

Profiles:**REHAB/RESTORATION/RENOVATION****Renovating the arts****THIRTEEN MILLION PROJECT BRINGS HISTORIC THEATER INTO THE 21ST CENTURY****BY BOB CRAIG**

A public/private partnership is returning the 113-year old Auditorium Theatre to its original glory with some behind the scenes doses of modernity.

In 2000, the State of Illinois' Department of Commerce and Community Affairs awarded \$13 million to the Auditorium Theatre Council for the continuing renovation of the theatre. The first phase of that rehab and restoration project was started that year and completed in summer 2001. Phase two, that began this month and is expected to be completed in time for the Oct. 16 opening of the Joffrey Ballet's 2002 fall season, is the most ambitious project to date.

"You have a project that's spanning two years in order to get everything done," says Krisitine Westerberg, project manager for the project's development manager Newcastle Limited LLC. "There are some very visible signs of the renovation and then there are things most people will never see."

Phase one of the restoration dealt mostly with projects audience members can appreciate. There was extensive renovation of original painting, mosaics and murals, lobby improvements and a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

The work involved 15 artisan painters with specialized expertise in renovation painting in numerous disciplines, stenciling, gilding, glazing and plastering. The work included the renovation and preservation of Charles Holloway's mural, "Symphony of Nature," that spans the proscenium arch of the stage and returning the ceiling arches and fascia panels to original colors. The reducer curtain on the stage was also returned to its original color scheme.

"That to me is one of the most visible changes," says Michael Haney, president of Newcastle Limited. "When you walked in here it used to be just a big wall of gold. Now it's subtle and you can see the detail really pops out with the darker color."

Phase two work will not be as readily apparent to the audience. It includes major projects including, the demolition of the existing stage, construction of a new stage and trap area, construction of a new orchestra pit with all associated lift equipment including movable seats and storage areas, selective demolition beneath the stage and seating areas, installation of basic mechanical, plumbing and electrical infrastructure beneath the stage and seating areas to allow for future expansion, installation of new electric supply, improvements to existing dressing rooms, creation of new wardrobe and laundry rooms and renovation of the painting of the top of the historic stage reducer curtain.

"There's a lot of demolition underneath the seating area that took place last summer just to get ready for this next phase," says Westerberg. "Relocation of conduits and wiring, things that haven't been used for years, things the contractor would run into and say what is this thing doing here, decades things have been down there. That will allow us to create much more useable space. Basically we're just emptying out that existing area and putting in a new basement slab to make sure the concrete is

stable and very level and then all new mechanicals, electric, air conditioning, plumbing all of that will go in as well."

The Auditorium Theatre, designed by Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, is part of the larger, multi-use Auditorium Building that is home to Roosevelt University. Completed in 1889 it was acquired by the city during the Great Depression because

**Michael Haney**

of massive unpaid property taxes and was only saved from the wrecking ball because of the added expense of demolition.

The theatre portion of the building was closed for 25 years, reopening in 1967. Since then private fund-raising efforts had maintained the theatre, but major improvements were needed. Adding life and returning the aesthetic beauty to the theatre was only possible through the public/private partnership and the assistance from DCCA.

"It allowed the project to move forward," says Haney. "It was really critical to preserving the historic aspects of the property while finding a balance to achieve what you need to go forward into the future and actually be an operating theatre."

Newcastle Limited focuses on transforming real estate, doing development management and managing complex projects for a variety of clients, in both the non-profit and institutions clients.

"We were attracted to the opportunity because of its complexity and because it's

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Artisan painters and renovation experts restored the interior of the Auditorium Theatre to its original grandeur public/private partnership rehab of the historic theatre.

not often that you have the chance to make an impact that's going to be here for posterity and a lot of people are going to be effected by," says Haney. "We felt it was an important project and were very pleased to be selected by the Auditorium Theatre Council who was seeking to find a development manager to oversee the project. We worked to refine the program, schedule the work and have been overseeing it over that time."

Because of the almost continuous piecemeal renovations of the theatre and building over the years there was little continuity to the projects and equipment varied widely. This is being rectified as much as possible with the current work.

"There are components of this theatre that have been working since 1920 and there are things that have only been working since 1940 and things that have only been working since the 1960s — so there is this whole array of components that have

been modernized at different times — which really creates problems from an operational standpoint," Westerberg says.

The theatre only shut down during the summer months during the current renovation and was operating during portions of the work.

Rich Regan, theatre manager for the Auditorium Theatre Council, says the rewards were worth the headaches.

"It was challenging, but the light at the end of the tunnel was how I convinced the guys that it was worth it," he says. "I'm not going to say it was a piece of cake, but the carrot at the end of the stick is this great facility."

How will the theatre compare to its former self when the work is done?

"I don't know if I can draw a clean parallel for you," says Regan. "I'm thinking that this was a '68 Chevelle convertible with a big block, now it's a little sleeker. Now it's more like a new 2002 Thunderbird. They're still two fantastic vehicles."

