



Matt August, Arizona Theatre Company's Kasser Family artistic director, and Pat Engles, chair of The Board of Trustees for Arizona Theatre Company, get a close-up look at new performance venue.



Mayor Corey Woods offered a welcoming message.

TCA + ATC = 'A really big deal'

COVER STORY

By Barbi Walker-Walsh
Photos by Andrew Lwowski

Arts Unite: Tempe's Dazzling Pact with the Official State Theater of Arizona Sets the Stage for a Cultural Renaissance

Tempe Center for the Arts and Arizona Theatre Company have announced details of a five-year partnership to bring high-quality, professional theater to Tempe. The announcement came during an Oct. 20 ribbon-cutting at the Tempe venue.

The deal also includes options for three contract extensions.

Tempe city officials and influential members of both TCA and ATC the ceremony. Among guests were Lucy Urias, state tourism director, and Michael Martin, Tempe tourism director.

Excitement about the joint venture was echoed by all involved, with seemingly unanimous agreement: *'This is a really big deal!'*

"Having our beautiful Tempe Center for the Arts building be the new home for Arizona Theater Company is an honor for Tempe and really reinforces the city's commitment to the arts," said

Tempe Vice Mayor Jennifer Adams, who joined the observance with Mayor Corey Woods.

Geri Wright, executive director of ATC, echoed the sentiment, adding she couldn't be more excited to call TCA and Tempe its new home. Wright said the city has given ATC such a warm welcome, noting they are looking forward to being part of what she described as a thriving and growing community.

Looking back on how the collaboration evolved, officials noted that pandemic conditions were in part responsible for the impetus to move TCA from Herberger Theater in downtown Phoenix, its home for over five



Guests were all smiles at ceremonies celebrating the partnership of Tempe Center for the Arts and Arizona Theater Center.

—Wrangler News photo by Andrew Lwowski

decades. Wright took the helm of ATC in 2020, a tough year to start a new position, let alone for an organization knocked off its feet due to the pandemic. The company shuttered shows, laid off cast and crew, and canceled performances altogether. Herberger Theater reported losing 90% of its revenue from March through November 2020.

But Wright said she took the opportunity to think about how to move forward. She said they had to reboot and rebrand after the pandemic, noting, "It's really important to build a new audience," she said.

The pandemic changed habits for some theatergoers. "They got out of the habit of it, so we needed to really identify Arizona Theater Company as the state theater, and moving to a different location was how we decided to do it.

"Lucky us!" Wright said of finding a home at TCA.

The new venue blew away cast members upon seeing it, Wright said. Plus, it's an incredible opportunity. The ATC family, including many trustees at the ribbon cutting, indicated they were ecstatic when they heard about the decision.

"Our new home, the Tempe Center for the Arts, is positioned at the cross-section of future geographic markets, providing ease of access, a state-of-the-art venue, and a more intimate feel for our patrons," Wright said.

The partnership, it seems, represents a boon for both organizations. ATC is one of the country's leading regional theaters, and its productions have been praised by critics and audiences alike. TCA opened in 2007, and at the time was likened by the Society of Architectural Historians to a Sydney

(Australia) Opera House in the desert. It has a 680-seat main theater, a 200-seat studio theater and a variety of other spaces for performances, events and educational programs.

"Stacked seating ensures that no seat is farther than 55 feet from the stage," according to the society. Bonus: each seat has individual cooling units.

"The building is an architectural icon," said Brendan Ross, Tempe's deputy director of arts and culture and the main architect of the two organizations' partnership.

The collaboration will bring high-quality, professional theater to Tempe and make it more accessible to residents of the entire metropolitan area.

"The center was built because residents of Tempe said we need an arts and culture center," Ross said. A survey revealed Tempe residents love theater more than those from surrounding cities. "They really want to see more of that," he said.

The benefits of a partnership between the center and the theater start by bringing the theater's mainstage productions to the venue. The technology and amenities of the main theater at TCA offer a superior audience experience.

"The partnership goes beyond the incredible season they've put together for audiences," said Matt August, Kasser Family Artistic Director. "We can make the arts more accessible to everyone with various programs," he said. August added that programs will include community nights, partnerships and various educational programs, including student matinees.

The collaboration also allows ATC to expand

its reach and serve more patrons. Located just west of Mill Avenue, on the southwest corner of Rio Salado Parkway and Hardy Drive, the center is easily accessible to all Valley cities by car, public transportation and bike.

In addition, it was noted, the partnership will create new opportunities between TCA and ATC, which plan to collaborate on educational programs, community event, and other initiatives.

"We are thrilled to call Tempe Center for the Arts the official new home of Arizona Theatre Company," said Tempe Mayor Corey Woods, adding that the long-term agreement allows the community to experience great theater for years and opportunities for enriching and inspiring our youth.

The partnership is also expected to generate millions of dollars in economic activity for the region. TCA and ATC are major employers and attract visitors from all over the country. The endeavor also nurtures the creative environment—not only by supporting local artists but the community's small business owners and entrepreneurs, "who frankly rely on the arts as a source of inspiration and income," Woods said.

In summary, the announcement seems to represent the beginning of a beautiful and long relationship, Ross said. "My gut says this is gonna work out really well," he said, adding that the two organizations joining forces makes for a friendly and welcoming center with something for everyone.

"People should feel a sense of belonging," Ross said. "This is not just for art types — it's for everybody to come and try something new, see a different show—have a good night out."



COVER PHOTO — There was plenty to cheer about at ribboncutting ceremonies for a newly forged collaboration between Tempe Center for the Arts and Arizona Theater Company. On hand to celebrate were Tempe Vice Mayor Jennifer Adams, left, and Councilmember Berdetta Hodges.