

New seats, other upgrades part of Sun Theatre fund drive

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Playhouse kicks off campaign for upgraded seating, new carpet, refinished flooring.

On the heels of a campaign for a new digital projector, screen and other improvements, the Gothenburg Community Playhouse is turning its sights on more comfortable seating.

“Comfort Counts” is a new fund raiser for the Sun Theatre that kicked off Monday.

The playhouse owns the theatre and would like to raise about \$65,000 to replace aging seats, refinish hardwood floors and install new carpet in the lobby and aisles.

Sun Theatre co-manager Matt Weiss said his mother, Betty Clark, remembers when the theatre installed “nifty seats” in the theatre when she was in high school.

She’s now 89 years old so Weiss said the seats would be around 75 years old, noting that they were re-upholstered and painted about 30 years ago.

Taking what Weiss describes as “a leap of faith,” he said the playhouse has ordered and will receive 279 new seats from a Michigan company.

They are wider and more comfortable than the current seating and have cup holders and padded armrests that lift up and down.

Like the current seats, wider seats will be installed in one row and narrow ones in the next row

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so viewing productions and movies will be optimal, he said.

Even though both sizes are two to three inches wider than what's in the theatre now, Weiss said the number of seats will increase by one.

Donors can buy one seat at \$200 or go together with friends and family to buy three or four, a row or even a section.

People can donate the cost of a seat and will be recognized by having their names inscribed on a plaque in the lobby.

Weiss said brass plates with numbers will be attached to each seat so people attending productions can reserve advance tickets.

MATINEE OFFERED

Beginning this Sunday, the Sun Theatre will offer a 2 p.m. matinee in addition to its evening showing on Sundays. "Monster University" will debut for the first of weekly matinees that will continue through December. Then, Sun Theatre co-manager Matt Weiss said playhouse members will assess the popularity of matinees and decide whether or not they'll continue. "It was actually a request from older people who wanted to see movies and don't drive at night," Weiss said.

"We hope to automate our ticketing system so you can see what's available on line," he said.

Weiss said the playhouse has about \$5,000 for the seat fund already from the digital projector campaign. They also plan to apply for a couple of grants.

The community is invited to the theatre during business hours to see and sit in the sample theatre chair.

At the beginning of November, the theatre will close for two weeks for the installation of seats.

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After the old seats are removed, the floor will be refinished at an estimated cost of \$10,000.

Carpet (no estimate was available) will then be laid and track lighting placed on each side of the aisle.

"It's a long-term investment for the future," he said, noting that the Sun Theatre will be 105 years old in 2014.

Weiss said the playhouse is asking the community to again contribute to keep movie and production prices affordable.

Larger theatres often charge \$10 and more for an adult ticket that costs \$5 at the Sun.

Concessions are also more reasonable, Weiss said, noting that some people stop in during movie hours just to buy popcorn or candy.

The theatre is also the backbone of the community for entertainment, he said.

"Kids can hop on their bikes or skateboards and ride to the theatre," Weiss said. "Kids and older folks, and folks in between, don't have to leave town."

Gothenburg has the only theatre, and the only independent, community-operated theatre along the interstate, between Kearney and North Platte.

"We have a huge following from Cozad," he said. "They consider this to be their community theatre."

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He added that movie attendance continues to grow with between 80 to 150 people each of the three nights movies are shown.

Looking ahead to other improvements, Weiss said the latest campaign is probably the last for awhile.

“We’ll need to eventually replace the front doors and furnace and want to get insulation but that’s not major,” he said.

Donations for the “Comfort Counts” campaign can be sent to Comfort Counts, Box 155, Gothenburg, NE, 69138.

For more information, call the Sun Theatre at 537-3235 or visit the theatre’s website at www.gothenburgsun.com.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636