

Beacon shines as progress for Hopewell

By Ben Bagwell
Jul 16, 2006



One of the shining lights in Hopewell's economic future is the historic Beacon Theatre, built well before World War II. Significant progress has been made since the grand opening.

Ninety two events, which include five weddings, have already been held at the Beacon since May 13, 2005. This month the State of Virginia provided a matching grant of \$100,000 to support this project. This follows a \$50,000 matching grant last year.

Matching funds will be used to support a full- time grant writer, operating expenses and capital campaign to restore the auditorium and develop children's programs.

"We really appreciate Del. Riley Ingram who has always kept the Beacon in the forefront of state funding. We will be able to capture these funds immediately because we have the matching funds already. We appreciate all of the General Assembly members who backed this grant," says Cheryl Maida, the Beacon's central fund raiser.

Maida projects \$7.3 million is needed to renovate what will be an 8,500 square foot first floor auditorium and an 11,600 square foot annex. Also included in the projected costs are three years worth of operating expenses.

Maida, executive director for Hopewell Preservation Inc., applauds the city for their \$1.3 million contribution to the preservation group to restore the Beacon. That gift came in 1999/2000 and secured the exterior of the building.

Most of the other funds raised have been the result of grant writing, the use of historic tax credits, 2006 enterprise zone grant and major gifts (\$10,000 and up) from Mr. and Mrs. Allen Flannagan, Jimmy and Teresa Jones of Hopewell Builder's Supply, The Marks Family and The Harrison Family Foundation, BB&T Bank, John Randolph Medical Center, Honeywell, 2004 Patrons of the James River Ball and Nelsen Funeral Home.

The Jones family has contributed \$70,000 via in kind work to build Phase II which helped in restoring the first, second and third floors at the Beacon. The John Randolph Foundation awarded a \$50,000 in 2005 and \$30,000 in this recent grant cycle. The Cameron Foundation has contributed grants of \$27,500 in the winter grant cycle and \$21,000 for the sprinkler system in 2005.

Maida served in a volunteer capacity from November 2002 to February of 2003. She then served as the project manager for the Beacon restoration and since October of 2003 has been executive director. Maida's nine-year career as a fund raiser, and executive director with United Way in Virginia, Illinois and Colorado brought the necessary skills to turn the organization around and begin work on Phase II.

"It will take at least two years to finish renovation if we had the money right now. Our restoration efforts will continue to move forward and hope that the downtown plan continues to stay on track.

Substantial donors and funders to this project look beyond our good works and immediate successes. They look at the surrounding businesses and facilities to help them make their final funding decision. We need a vibrant downtown to keep us growing," Maida says.

"We support the city on the potential economic impact of the downtown development. Our success has grown revenue for real-estate tax, provided three fulltime and two part-time positions, and our clients that rent our facility have brought more than 10,000 people to downtown Hopewell."

Hopewell Mayor Steve Taylor says, "The progress of the Beacon coupled with construction of the new library will create a cultural arts synergy for the city and hopefully will spawn other revitalization in the downtown area.

"I've been excited for the Beacon's staff in their efforts to raise funds. They have created a lot of excitement."

James R. Jones Builder Inc. has been the mainstay in local funding for the Beacon renovation. Mrs. Jones says, "The Beacon could be an asset to the city and the region. Downtown revitalization is tied closely to the Beacon Theatre. Right now we want to see the direction of the new city council."

She says, "I don't think the Beacon would be where it is today without Cheryl Maida. She is not a quitter."

John Randolph Medical Center staffer Penny Shaver, president of the board of directors for Hopewell Preservation Inc., says, "The Beacon shows potential for use by other organizations in the city. That is why the John Randolph Medical Center has donated money to the Beacon and is continuing to back the Beacon with the use of their space with seminars and other projects." Ms. Shaver says, "Cheryl Maida's tenacity has overcome a lot of skepticism. The Beacon could become a center for multi-cultural activities." If you would like to find out more about the Beacon Theater Visit www.beacontheatre.org