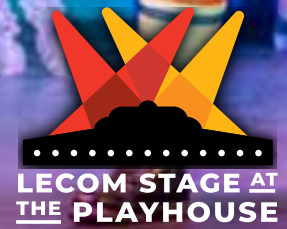


CONNECTION

2023 ANNUAL REPORT | REPORTING IN FISCAL YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2023





Hello!

Welcome to the Erie Playhouse...



INCLUSIVE.

PROFESSIONAL.

GRATEFUL.

IMPACTFUL.

PASSIONATE.

MISSION

The Playhouse educates, entertains, transforms, and supports communities through theatre.

Letter from our Executive Director

Every year, we publish our Annual Report under the title, CONNECTION. It is meant to evoke that feeling of unity and togetherness we all experience through the creation and celebration of community theatre, and to remind us that the mission and impact of the Erie Playhouse extend far beyond the theatre walls.

This report, focusing on the recently completed fiscal year, could just as easily be called RECONNECTION, as 2023 was, for many of us, a return to the Playhouse. We saw audiences growing as many people resumed pre-pandemic activity levels. We also saw many volunteers – actors, pit musicians, stage crew and ushers – reconnecting behind the scenes. And with an outstanding slate of world-class productions, we saw many individuals, patrons, and participants alike, drawn back to the Playhouse after years away, reconnecting with an Erie institution more than a century in the making.

On a personal note, my wife, Jessica, and I couldn't be happier to have reconnected with the Playhouse. Moving back to Erie was an easy decision for us because we were doing it to rejoin the Playhouse community.

From the moment I walked into the theatre on my first day as Executive Director last May, you've all made us feel so welcome in this incredible place. I hope to return the gesture every day through my passion and commitment to this beloved organization.

On New Year's Eve, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Erie Playhouse's permanent home on 10th Street. On that incredible night, I shared quotes from an article published in the June 1949 issue of the magazine, Nation's Business. In a 74-year-old feature on the Playhouse unearthed by Artistic Director Richard Davis in a box of archives, the author referenced the theatre's motto on display in the lobby of the Playhouse's then-home on 7th Street: "This building is dedicated to the making of happiness."

Though it's been a while since those words have been displayed in our lobby, they're back up on our marquee. This building – and this organization – is dedicated to the making of happiness. To connecting our community through the power of theatre. To carrying forward the great work of all who trod the boards before us. To preserving the Erie Playhouse for generations to come.

I hope you'll take a few moments to peruse the pages of this annual report, and to see all we accomplished in 2023. Most of all, I hope you'll join me in celebrating a season of blockbusters in 2024 and to the wonderful possibilities ahead.

Whether you've been away like me, or you've been here all along, we're glad you're here!

All the best,

Zach
Zach Flock, Executive Director



2023 ANNUAL FUND DRIVE CONTRIBUTORS

Thank You! With those two words, we convey our deepest gratitude for the generosity of our donors.

PRODUCER CIRCLE (\$2,500+)

John R. & Mary Gail Baldwin
David S. Cohen
Gary & Emy Dougan
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- Erie Gives Matching+
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Community Foundation+
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Ron & Kelly Craig
Dot & Brian Darold
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**Audiences of Disney's
Descendants**
Anonymous
Engel O'Neill Advertising
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Anonymous
Carol George & Tom Laska
Vicki Glembocki
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Liz Allen
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Anonymous
Robert & Marcia Allshouse
Catherine Anderson

**Audiences of The Diary of
Anne Frank**
Anonymous
Bruce & Kathleen Arkwright
Carla Arnone
Gregory T & Ann M Badach
**Cait Bryant Baden, Allana
Baden, Griffin Baden**
Captain Gardiner
Tayla Balkovic
Shelly & David Benjamin
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Tracy Bishop
Pam & Bob Blakely
Susan & Tom Blecki
Anonymous
Peggy Brace
Samantha Brickell
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Anonymous
Ginnie Burger
Betsy Butoryak+
Virginia Byers
Mary Jo Campbell
**In honor of my aunt, Teri
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Nancy Chiappazzi
Anonymous
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Antonette Cipriani
Karen Clement
Shawn Clerkin
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Anonymous+
Anonymous
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Anonymous
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Anonymous
Greg Engel
Karen Etter+
Anonymous
Karen Euliano
Jennifer Fackler
Bonnie & Ross Fagan+
Lynn K. Falk
Kathryn Faulkner
Kimberly Faulkner
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Kyle Filbeck
Avery Fiscus
Jane Fitzgibbon
Barbara & George Flanders+
Zach & Jessica Flock
Ray Flynt
John F
Cathy & David Fresch
Lorie Fritts
Kristin Fry
Matt & Renee Fuchs
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In Memory of Joe Hassler
Fred & Jackie Garnon
Louise Garrelts
In Honor of Jim Griffey
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Julie Gill & Judy Memo
Gail Goodridge-Wehn
Shari & John Gould
Wendy & Darrell Grafius
Noah Green
Anonymous+
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Carole Groters+
Karen & Jim Haas
Lynn Halasz+
Clark & Carole Hall
Eric A. Hamilton
Mary Jane Hand
Ron & Donna Harrington

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Sherry Hartman
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Linda Higley+
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Anonymous
James Holland
John & Jacque Holmberg
Kathleen Holtz
Cora Howey
Lynette Hughes+
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Ryan Ingram
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Anonymous
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Karen Kleck+
Deanna J. Klein
Ericka & Peter Kloecker
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Sue Larson
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Becky & Jerry Lee
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Ellen Pfadt
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Karen Sloan
Mary Jane Smalley
Anonymous
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Bob & Robin Snyder
Rami Sorge
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J. M. Stevenson
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Nancy Pianta Trapp
Michele Vahey
Stephen Valahovic
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In Loving Memory of Tom Byrne
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Carol Wood
Devon Yates
Debbie & Jim Zahler
Erica Zielewski

+ Increased gift

New donor

Italics indicates matching gift

Making an Impact

CORPORATE, FOUNDATION AND GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTORS

SPONSORSHIPS

Underwrite production expenses

2023 Mainstage Season Sponsor

LECOM Health

2023 Family Season Sponsor

UPMC Health Plan

SHOW AND EVENT SPONSORS

Cellar '54

Courtyard Winery

Dusckas-Taylor Funeral Home & Cremation Services

Erie Catholic School System

Erie Federal Credit Union

Erie Insurance

The Housing Authority of the City of Erie

Jade Winery

Lake Erie Candy Company

Larese Floral Design

Lincoln Recycling

Mazza Vineyards

National Fuel

PNC Bank

PopLuck

Printing Concepts, Inc.

MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

Engel O'Neill

Erie News Now/Lilly Broadcasting

Erie Reader

GoErie.com

GRISÉ Audio Visual

Lamar Advertising

Visit Erie

Rick Klein Photography

GRANTS

Support facilities/operations and programming

American Tinning and Galvanizing Company – Neighborhood Assistance Program for PLAYtime

The Erie Community Foundation – Operating

Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority – Lead Asset Sustainability and Programming

Erie Insurance – Neighborhood Assistance Program for PLAYtime

Henry & Mary J. MacDonald Foundation – Facility Renovations

Lincoln Recycling – Marquee Upgrades

Northwest Bank – Marquee Upgrades

Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie – Marquee Upgrades

Schuster Re-Grant Initiative – Arts Accessibility

United Way of Erie County – PLAYtime

UPMC Health Plan – Neighborhood Assistance Program for PLAYtime





EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT TAX CREDIT

CHANGING CHILDREN'S LIVES

WHAT IS IT?

Offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development, the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program allows businesses to receive significant tax credits when they contribute to qualified educational improvement organizations such as the Erie Playhouse. This funding allows us to bring increased educational opportunities to thousands of children annually. This program only funds our seven pre-approved innovative educational programs.

WHAT BUSINESSES ARE ELIGIBLE?

Entities eligible to apply for EITC are operating business firms authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that are subject to the following taxes: Personal Income Tax, Capital Stock/Foreign Franchise Tax, Corporate Net Income Tax, Bank Shares Tax, Title Insurance & Trust Company Shares Tax, Insurance Premiums Tax (excluding unauthorized, domestic/foreign marine), Mutual Thrift Tax, Malt Beverage Tax or Surplus Lines Tax.

WHY SHOULD YOU PARTICIPATE?

Your business will receive a 90% tax credit if you sign up for two years in the program and a 75% tax credit if you sign up for one year. Eligible businesses can receive up to \$200,000 in tax credits per taxable year. Most importantly, your contributions enable us to inspire, challenge, amaze and educate children who might otherwise never experience the joy of live theatre.



Thank you for supporting our Educational Improvement Tax Credit Programs

Erie Insurance
Marquette Savings Bank
Scott Enterprises

MacDonald Illig
Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett
UPMC Health Benefits

For more information on the application process and how your business can support the Playhouse through this program, please contact Zach Flock at 814.454.2852, ext. 7.

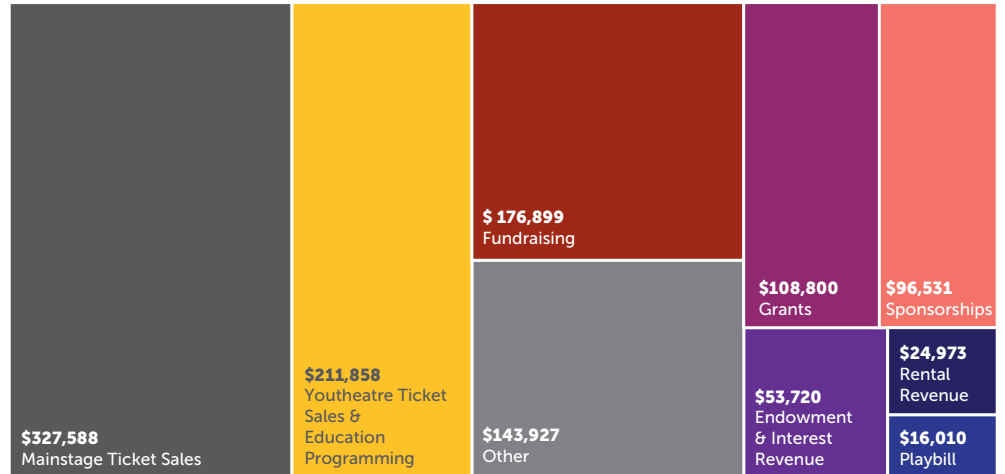


2023 FISCAL YEAR IN REVIEW

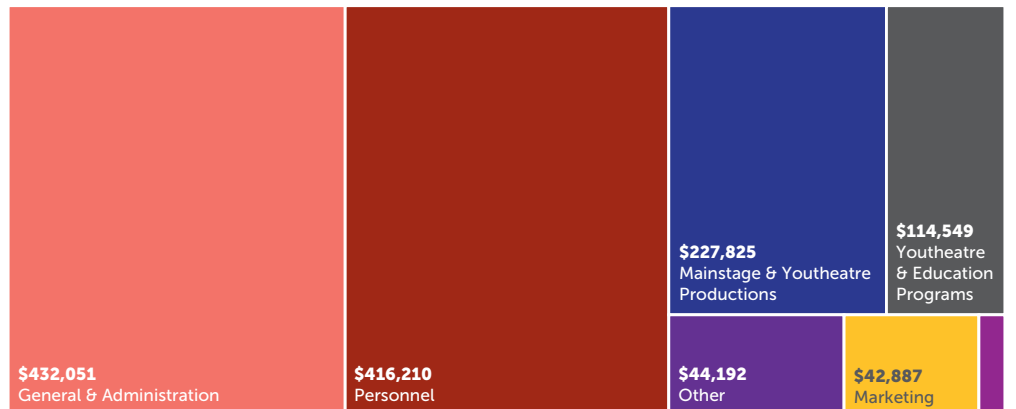
In 2023, we made significant strides in improving the financial strength of our organization while undergoing a leadership transition. Audiences embraced our season of world-class theatre with enthusiasm, leading to an increase in Mainstage and Youtheatre ticket sales, and even an extended run of our production of *Jersey Boys*. Our reinvigorated Youtheatre program brought many new families to the theatre, including students attending school performances of *Disney's Finding Nemo, Jr.* and *Disney's Descendants*. We also experienced a much-needed uptick in individual donations to our Annual Fund Drive during Erie Gives and for specific projects like our beautiful marquee upgrade.

All the while, we faced the challenges of inflation and the need to tackle essential maintenance projects like replacing fire doors in the theatre. Our staff have worked diligently to spend wisely and to closely manage production expenses and administrative costs. While we did end the year with a deficit, we reduced the deficit by over 60% from 2022. We are working toward a balanced budget in 2024.

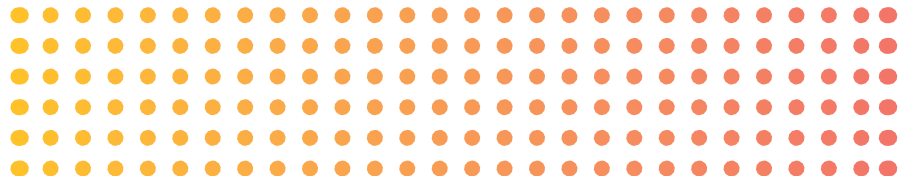
REVENUE



EXPENSES



*Unaudited report



2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Facilitator
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Facilitator
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Manager
Molly Parks, PLAYtime
Facilitator
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Alison Ollinger-Riefstahl,
House Manager
Benjamin Snyder, PLAYtime
Facilitator
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Facilitator
Patrick Vahey, PLAYtime
Facilitator
Bruce Yates, PLAYtime
Facilitator
Trisha Yates, PLAYtime
Coordinator

DAVID AND JUDY MATTHEWS SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The scholarship fund surpassed its needed goal of \$25,000, and we will award the first scholarship this summer to a student attending school to pursue a career in a theatre or performing arts-related field.

"Give them love and they will give it back."



Message from Our Artistic Director

Thank You! Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. I don't think I can say it enough. Thank you for your support over the 2023 season. Your attendance, financial support and volunteerism helped to bring the Playhouse to solid ground. Our 107th season was outstanding, filled with memorable performances and sell-out audiences. Our Youtheatre returned in full force with two sell-out productions, packed school matinees, and great summer camps; reimaged classes and the restoration of the Showstoppers started in 2024. Our design staff really knocked it out of the park, too. Whether creating the undersea world of *Finding Nemo, Jr.*, the slickness of *Jersey Boys*, the zaniness of *Spongebob The Musical* or the rock and roll realm of *Disney's Descendants*, they dazzled audiences every time. Everyone is still talking about the spinning house of *Misery*. And finally, we had the chance to look back over the last 40 years in our home on 10th street with our thrilling New Year's Eve concert celebration.

Now the 108th season is off and running – audiences and our performers are all so excited about the hit-filled season. As always, our season ticket packages are the best way to ensure you have a great seat at a great price. It is also the best way you can support our work. Without you in the seats and the countless hours our volunteers dedicate we simply would not be here.

Every show, we bring together a group of strangers from all different walks of life. They come together to learn songs, dances, lines, and blocking. Over the rehearsal period, a family builds. New friendships that will last a lifetime are ignited. Dreams are fulfilled, passion is born and yes, sometimes romance is kindled. I am lucky as I get to see this happen time and time again. The Playhouse Mr. Vincent created does more than enrich our community through entertainment; it changes the lives of community members as well.

Once again, I say thank you for your support and I will see you at the Playhouse.

Richard

Richard Davis, Artistic Director





Production Highlights

2023 Season by the Numbers



THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$31,205

Performances: 11

Attendance: 2,207

Percent Capacity: 46%

DISNEY'S FINDING NEMO JR

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$31,695

Performances: 13

Attendance: 3,632

Percent Capacity: 64%





JERSEY BOYS

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$64,966
Performances: 12
Attendance: 3,566
Percent Capacity: 68%

THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$36,453
Performances: 9
Attendance: 1,808
Percent Capacity: 46%



BEAUTIFUL: THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$49,754
Performances: 10
Attendance: 3,156
Percent Capacity: 73%





MISERY

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$25,985

Performances: 9

Attendance: 1,346

Percent Capacity: 34%

DISNEY'S DESCENDANTS: THE MUSICAL

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$44,050

Performances: 11

Attendance: 3,953

Percent Capacity: 83%



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

Ticket & Sponsorship Revenue: \$53,545

Performances: 9

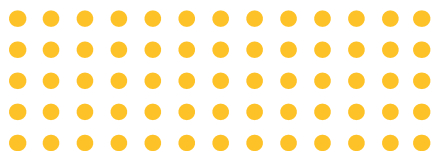
Attendance: 2,770

Percent Capacity: 71%

PLAYtime LITERACY PROGRAM

A COMMUNITY GEM

PLAYtime is excited to report the exponential growth made in 2023. Trish Yates, author of PLAYtime's arts-based literacy lessons, returned in a new role as PLAYtime Coordinator. PLAYtime's six facilitators delivered the lessons in 150 classrooms weekly, seeing over 2,350 children from three years old to 1st grade. PLAYtime programming is in 22 sites: ALL 13 Erie City Community Schools, plus childhood learning centers, and Barber National Institute. But PLAYtime did not stop there! In 2023 alone, PLAYtime could be seen promoting literacy in the most unusual places. BINGO? Yes, what a great family event to learn how to listen, follow directions and practice number reading left to right. In the fall, PLAYtime attended eight Trunk-or-Treats. PLAYtime emceed "Dudes and Donuts" at McKinley for over 300 people. Storytelling by PLAYtime found its way everywhere: PLAYtime at the Playground evenings, PLAYtime at the Urban Market, PLAYtime in the Garden, and even PLAYtime at the Erie Zoo. We also joined the Safari Carnival at Lincoln, the End-of-the Year Carnival at Edison, and the Winter Fest at Grover Cleveland. PLAYtime hosted its annual "Holiday Sing-Along" at the Erie Playhouse and also provided opportunities for children and families to attend Youtheatre shows. In addition, PLAYtime provided a literacy arts experience for two weeks at Elk Valley's summer programming and provided an afterschool experience featuring costume design at Edison. So many activities have made 2023 a memorable one, but the cherry on top was PLAYtime's World Premiere of the Imagination Library story *Chimpanzees For Tea!*



CHIMPANZEES FOR TEA! WORLD PREMIERE

In April 2023, PLAYtime presented *Chimpanzees For Tea!*, an original work adapted from the beloved Imagination Library book by Jo Empson of the same name. The experience began in the classroom as the facilitators prepared the children for a trip to the theatre. Jo Empson even sent an intro video for everyone to enjoy prior to each show. And the best part? Everything was FREE. Over 1300 children came to the three school matinees and went home with a copy of the book. Over 800 families attended the public performances, and PLAYtime hosted after show 'Parent and Me' interactive programs following these performances!



Chimpanzees for Tea!

ANNUAL FUND

As a non-profit community organization, one of the most vital sources of revenue for the Playhouse is our Annual Fund. These dollars support all aspects of our day-to-day operations, from costumes to utilities, and help us fulfill our mission. Despite leadership changes, a reduced campaign timeframe, and fewer strategic appeals, the annual fund raised \$155,899 of its \$203,000 goal. Our sincerest thank you to the volunteers who were the face of the campaign: Charlie

The entire Kress family shares a love of theatre, especially when it involves spontaneous singing and dancing. Every day is like a real-life musical for this traveling family troupe. But it was not always so. There was a time before singing showtunes in the car, a time before little jazz hands waving in the back seat. Then one fine day, we took a dramatic turn on 10th Street and arrived at the Erie Playhouse. Suddenly, everything changed.

Before theatre life, we started a family and made our home in Waterford. Richard works in Erie at Kress Financial Services, and Holly manages all the beautiful chaos at home.

Signing up for that first Youtheatre camp turned out to be a life-changing decision. It was a formative experience for our children that would inspire imagination, build friendships, and develop character on stage and in life. Reminded of the joy of "play" after a long intermission from his high school musical days, Holly persuaded Richard and the kids to return for Act II.

Months later, Richard debuted on the Playhouse stage as Prince Topher in *Cinderella* with two-year-old Natalie yelling from the audience, "Go get her, daddy!" Immediately after that, Lainey and Cavin joined the cast of *Frozen, Jr.* Then, all five Kressicals appeared as Seussical characters during the livestreamed musi-

cal marathon. It was a great honor that the legendary David Matthews introduced us. In the past few years, we have ALL been involved in productions in the area with Playhouse favorites including *White Christmas*, *Elephant & Piggy*, *Lightning Thief*, *Sound Of Music*, *Finding Nemo, Jr.*, *Descendants*, and a few concerts along the way.



The Von Kress Family Singers: Richard the Father; Holly the Mother; Lainey the Teen; Cavin the Tween; Natalie the Baby.

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We are just one of the countless families in the greater Erie theatre community who have discovered the gem that is the Erie Playhouse, where life-affirming art inspires and delights players and patrons from all walks of life. This year, we encourage each of you to share your love of the Erie Playhouse by inviting new fans and welcoming old friends into our theatre.

- the Kress Family

Youtheatre News

In addition to welcoming Zach Flock as Executive Director, 2023 saw the arrival of Ahnika Lexvold as Youtheatre and Education Director. She was selected after a search that attracted candidates from across the country.

A theatre educator hailing from Saint Paul, Minnesota, Ahnika graduated with a B.A. in Acting/Directing from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and went on to work with a variety of theatre companies in the Twin Cities area as an educator, director, costume designer, and stage manager. Most recently, Ahnika served as the Out-of-School Time Coordinator for an elementary school and worked with the organization Adventures in Cardboard, running fantasy adventure role-play camps.

"Youtheatre and Education have long been a vital part of our operations," noted Zach Flock, Executive Director. "Ahnika is a passionate artist, educator and administrator, and we're thrilled to welcome her to the Playhouse and the Erie community."

"There's a lot of momentum at the Playhouse," added Emily Cassano, President of the Erie Playhouse Board of Directors who served as Youtheatre & Education Director from 2008–2014. "We're excited to welcome Ahnika and to build and grow our programs to serve the entire community."

As Youtheatre and Education Director, Ahnika will organize, administer, and manage all aspects of Youtheatre programs, productions, and educational opportunities.

Ahnika joined the Playhouse staff in August and immediately jumped into directing *Disney's Descendants*, which saw an incredibly successful run in November. She ended the season with auditions for Showstoppers, the Playhouse's signature youth show choir returning in 2024, and the introduction of Showstoppers: Originals, a group of students who are working on an original devised piece to debut later this year.

Additionally, Ahnika unveiled a full slate of Winter/Spring 2024 Youtheatre classes ranging from acting and improvisation to voice, dance, and playwriting. She is also planning summer camps, including two weeks of Create-A-Play camps and one week of Encore Camp with a performance of *Seussical KIDS*, and another slate of classes for Fall 2024.

This season, Ahnika will produce three captivating Youtheatre productions: *Lyle The Crocodile*, *Diary Of A Wimpy Kid: The Musical*, and *Tuck Everlasting*.

Welcome, Ahnika!





Iconic Marquee Upgrades Unveiled.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

On November 22, we held a ribbon cutting ceremony to thank the project's investors and reveal the updated marquee. The marquee upgrades include 10-millimeter LED screens that preserve the marquee's historical character while allowing for state-of-the-art programming. A Historic Preservations Grant of \$15,000 from the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie and generous gifts from Lincoln Recycling for \$21,000 and Northwest Bank for \$2,500 made this project possible.

“ The marquee serves as our front door. It presents visitors with an image that is consistent with the artistic quality that they see on our stage.

– Zach Flock

Photo (from left): 1. Brian Eller, Trust Administrator, Northwest Bank; Aaron Snippert, Executive Director, Redevelopment Authority of the City of Erie; Joe Schember, Mayor, City of Erie; Mary Lincoln; Jeremy Lincoln; Andrew Lincoln; Liz Lincoln; Zach Flock, Executive Director, Erie Playhouse



2024 Launch Party

2024 SEASON OF BLOCKBUSTERS

LAUNCH PARTY

On August 29, we rolled out the red carpet to announce our 108th Season of blockbusters to a packed house. Guests enjoyed hors d'oeuvres, complimentary beer and wine, and special season ticket promotions. The mainstage lineup includes *Tootsie*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Disney's Newsies*, *Shawshank Redemption*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*. Youtheatre shows include *Lyle the Crocodile*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Musical*, and *Tuck Everlasting*.

WELCOME HOME

JUSTIN ANDREW HONARD

On December 23, Justin Andrew Honard, an American drag queen and recording artist from Erie, brought the "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like ALASKA... A Christmas Show" tour to the Erie Playhouse LECOM Stage. ALASKA is best known as the runner-up on the fifth season of RuPaul's Drag Race and the winner of the second season of *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*. We added a matinee when the evening show quickly sold out. This magical show featured holiday classics, not-so-holiday classics, and yuletide tomfoolery.



Oh, what a night!

ANNUAL DONOR DINNER

On June 28 on the Playhouse stage, 64 Circle of Friends patrons at the Benefactor, Director and Producer levels feasted on a delicious four-course dinner prepared by Chef Don Baxter. A heartfelt thank you to Dennis Borczon for providing wine service and our own *Jersey Boys*, Brendan Daugherty, Owen Hitt, Patrick Vahey, and Dylan Vergotz with Devon Yates on keyboard for entertaining our guests with a medley of the Four Seasons' favorite hits. A special thank you to Brent, Leah, Millie, and Addy Johnson for hosting the event.

BEHIND THE SCENES – Snapshots

"The term behind the scenes comes from the theatre, where in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, violent actions such as murder or execution took place backstage (behind the scenery). By the late eighteenth century, the expression was used figuratively for any activity that took place out of the public eye."

The Dictionary of Clichés by Christine Anner.



BEAUTIFUL: THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL

The show starred Kate Thiem in the role of Carole King. Her personal dresser, Jennifer Vergotz, assisted her through seventeen costume and four wig changes; the quickest change took place almost at the start of the play when Kate had 35 seconds to go from a long blonde wig and blue dress to a ponytail wig, new shoes, skirt, blouse, and sweater!

Costumes and sets are a critical part of theatre performances and can make or break the impact of a production. What you see on our stage happens behind the scenes at our Costume and Scenic Shop on West 12th Street. Here are a few snapshots.

THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL

Squidward Q. Tentacles' extra set of tap-dancing legs, Karen the Computer's glasses programmed with different images, and the massive chorus of sardines are a few of the costumes that made a huge splash in Bikini Bottom.



MISERY

The set rotated 360°, required a minimum of four stagehands to rotate, and featured four distinct rooms that actors seamlessly walked or rolled through.



CLARENCE, THE ANGEL TREE – A Community Collaboration

We were thrilled to partner with Community Shelter Services to make the holiday brighter for Erie's homeless community. During the run of *It's A Wonderful Life*, we collected and decorated "Clarence," our Angel Tree, with 113 gift cards worth \$1,700 that staff distributed to clients living at one of their facilities.

Open 24/7, 365 days a year, Community Shelter Services helps individuals meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. On-site social workers address behavioral health, housing, and employment needs as they guide clients to achieve renewed lives of dignity and self-determination.

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