



# Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation

## Green Room Newsletter

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## Foundation Reaches Major Goal

In less than a year, saving the Colonial Fox Theatre from continuing to sit vacant or being destroyed has gone from a simple idea to becoming even more of a reality.

The Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation (CFTF), with its 400 for \$40K fundraising campaign, announced on November 30, that it had reached its goal to purchase the building from Marsha Besse, thus making it the property of the CFTF.

"The joy in working on this project has been the community support," said Vonnie Corsini, CFTF president, during the announcement outside of the theatre on Nov. 30. "Pittsburg wants a revived Colonial Fox Theatre and the Act 1 goal of the CFTF has been to save the theatre from destruction and secure ownership of the building on behalf of the community. As of today, we can say that we have met that goal."

Four hundred and sixty-seven people, groups, and organizations donated \$100 each to raise the amount required to purchase the building, which houses the Colonial Fox Theatre.

"We launched the 400 for \$40K campaign to demonstrate the broad-based

### Letter from Marsha Besse:

I am so proud of you and your group for all you have accomplished so far. I applaud each and every one of you!

Although I won't be there today, I will be with you in spirit. Have a marvelous day and celebrate for me too.

The theatre has quite a spirit, which has sustained her through the soon-to-be 88 years. She has endured while more than 20 other theatres crumbled. She was loved by my family all those years and we endured with her too. We love her still.

I know she is in good hands, I'm sure my father and grandfather would have approved of all the wonderful things you have in store for her.

My deepest admiration and appreciation,  
Marsha Besse



Sherry Strecker receives a check on behalf of Marsha Besse from CFTF President Vonnie Corsini for the purchase of the Colonial Fox Theatre.

community support for the Colonial Fox Theatre project," Vonnie said. "Response has been overwhelming and we have exceeded our goal."

As Marsha Besse was unable to attend the event, Sherry Strecker accepted the check on behalf of the Besse family in final payment for the building with a simple, "Thank you."

The CFTF has already selected the architectural firm of William Morris Associates, Augusta, Kansas, to help with the restoration. The next step for the CFTF is to conduct a feasibility study to determine the wishes of the community regarding the programming of the theatre.

The Participating Purchasers of the Colonial Fox Theatre will be honored by a plaque bearing their names, which will be prominently displayed inside the theatre once restoration is finished.

## A note from:

### Vonnie Corsini, Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation President

Pat Jones (CFTF Vice President and Public Relations Chair) and I attended the **Curtains Up! Workshop: Restoring Historic Theatres and Revitalizing our Communities**, in Milwaukee, this November.

We benefited from three information-filled days absorbing as much as we could from the experience of professional panel members from across this country and Canada. The workshop was presented by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, prepared by the League of Historic American Theatres, and entirely underwritten by the Jeffris Family Foundation.

When I say entirely underwritten, that not only included the unparalleled quality of the facilities and presentation materials, but also the scholarships, which allowed theatre operators, owners, and trustees to attend. Fortunately, the Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation was a recipient of the Jeffris Family Foundation's generosity.

Over 20 historic theatres were represented at the workshop and we benefited from the numerous opportunities to compare the challenges of the Colonial Fox Theatre to those of other theatre representatives. We also brainstormed options for dealing with challenges in one-to-one conversations with workshop presenters and other attendees.

We gathered great insight as to how complicated these projects are and how many opportunities they bring to serve the community. There



are many more opportunities than you could ever imagine relating to how rehabilitated historic buildings have served to revitalize communities.

This workshop came at the perfect time for the CFTF. We received good advice on the next step in terms of assuring that we consult and include as many people as possible in the process of developing the programs and ideas regarding how this historic building can meet our community needs.

To this end, we will be conducting a feasibility study during the next several weeks, the results of which will be our guide to the integration of our communities economic, cultural, and social resources as they affect the Colonial Fox Theatre. We will be seeking answers to several questions including: What programs and events does the community wish to see and support? How can the theatre best serve those wishes? How will we grow? The lesson from this workshop is that the answers to these questions are far too important for us to proceed hastily.

We have outstanding people serving as Trustees of the Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation and we have identified a qualified preservation architect. Our responsibility now is to proceed strategically, methodically, and deliberately to identify the best way for the community to benefit from this beautiful Pittsburg landmark.

## Architect Selected for Colonial Fox Project

The Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation has selected an architect for the theatre project.

William Morris Associates, of Augusta, Kansas was founded in 1979 by William Morris who has worked on projects such as the Augusta Public Library, the Carrie Nation House restoration, and the interior restoration of the Augusta Historic Theatre, among many others.



William Morris

William Morris was also one of the original operators of the 550-seat historic Augusta Theatre. The State Historic Preservation Office recommended Mr. Morris to the CFTF. "We have done a lot

of different project types of historic preservation," Morris said. He will also help the CFTF with various funding and grant processes.

Mr. Morris is just finishing up the restoration of the Augusta Theatre. A few months ago, Morris completed the restoration of the mezzanine and lobby of the Booth Theatre in Independence, Kansas. His firm is currently working in Smith Center, Kansas on the restoration of an 1890's bank building.

"This [the Colonial Fox Theatre] is going to be an extremely fun project," Morris said. "A challenge, no doubt about it, there are just so many interesting things we have to deal with. We are ready to get started and are looking forward to it."

The Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation is also looking forward to this challenge.

## Colonial Fox Theatre Now Listed as a Most Endangered Historic Property in Kansas

On November 1, the Kansas Preservation Alliance (KPA) revealed their 2008 Most Endangered Historic Properties in the state of Kansas. This list includes the Colonial Fox Theatre in Pittsburg.

In addition to the honor

of being included on the Most Endangered list, Pat Jones, Public Relations Chair, notes that the CFTF will now have "increased visibility and name recognition on a state level." Increased visibility will allow the CFTF to get on

the radar of those groups and foundations who do not accept unsolicited requests for grants.

This year, for the first time, the KPA awarded a \$500 grant to one of the properties honored. KPA officials remarked that,

given the efforts of the winning organization, the Kansas Preservation Alliance chose to nickname this award the *Roll Up Your Sleeves Award*. And, the winner was...

**The Colonial Fox Theatre of Pittsburg, Kansas.**

## Theatre Chairs Still in Good Condition after 65 Years of "Sitting" in The Colonial Fox

Recently, representatives of the Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation sat down to receive a history lesson. Mark W. Wretschko and Gene Sibley of The American Seating Company were in Pittsburg to look at the seats in the Colonial Fox Theatre.

The American Seating Company installed the seats currently in the building in 1942. The American Bodiform Chair was the "chair of choice" at the time, according to Wretschko, and continues to be today. "These chairs, whenever possible, never go into a land fill," Wretschko said. "There is always someone who wants these chairs."

The cast iron chairs have what is called a "compound curve" that has a Bodiform back which offers great lumbar support even if the cushions are gone. Cast iron also prevents movement from rippling throughout a row of seats. "You can't do



Gene Sibley (left) and Mark W. Wretschko of American Seating discuss the condition of the chairs in the Colonial Fox Theatre with members of the CFTF. Other venues that have some type of American Seating chairs are several Major League ballparks and National Football League stadiums, the Kennedy Center, the Crystal Cathedral in California, city busses, several theatres around the country and various governmental agencies

that with wood," Sibley said. "Cast iron is more absorbing. Someone at the end of the row won't feel what someone in the middle of the row is doing."

Wretschko said the chairs in the theatre are still in great condition.

"Even the foam seems to be in good condition for the most part," he said. "The theatre doesn't need new chairs, they just need to be fixed up. As far as quality goes, you already have the best there is."

## The Inside of the Theatre Makes an Impact on People Taking Tour

Hundreds of people have toured the Colonial Fox Theatre over the last several months and reactions have remained positive. People waited in long lines during the Little Balkans Day celebration in September to see the theatre's interior.

Tours continued during the annual fall Art Walk and before the Pittsburg State University Homecoming parade. Lifelong Pittsburg resident Justin Kelly thought the most exciting thing was seeing that the building is still in very good condition. "I was really surprised, for it being vacant and empty for so long, that it is still in good condition," Kelly said. "I remember seeing a lot of shows here, I'm a big movie guy," he said. The last movie he saw in the theatre was *Rocky III*.

Kelly feels a renovated downtown theatre will be a great thing for Pittsburg as it will give us

the opportunity to enjoy cultural events in the downtown area. "I think this is wonderful," Kelly said. "If I would have had the money to buy this place myself I would have."

Marlena Walsingham had never been in the theatre before, but said she could feel the spirit of the building while taking the tour. "It's kind of weird to say, but it was somewhat emotional," she said. "So much history has gone in and out of that building, so many stories, it's unimaginable."

Several people were quite surprised with the size of the interior of the theatre. "It was kind of overwhelming," Walsingham said. "I walked in there and all I could say was WOW. You just have to stand there and take it all in. It's really beautiful."

The Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation, as time and conditions permit, will host tours of the theatre throughout 2008.

### Advice from a former resident



Vonnie Corsini, president of the CFTF stands next to Carol Johnson, Executive Director of the Amherst Cinema Arts Center, Amherst, MA (and a member of our 400 for \$40K) outside of the Theatre. Johnson, a native of Pittsburg, and daughter of long-time residents Chris and Dorothy Johnson, was in town and met with members of the CFTF on Sunday, November 11.

She shared a great deal of her experience in bringing the Amherst Cinema Arts Center into operation, running a three year capital campaign to raise \$2.95 million dollars towards the goal of purchasing the building, assessing the needs of a community and what it will support.



**Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation**

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### Help Us Save Money

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## Roll Up Your Sleeves Award



(Left to right) LeAnne Hays, Chair, Board of Directors, Kansas Preservation Alliance gives Pat Jones, vice president and Vonnie Corsini, president of the Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation a grant/check at the Capitol Plaza Hotel on November 1. CFTF was announced as the first recipient of the \$500 grant given by the Kansas Preservation Alliance to one of the properties named on the 2008 Most Endangered Historic Properties list. In our honor, they nicknamed the award the *Roll Up Your Sleeves Award*.

The mission of the Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation is to enhance and encourage the spirit of the Pittsburg area through the preservation and utilization of the Colonial Fox Theatre.