

November 25, 2020

Leaving 2020 Behind, and Looking Forward to a Bright New Year!

Dear NCCA Family;

As we begin the holiday season, we are reminded of what really matters – our loved ones, our health, and our well-being. 2020 has been one of the most challenging years I can personally recall, and with that, I am eager to leave it behind and move onto what I hope will be a bright new year for myself, for you, and for NCCA at Jean’s Playhouse.

This time of year we would typically be planning our Annual Meeting and Launch Party where we would all get together, celebrate, and partake in what is usually the best potluck dinner around (thanks to all of you!). Unfortunately, we cannot do that safely at this time, but we still wanted to reach out and share with you the successes and challenges of 2020. Therefore, Lyn has provided you a write-up of the financial scene in the box to the right, while I will give you an update on what we were able to accomplish during the pandemic and where that leaves us as we look forward to 2021.



As many of you know, 2020 was the start of a major change for us. Having gotten rid of our mortgage burden at the end of 2019, Jean’s Playhouse closed down for the winter months in order to reduce overhead costs and provide the staff with much needed time to prepare for the summer and fall. As the famous saying goes, “it’s all in the timing,” and these changes could not have come at a better time to help us weather the storm of COVID-19. I cannot stress enough how important it was that our amazing Board of Trustees supported our suggestion to change the model and worked so hard to get rid of the looming mortgage.



I remember the weekend of March 7th – we were at the New England Theatre Conference Auditions in Massachusetts, auditioning over 700 young actors to cast our 2020 summer season. I drove home on Monday, March 9th, and by Friday, March 13th, states were calling for “shelter in place,” baseball spring training

games were canceled, Disney World closed, and the pandemic had officially begun. Just four days earlier, we were shaking hands with actors and colleagues, no one was wearing a mask, and everyone was laughing and chatting without a care in the world.

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When our 2020 fiscal year began last November, we were in the process of taking substantial strides forward with the help of the Bruce Alexander Foundation, whose sizeable investment in our future relieved the mortgage burden on NCCA.

That, coupled with solid artistic planning and the marketability of what we knew would be an amazing producing summer, had us looking forward to what we planned to be the most successful season in years.

But then COVID-19 happened. And kept happening. Each new week brought not only new waves of the pandemic, but shifting policies and procedures designed to keep us all as safe as possible. At first, postponing, and then decisively canceling our spring events and promotional activities, then our summer. And while we were able to return some weekly entertainment to the stage in August, natural reluctance to gather kept audiences and ticket sales at far less than even our most conservative estimates.

A brief financial summary offers this ...

Donations	\$ 63,230
Ticket Sales	\$ 16,633
Sponsor & Advertising Income	\$ 21,800
Fundraising Events	\$ 11,973
Misc. Income	\$ 12,645
Total Income	\$ 126,281

Programming/Staff Expenses	\$ 113,211
Fundraising Expenses	\$ 2,415
Building/Business Expenses	\$ 51,829
Total Expenses	\$ 167,455

Net Effect/Loss due to COVID **[- \$41,174]**

However ...

Paycheck Protection Program allocation through 10/31	\$ 58,144
Other CARES Act funding	\$ 7,500
	\$ 3,000

It became clear by May that we were not going to be able to produce our highly anticipated summer season, but lucky for us, the building was shut down and expenses at a minimum. So we remained shut down until August, when we tried our hand at presenting a few comedians and musicians. These events allowed us to create a system of presenting that kept our staff, volunteers, and patrons safe. However, it quickly became clear to us (as well as all of our colleagues throughout NH and beyond) that not enough people were comfortable seeing a live show at that time to cover the costs associated with it. This was important for us to know, and it informed our decision to keep programming extremely limited throughout the remainder of 2020.



Luckily, our “Just the Ticket” Fundraiser helped enormously over the summer, as patrons like you donated the average cost of a seat. As a thank you to those donors, we created a Virtual Alumni Cabaret Show. Working on this in September was a beautiful reminder that we – the

North Country Center for the Arts at Jean’s Playhouse – make a difference in the lives of our young performers. I caught up with many actors from 2019, 2018, and beyond. One of them got engaged to the Stage Manager he met here at NCCA! One of them was slated to make his Broadway debut in a show he learned about from his fellow castmate during one of our rehearsals. Former Artistic Director Kim Barber spoke to me at length about her amazing years with us. We make a difference, and that was an important reminder after such a difficult year and a canceled summer. We make a difference.



While we were not able to accomplish much in the way of performing over the summer and fall, we were able to do some important upgrades and major cleaning! Our backyard is spotless, our costume and scenic storage has been cleaned out and reorganized, the stage is

repainted, the website restructured, our ticket software upgraded, and many more wonderful changes that simply required time and energy – something we never seem to have enough of in a “normal” year. We did our best to find the silver linings and make improvements that will make future years better than ever for our audience and our staff.

We don’t exactly know what’s going to happen in 2021. We have made it over the financial hurdle of 2020 thanks to your support and the help of state and federal aid. That said, 2021 will be the next challenge and your support will be more important than ever. As of right now, we do plan to produce a summer season, however, what that season will be is still unknown. Will restrictions on attendance be lifted? Will people feel safer and have more confidence to come see a live show? Can we safely bring out-of-town actors and production staff to Lincoln? If so, how many can we safely accommodate? These are all questions we have to ask ourselves as we move through the winter months. But we promise you this: we *will* make it through and we *will* once again produce live theatre that makes you laugh, cry, and jump up with applause! As always, thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to continuing to serve you and our North Country community.

– Joel Mercier, *Producing Artistic Director*

Including CARES Act funding, the fiscal close of the year was closer to \$27,470 as we started the new fiscal year on November 1. The Paycheck Protection Program funds continue through November and into the first few weeks of December.

We were also early-on recipients of a low-interest EIDL loan of \$149,900 which we have set aside in savings and will not begin accruing loan interest until mid-2021.

Meanwhile, we continue to plan as far ahead as possible, looking for new grant opportunities as well as alternative methods of fundraising in the future. Until we all feel comfortable gathering, live events, dinners, and other parties will not be part of our strategy for now – but we will continue to seek and pursue new ideas.

... such as NH Gives, which was ‘new’ to us in 2020 and we were excited to participate! With the possibility of matching dollars and a lot of enthusiasm, many of you stepped up to contribute through the NH Gives program on June 9. While it was received / considered a charitable gift through the program itself, we of course want to thank this list of generous supporters:

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