

## Sun contributes to community vitality

Written by Elizabeth Barrett  
Thursday, 19 September 2013 13:47 -

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Theatre grand marshal of Harvest Festival because of improvements.

Ask any Gothenburg Community Playhouse board member about the importance of the Sun Theatre and you'll get plenty of answers.

Right off the bat.

“A community place for all ages.”—Wenda Keiser

“When smaller towns lose their theatre, the town goes downhill.”—Mike Wolff

“It's a good recruiting tool when you bring businesses to town and the employees they bring.”—Logan Ricely and Wenda Keiser.

For the long list of costly improvements playhouse members have put into the theatre, the Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce has selected the Sun as the grand marshal of the annual Harvest Festival this Thursday through Saturday.

Playhouse members will lead Saturday's parade.

How they will do that is a surprise, they said.

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The Sun was selected not only because of improvements that keep it a vital part of the community, it also has a long history of providing movies and live entertainment, Chamber officials said.

The playhouse formed in 1968 and, in 1983, members bought the Sun after a successful fund drive to save the theatre.

Since then, the theatre has operated on a mostly volunteer basis.

In recent years, the playhouse has installed neon lights on a new facade, enlarged and remodeled the concession stand and stage front, installed a digital projection and sound system, a new stage and acoustical wall curtains, a new cinema screen and bought a new corn popper.

Before those upgrades, Wolff noted that the playhouse remodeled dressing rooms and installed new stage lighting and curtains from the old high school before the building was demolished in 2001.

They are now in the middle of a "Comfort Counts" campaign to raise money to buy larger and more comfortable seats.

So far, 183 of 279 seats bought have been paid for through donations.

Playhouse members hope a push this Saturday, during a showing of "Despicable Me 2," will move the goal closer.

For every 25 people attending the 1 p.m. movie, Gothenburg State Bank will donate a seat.

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Installation of the seats is planned around the first part of November.

Wolf said he believes raising enough money to buy a digital projector is the most significant improvement because without it, the theatre would have closed.

The theatre had shown movies on 35-millimeter film but outlets for the films were closing as digital projection of movies became the norm.

Sun co-manager Matt Weiss said the improvements in recent years have brought the Sun to a new level of entertainment.

“Before, we just paid the bills and kept it open,” Weiss said.

Ricely said the community has always been involved.

“People are willing to put time and money into the community and theatre,” he said. “The improvements are good proof of what our community has done.”

Board member Pam Buddenberg said she’s proud the theatre has stayed open through the years.

“We feel proud we’ve been able to make improvements and maintain the theatre for the community,” Buddenberg said.

Keiser described the improvements as a continuation of tradition.

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Wolff noted the significance of the playhouse board that has kept active and vibrant with new people and ideas.

Chamber director Anne Anderson said the theatre shows movies on weekends and hosts other entertainment because of community volunteers who work at the Sun when needed.

“With volunteer help, the Sun can continue to keep their prices family affordable,” Anderson said. “So the next time you walk into the theatre, thank the volunteers who sell the tickets, pop the popcorn and clean up behind you when you leave.”

The playhouse board is made up of Mary Streeter, president; Ricely, vice president; Tiffany Farr, secretary; Wenda Keiser, treasurer; and board members Devin Brundage and Wolff.

Sun co-managers are Weiss and Jill Rubenthaler.

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