

TREASURED MEMORIES

I have often said, with genuine sincerity that I have been blessed and most grateful for the nearly quarter century of cherished experiences and memories as a member of OCP. These are memories that cannot be erased by a few hours of tragic fire. This hopefully temporary absence from our grand old palace has indeed been a roller coaster of tearful emotions.

First, there were tears of sorrow and sadness as we stood in the bitter coldness of that winter night, helplessly watching those raging flames destroy something so precious to us.

Then, eyes were moistened with emotional pride, as my fellow players, the cast and crew, after embracing each other with mutual consolation, so quickly rallied to do what was necessary to produce this outstanding show.

Finally, eyes glistened with joy and gratitude that no one was hurt, and when I ponder how our communities, from far and wide, sharing our grief, have come forth with encouragement and pledges of support.

I have oft been asked how this tragedy will affect the future of the players, my ever-confident response, "We've been in business for much of sixty years—we'll come back as strong as ever."

When it was suggested I write this piece for a special edition of the Marquee, it gave me pause to reflect back a little on our organization before I even became involved. In those early days folks like Dr. Dave Allen, Sue Degerstrom, Pegge Dillingham, the Kindigs, the Knipes, the Jarsons, Linda Keenan, Larry Gibbons, Sally Sue Gale, Anna Pennington, Pete Marutiak, Marty Haubenstricher, Ed Alderman and others were involved. They seemed to put together plays as much for their own amusement as for any audience. They used any venue that was available until they were able to purchase the old church on Corunna Avenue. It was a cozy intimate little building with barely ninety seats. The stage

was so miniscule the performers had to exit and walk outside to reach the opposite side. Yet we have memories of such extravaganzas as *South Pacific* and *Guys and Dolls*.

Alas came a day, however, I suppose not unlike last week, when their little playhouse had to be abandoned as unsafe, I'm sure it was a bitter disappointment, similar to current times.

It was then back to using any available work and storage areas, make shift temporary stages in restaurants or the Country Club and school facilities. The shows did 'go on.' Things weren't always easy or comfortable. Who'll ever forget painting and stenciling our sixteen-foot walls for *Man Who Came to Dinner* outside Tom Manke's shop in blowing wet snow? Still etched are memories of building *Annie* sets in the garage of Nelson House Funeral Home, or the several sets constructed in the abandoned Green Meadows School. There we toiled without heat, electricity, or lavatory facilities. We used a three channel generator; one for the salamander, one for light, permitting use of only one power tool at a



time, Then, there was all that trucking, with guys weighting and holding themselves and contents down in the truck's bed. Hardships at the time indeed, now they, too, are fond amusing memories.

Then came the first of our mega blockbusters *Annie*, performed at the Junior High School. With essentially full houses every night and even literally having to turn away some disappointed patrons, we generated sufficient revenue to liquidate all debts. In addition, it provided seed money for OCP's next most ambitious project yet.

In 1991, with guidance of Mark Van Epps, Judge Joe Linden and many others, supported by a twenty thousand dollar Arts grant from several sources to fund evaluation of the structure, the Capitol Theater was purchased from the Lebowsky family.

Built in 1926 during the hardship years surrounding the great depression, it was the only survivor among the three such theaters of the day. Initially, with its grand theater organ, it was venue for both vaudeville and silent films. With the demise of the live traveling minstrels and the emergence of the 'talkies' the Capitol became, for many years, Owosso's only first run movie house. It has been a haven of memories for so many of our aging citizens. Romantic balcony encounters, youthful pranks, and oh yes, some memorable movies as well.

It is said to be a dying wish of Mr. Lebowsky that his treasured theater be returned to live performance. That came to pass, with the change of name to the Lebowsky Center for Performing Arts. Soon there after came the purchase from Lois Hoddy of the adjacent structure now called the Hoddy Annex. This addition enhanced the use and function of the theater. Thanks to the tight fisted fiscal management of Al, our 'treasurer for life' both of these structures were fully paid off.

Now, didn't all that make us think we had finally arrived as a 'real theatrical company,' the envy of many other groups around us? With these acquisitions, however, came significantly increases responsibilities and the necessary expansion of our mis-

sion statement to include, "...the preservation and restoration of our historic treasure."

What a 'night to remember' – that encore performance of *Steel Magnolias* which the two previous weekends had filled the Country Club for dinner theater. With an audience still clamoring for tickets, a one night stand at the Lebowsky was announced for the following Saturday. The evening was electric as four hundred excited patrons lined the sidewalk waiting to pass under a marquee that hadn't been lit in many years. The reactions and comments were classic—pointing to the far reaches of the balcony—"I got my first kiss up there," or trudging down to the men's 'John' (with paraphrasing) "I haven't relieved my self down here in twenty five years." The play? Oh yes, it was magnificent if I do say so myself.

A few months hence, Deb and Sue directed the first big musical on our grand stage, *Annie Get Your Gun*. It also was a smash and a preview of things to come. With the luxury of more space and consistent technology, commenced an era of even bigger and grander shows. Our sets became larger and more complex, the costuming more exotic and elaborate, and the size and talent of orchestras more impressive.

The aged Capitol had no first floor, accessible lavatory service. One of our earliest priorities was the creation of such. With the generosity of the Memorial medical staff and the medical wives auxiliary and especially Sascon Construction, Hi Temp Electric and Tech Electric and other volunteer labor, the project came about.



To make the Hoddy Annex more functional a large double door was needed and donated in memory of John and Ruth Morovitz.

Under the persistence guidance of Mardie and later Bryan, our various committees and trustees, with the continuing financial support of a faithful community, the 'Old Capitol' was gradually being restored to vintage grandeur and more efficient function.

The building was re-roofed. A hundred thousand dollar State of Michigan grant funded new heating and cooling systems. Other grants made possible restoration of the box seating. With donated materials, member labor, the auditorium was repainted. At times, it was frightening watching Mardi and Joanne tediously adding colors to the thirty-foot proscenium perched atop Sam McLaren's donated lift, while Jeff Wing restored the lovely fern leaves to the walls.

Enormous utility costs in the old structure necessitated last years insulation of the attic. This fall with support from Huska Construction, the stage insulation was completed. Also last fall, the much delayed replacement of aged unsafe stage rigging was finally completed, another cause for celebration.

Upgrading of our technical systems was made possible in good measure by the consistent financial support of the Cook Foundation, Wolverine Sign, and Owosso Graphic Arts, and Ludington Electric. Our efforts have been much aided by the unflagging support of our local news media.

So many hours of service and material have been donated by members of Kiwanis; and who will every forget the recent production 'Home Depot Day.' With enthusiasm and fervor those hundred lovely people swarmed over the building with paint brushes and tools, a stimulus for all of us to work even harder.

With all of these ongoing restorational projects, our faithful old palace never ceased serving our community and us. Amongst so many outstanding performers that graced the Lebowsky stage, it's

hazardous to single any out for special consideration. Certainly, however, coming to mind is our all time attendance leader *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Noteworthy also was *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* for its public controversy and picketers, which drew T V coverage and large audiences. There were the spectacles of plays like *King & I* and *Will Rodgers Follies* and *Crazy for You* with its eight scenes and sixteen rapid changes. The return of *Annie* and *Sound of Music* and the Twenty fifth anniversary repeat of *South Pacific*. Treasured memories also include the spectacular youth programs such as *Grease*, *Footloose* and *Sweet Charity*. Typical high school plays these were not.

Very special among events at the Lebowsky was the millennium Gala and Ball, not soon to be forgotten by anyone who attended. For three hundred dollars per couple, it was truly a 'night to remember.' With flooring erected over the seats at stage level, the theater was never more elegantly decorated. A twenty-piece orchestra provided music for dance, an ambiance at the black tie affair. An especially fine meal with champagne was served, an historical review of the century was projected and the evening was concluded in exciting typical New Year's fashion.

Consistent with our pledge to share the theater, countless other events were sponsored by a host of other organizations including school productions, service club fundraisers, civic and other charities. There were weddings, professional Shakespeare, Judge Fitzgerald's inauguration, and an actual circus with ponies and chimps. There were wres-





ting matches, power lifters and a haunted house. And, of course, there were concerts of symphony and gospel, barbershop and ROCK.

These lists are woefully incomplete, but give a hint of what the Lebowsky has meant to so many. All of these wonderful experiences leave a legacy of treasured memories to sustain and encourage us.

Our recent horrendous loss still has us in a state of lingering shock and dismay, but it shall pass. Shattered plans can be replanned. The same drive, determination and talent that over these decades have brought respect and appreciation to OCP were not destroyed by conflagration. We will emerge with renewed commitment to save what is salvageable and rebuild what is rebuild able. *“The shows must go on.”*

Sincerely,

John E. Morovitz, President, OCP

Our shows: From way back when...

My Fair Lady • For Love or Money • The Tender Trap • Blithe Spirit • South Pacific • A Streetcar Named Desire • The Pajama Game • Laura • Barefoot in the Park • The Odd Couple • Gypsy • Bus Stop • Mary, Mary • Guys and Dolls • A Shot in the Dark • Ten Little Indians • How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying • Arsenic and Old Lace • Never Too Late • Little Mary Sunshine • Claudia • Come Blow Your Horn • Carnival • The Beanstalk & Jack • Picnic • Rapunzel • Girls in 509 • Carousel • Wait Until Dark • Harvey • Of Thee I Sing • I Never Sang For My Father • Play it Again Jam • The Spirit of '76 (variety show) • Forty Carats • Damn Yankees • Sleuth • The Night of January 16th • A Lion in Winter • The Fantastics • Plaza Suite • A Company of Wayward Saints • A Funny Thing Happened on The Way To the Forum • 6 Rms. Rv. Vu • The Miracle Worker • The Mousetrap • The Madwoman of Chaillot • Mame • State of the Union • California Suite • The Music Man • Nightwatch • September Review • Charley's Aunt • The King and I • Inherit the Wind • Butterflies are Free • South Pacific • Cat on a Hot Tin Roof • On Golden Pond • A Christmas Carol • Last of the Red Hot Lovers • Hello Dolly • Deathtrap • Annie • Having a Wonderful Time, Wish You Were Her • The Man Who Came to Dinner • Oklahoma • Arsenic & Old Lace • Angel Street • The Sound of Music • Barefoot in the Park • Hound of the Baskervilles • Hans Christian Andersen • You Can't Take It With You • A Thousand Clowns • Brigadoon • Dial "M" for Murder • The Seven Year Itch • My Fair Lady • Catch Me If You Can • Steel Magnolias • Annie Get Your Gun • Anatomy of a Murder • Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii • Holiday at Lebowsky (1991–2002) • Anything Goes • Crimes of the Heart • Owosso Swing Band (1993–2003) • Nunsense • An Act of The Imagination • Best Little Whorehouse in Texas • Lend Me a Tenor • Little Shop of Horrors • Effect of Gamma Rays On Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds • Fiddler on the Roof • The Rainmaker • Rapunzel at the Castle • The Front Page • The 1940's Radio Hour • The Wizard of Oz • Back to Broadway (1994–2003) • The Boys Next Door • Singles File • Just the Two of Us • A Few Good Men • The Will Rodgers Follies • The Father of the Bride • Charlotte's Web • Choices • Love Letters • Dracula • The Fantasticks • Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat • I Hate Hamlet • Wind in the Willows • The Odd Couple (female version) • Oliver! • Joseph...Dreamcoat (reprise) • Postmortem • Grease! • One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest • Moby Dick! The Musical • West Side Story • Harvey • The Brook in the King's Garden • Moon Over Buffalo • Forever Plaid • The Millenium Party • Big! The Musical • Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean • Just So Stories • Just The Two of Us • The Second Time Around • Heidi • The Music Man • 12 Angry Jurors • Aladdin MacFaddin • Cabin Fever • All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten • Crazy For You • A Bad Year For Tomatoes • Fame • The Pajama Game • Miracle on 34th Street • B2B9: Smokey Joe's Cafe • Annie (reprise) • Noises Off • Little Shop of Horrors (reprise) • The Crucible • Godspel • B2B10: Tapestry • A Chorus Line • Escanaba In Da Moonlight • Footloose • A Midsummer Night's Dream • You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown • The King and I (reprise) • Steel Magnolias (reprise) • B2B11: Motown's Got A Hold On Me • Sweet Charity • To Kill A Mockingbird • Guys and Dolls • Yes Virginia, There Is A Santa Claus • The Sound of Music (reprise) • Brighton Beach Memoirs • Romeo and Juliet • A Funny Thing Happened on The Way To the Forum (reprise) • Beauty and The Beast **...to Now!**

Nuts & Bolts: An Executive Report

by Bryan Dryer

By 5 o'clock that Wednesday morning, firefighters had stopped battling the blaze at the Lebowsky Center, and were replaced by news crews from around mid-Michigan who taped their footage, told their stories, and left to edit for a 6 o'clock broadcast. Since they first aired that story on February 14th, a lot has happened for the Owosso Community Players—both as actors and artists, and as owners and operators of a landmark theater.

The most visible press has focused on the musical *Beauty and The Beast*—and rightly so. What the cast and crew of that show have done in ten days is a true miracle, continuing their show with renewed passion and dedication and inspiring a whole city with their spirit and drive. I'm proud to be a part of their theatre family.

I know that there are some very passionate feelings tied up in the theatre, and especially in the recent events that affected it. Now—more than ever—it is absolutely necessary that we all come together to work for the best interests of the organization. One of the biggest obstacles to this is 'misinformation' - rumors, incomplete facts, and just plain lies. Please consider the following, and know that we're in this together. Thank you all for moving us forward.

I've heard that the fire is 'suspicious.' Does that mean that the fire was arson?

According to Sgt. Jaskulka of the Michigan State Police, all fires of this magnitude are considered 'suspicious.' To protect the integrity of the scene. With so much at stake, the investigators want every opportunity to discover the facts. That why no one's allowed in the building until they've finished.

When can we get in the building?

Not for a while. Once the investigation is completed, structural engineer and the city building inspector (John Archer) will decide what parts of the theater are still safe, and the unsafe parts will be removed. Then, and only then, can an organized effort by OCP be made to being removing salvageable property. As it is still private property, access to the building must be approved by the OCP board.

Will OCP rebuild the Lebowsky Center on the original site?

This can't be determined until after consultation with architects, engineers, and insurance adjusters. For now, OCP exploring all opportunities for a permanent home to showcase live theatre in Owosso.

What if it WAS arson? Does that affect OCP's insurance?

The clause in OCP's policy that addresses "destruction by a criminal act" only relates to the insured parties—OCP Boards and Committees. Arson would only void (cancel) the claim if the insured parties intentionally set the fire to collect the insurance money. Which they didn't.

What can I do to help?

You can volunteer on the OCP website: owossoplayers.com Or you can contact me at the Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce office: 215 N. Water Street, Owosso (989) 723-5149. email:

owossoplayers@yahoo.com

If you want to make a pledge or donation, please send it to:

Owosso Community Players
POB 606
Owosso MI 48867-0606



photo by Michael Jordan



photo by Michael Jordan

Public Safety Branch

Agency: Owosso Fire Dept.
Representative:
 Chief Mike Bradley
 Entered the building on Wednesday to begin C&O investigation; coordinating with State Police C&O investigation.

Agency: Owosso Police Dept.
Representative:
 Detective Sgt. Kurt Moffit
 Interviewed cast, crew, and board members as to events leading up to the fire.

Agency: Michigan State Police, Fire Investigation Unit
Representative:
 Special Sgt. Leonard Jaskulka
 Entered the building on Wednesday to begin C&O investigation; conducted limited interview with Executive Director.

Agency: U.S. Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms Investigation Unit
Representative:
 Special Agent TBA
 Will look for any evidence to indicate any criminal acts meant to target a public venue (like the Lebowsky Center.)

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The investigation into last week's fire at the Lebowsky Center is a joint effort involving several agencies and inspectors. The investigation is known as a "C&O" or "Cause and Origin" investigation. It is a carefully coordinated effort that will take diligence and time to complete properly. As such, progress will be slow but steady. Listed below is the information available to date.

At this time, nothing in the building will be released until the joint investigation is complete.
 If you had any personal items in the theater, please provide OCP with a detailed listing of these items, along with their approximate replacement value. These lists can be mailed to:

**OCP
 POB 606
 Owosso MI 48867-0606** (or)
 emailed to:
owossoplayers@yahoo.com

The insurance policy on the building will not cover the replacement of the facility; rather, it's designed to cover:

1. Any necessary clean-up and demolition on the site.
2. Replacement of technical elements in the theater.
3. Minimum two years of OCP's total operating budget.
4. Expenses for relocation and establishment of new office.

Any money spent on behalf of the organization (for the current production or by committees) MUST be documented and receipts kept. These expenses may be reimbursed to OCP by the insurance policy. But spend wisely—there are limits.

The investigation will most likely last through March.

Insurance Branch

Agency: Chubb Insurance (policy provider)
Representative:
 Nicole, Claims Specialist
 Coordinating all insurance personnel involved with claim; makes final determination on claim payment amount.

Agency: Butler & Associates (Independent Claims Adjuster)
Representative:
 Bill Butler, Owner
 Collecting all information from OCP regarding claims related to the fire damage.

Agency: Donan Engineering (Fire Investigation Consultants)
Representative:
 Dave Row, Senior Investigator
 Conducting C&O investigation for insurance company; consulting on safety of building.

Agency: Donan Engineering (subcontracted)
Representative:
 John Skidmore, Structural Engineer
 Consulting on safety of building and possible salvage options.