

ARTSCENE HOOGLAND CENTER FOR THE ARTS - 20TH ANNIVERSARY

This year, the Hoogland Center for the Arts is celebrating 20 years as a thriving performing arts center that has become a cultural cornerstone of the city of Springfield. The building first opened to the general public on the night of December 31, 2003. Since that notable New Year's Eve celebration two decades ago, local artists, musicians, performers, and dancers have filled downtown Springfield with excitement and entertainment, making the Hoogland the place where "the arts come alive" in central Illinois.

Home to multiple arts and civic organizations, the Hoogland has hosted hundreds of theatrical performances, concerts, rehearsals, meetings, debates and other important events over the years, inspiring creativity and providing entertainment for the residents of Central Illinois. Since its grand opening, the Hoogland has become more than just a venue for performances; it has evolved into a community gathering place—a space where people come together to celebrate the arts, connect with one another, and contribute to the vibrancy of Springfield.

After weathering a few storms (and a pandemic), the Hoogland continues to beat the odds by remaining a vital and healthy member of the established arts community. Here is a timeline of some of the important dates and milestones in the Hoogland's inspiring history.

1909 — The building opened as the home to the International Order of Masons.

1960 — The Masonic Order experienced substantial growth and required more space. A major addition, designed by architect Bill Turley, brought the facility to 80,000 square feet. The building facade was also modernized.

1988 — Kay Feurer, Executive Director of the Springfield Area Arts Council, recognized the potential of the Masonic Temple. A feasibility study was conducted on the facility's use. At the time, making this vision a reality seemed unattainable.

1999 — Mayor Karen Hasara formed a group to envision the direction of the city in the next 20 years. With direct input from citizens, the Springfield Strategy 2020 committee placed a home for the arts in downtown Springfield at the top of its list.



A montage of many of the different groups that call the Hoogland home!

2001 — The International Order of Masons decided their needs no longer justified owning such a large facility and put the building up for sale. Through a generous gift by Carolyn Oxtoby and Stephen Bartholf, the Masonic Temple was purchased and the not-for-profit organization Springfield Arts Center, Inc. began the quest to transform the facility into the Center for the Arts. The Illinois Arts Council provided funding for architectural planning and consultation. According to founding board member Dennis Bringuet, "We saw the need to fill the soon to be empty building. We also thought bringing together over a dozen existing arts organizations would create a synergy that would be helpful to everyone!"

2002 — Recognizing the immense public benefit this project held for the people of Springfield, the State of Illinois awarded a grant of \$5.5 million to begin the renovation.

January/February 2003 — Renovations began on the building. The Center's original board members included Judge Tom Appleton, Grace Luttrell Nanavati, Dennis Bringuet, Tom Frost, Norm Sims, Judy Stephens, Kathy Hoffmann, Carolyn Oxtoby, Judy Bartholf, and Roderick Nunn. Jones/Blythe construction was the general contractor and Graham & Hyde were the architects.

December 17, 2003 — Mayor Tim Davlin was joined by former mayors Karen Hasara, Ossie Langfelder, and Mike Houston at the ribbon cutting ceremony.

December 31, 2003 — The newly renovated Center for the Arts officially opened its doors to a packed house for the Springfield Area Arts Council's First Night Springfield event. The first group of resident organizations included David Cain – U-Media, Springfield Ballet Company, Springfield Theatre Centre, Springfield Muni Opera, Sangamon Watercolor Society,

Springfield Area Arts Council, Prairie Art Alliance, Sangamon Valley Youth Symphony and Community Orchestra, Sound Celebration Chorus, Land of Lincoln Chorus, Springfield International Folk Dancers, Old Capitol Art Fair, Arena Food Service, Dreaming in Colour, St. Andrews Society, and WSEC-TV.

April 21, 2004 — The Hoogland name was added to the building through a major contribution made by Charles and Kathleen Hoogland. “As a community-minded family, we want the area to benefit from a first-class arts facility,” said Mr. Hoogland at the time. “Supporting the Center for the Arts is one way that we can support the community that has supported us.”

May 1, 2004 – The “Beyond our Dream Gala” celebrated the opening of the Center with a concert featuring Broadway star, and former Central Illinois resident, Peter Samuel performing selections from Les Misérables with a cast of 100 local performers. The resident organizations also provided entertainment throughout the building that evening.

September, 2004 – The Springfield Theatre Centre presented a production of the Stephen Sondheim/James Lapine musical Sunday in the Park with George as their inaugural production at the Center.



A postcard of the original Masonic Temple, which was built in 1909.



Dinners • Classes • Yearly Wine and Food trips
Weekly Saturday Tastings • Wine by the glass on Friday Nights



2625 Chatham Road • Springfield, IL 62704 • 217-698-1112
springfield@thecorkscrew.com www.thecorkscrew.com

September/October, 2006 – The Hoogland, in conjunction with Over The Moon Productions, presented a spectacular production of CATS, showcasing the capabilities of the arts center and the talent of local performers. This was the first musical produced by the Hoogland.

April, 2007 – The Hoogland Center for the Arts was strictly a landlord to other arts groups when the building first opened, but starting in 2007, the Center started presenting its own performance series as a way to generate additional income. Many national performers have graced the Hoogland

stage over the years, including the Avett Brothers, Second City Touring Company, Larry Gatlin, Ronny Cox, John Conlee, Rex Smith, Eddie Mekka, Riders in the Sky, Gallagher, to name a few. Broadway stars, including Lee Roy Reams, Ken Page, Liz Callaway, Andrea McArdle, Donna McKechnie, Faith Prince, and Alton Fitzgerald White have performed at Hoogland gala events.

October 2011 – A campaign was launched to pay off the remaining mortgage balance of \$2.5 million. The monthly payments of nearly \$27,000 were a huge financial burden to the

The Hoogland today. A new electronic message board was added to the marquee in late 2023.



The 1960 addition to the Masonic Temple was designed by architect Bill Turley.



Original Building Manager Loren Barnes, original board president Judge Tom Appleton, and general contractor John Blythe in the early days of the Hoogland transformation.



The renovation of the main theatre (now known as the LRS Theatre) was a massive undertaking back in 2003.



Mayor Tim Davlin was joined by former mayors Karen Hasara, Ossie Langfelder, and Mike Houston at the official ribbon cutting on December 17, 2003.

Hoogland Center, and the organization was faced with potentially closing the doors at the beginning of 2012 if nothing was done. An anonymous donor graciously donated \$1.2 million to the campaign, and the remaining \$1.3 million was raised through the generosity of hundreds of supporters. By December 31, 2011, the goal of \$2.5

million in donations and pledges was reached.

September, 2012 – The Hoogland Center started its own education program with the goal of offering theatre classes to children from first to twelfth grades, helping them develop a love and appreciation for the per-

forming arts. The children and teens participate in weekly classes and present four different shows each year. The program started with 50 students, and now averages over 200 students each year.

December 17, 2015 — The final mortgage payment was made to Illinois National Bank, exactly 12 years after the original ribbon cutting ceremony. The mortgage was shredded at a recognition celebration to commemorate that important day.

February 10, 2016 — A standing-room-only crowd filled Theatre 3 (now known as the Peggy Ryder Theatre) to hear President Barack Obama speak to his local supporters. His visit to the Hoogland made national news.

March, 2020 — Like the rest of the world, the Hoogland Center for the Arts was deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, they shut our doors when the State of Illinois issued a “stay-at-home” mandate. Finally, by July of 2021, the Center started presenting performances for the public once again. During this period, much needed improvements to the HVAC and lighting systems were made.

December 31, 2023 — The Hoogland Center for the Arts celebrated its 20th Anniversary at First Night Springfield. Many new improvements were highlighted at this event, including new electronic message boards on the marquee and roof, and automatic door openers on all restroom doors, making access easier for all guests. Over 30,000 tickets were sold for shows in 2023, finally returning to pre-pandemic levels.

The future is bright for the Hoogland Center for the Arts, and the dream that started so long ago has flourished with the support of the community and generous benefactors. According to former Mayor Mike Houston, “There is no organization that has had more cultural impact on Mr. Lincoln’s Hometown and Central Illinois than the Hoogland Center for the Arts.”

Original board member Grace Luttrell Nanavati is proud that the Hoogland has persevered and reached its 20th Anniversary stronger than ever. “The Center is perfect, meeting the mission and goals we set back in 1999. We are an arts organization, so there will always be a struggle, but the growth, interdisciplinary performances, youth activities, and performance and visual

arts that comprise the building are a breath of fresh air to us all.”

For more information about upcoming events at the Hoogland, please go to their website at hcfta.org

By Gus Gordon

Gordon's personal involvement with the Hoogland began in April of 2004, when he presented a production of Forever Plaid on the LRS Stage. Next, he started working part-time at the Center as the Artistic Director in 2007, producing shows that would help increase revenue. In 2012, Gus came to Hoogland full-time, and in 2013, he became the organization's Executive Director.



Charles and Kathleen Hoogland donated over \$1,000,000 to the organization, thus receiving naming rights to the building.



Original Board Member Grace Luttrell Nanavati posed with her husband PJ and Laverne and Shirley star Eddie Mekka at the 2008 Gala production of *Guys and Dolls in Concert*.



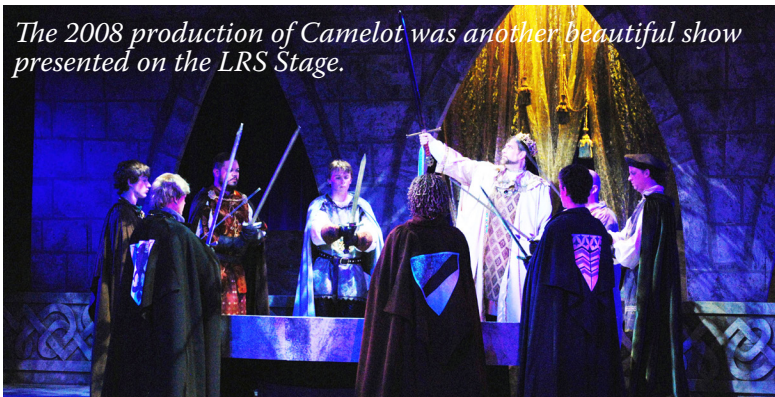
Sunday in the Park with George directed by Leigh Steiner. This was the Springfield Theatre Centre's first production at the Hoogland in 2004.



The 2006 production of *Cats* featured spectacular sets and costumes by Paul Presney, Jr. and Dave Shaw.



Former teen heartthrob Rex Smith headlined a concert version of *The Pirates of Penzance* in 2007.



The 2008 production of Camelot was another beautiful show presented on the LRS Stage.



The Bringuet Family at the 2010 Hoogland Gala (with Julie Ratz and Gina Russell). Ace Sign Company has played an important role in the Hoogland's history.



The Hoogland's 2012 production of Ain't Misbehavin'.



Judge Tom Appleton shredded the old mortgage papers when the building was finally paid off in 2015.



President Obama spoke to a packed house of his supporters at the Hoogland in 2016. His staff personally picked the Hoogland as the location of one of his last visits to Springfield as President.



New air handlers were installed during the pandemic due to a generous gift from the AA Harvey Foundation.



Broadway star Andrea McArdle with Hoogland Education students in 2018.



Marianne Stremsterfer and Velma Lawson both serve as ushers at the Hoogland. According to Lawson, "Ushering gives me something fun to do on Saturday night!"