team, improves self confidence, and helps them speak clearly before an audience.

On Monday nights, the students showcase what they learned in classes that week by performing for family and friends.

The senior division concentrates more on acting than the junior division. All of the students work with a dance instructor to learn how to move on stage.

"I love the fact that we do nothing but concentrate on theater during this time," said Morehouse who has taught English at Cranbrook Kingwood Upper School for the past 13 years, and is a member of the St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild of Cranbrook.

"The students can focus and memorize something overnight. Most of us are doing this because we love theater," said Morehouse.

John Rutherford is producing "Our Town" and is head of the senior division. "Everyone has a part, we work together as a team," he said. "This is my eighth summer. I teach theater at Warren Fitzgerald High School. The summer program draws students from many com-

munities and varied backgrounds. We're all working together to do one thing, put on a play. It breaks down barriers and boundaries. Students improve their acting skills, and become more tolerant of others. Each year presents new challenges and accomplishments, we try to work on weaknesses and move students to areas that are less comfortable to them."

In college, Gretchen Alexandra played the part of Emily in "Our Town."

"I have wonderful memories," said Alexandra who is directing the Cranbrook Theatre School, senior division, production of the play at the outdoor Greek Theatre.

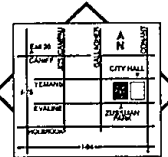
"I enjoy seeing the play come to life," she said. "I love having the chance to work in theater. It is my passion and love."

A language arts teacher, Alexandra, who is assistant director of the senior division, enjoys watching the students grow. "The kids choose to be here," she said. "It teaches them how to focus, to work together as a group and meet deadlines. They learn how to present themselves well in front of people. Any kid would benefit from being here."

"A lot of the kids graduate from the program and come back to teach, and help. It's nice to see that."



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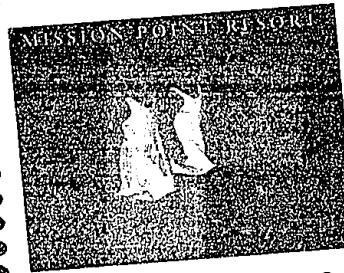
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Screened on Wednesdays on exhibit prior to the Theatre Series Events.

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