

Omaha Performing Arts

Organization's Performance Earns a Standing Ovation

A decade has passed since the first performance was held at the Holland Performing Arts Center, 13th and Douglas Streets, but the memories of that opening night remain unforgettable for Joan Squires, president of Omaha Performing Arts (OPA).

"Sitting in the audience as a children's chorus sang the Star Spangled Banner, I got teary," Squires recalled. "It was just extraordinary thinking about all the people who came together to make that opening possible and then to finally be experiencing a live performance."

Under the stewardship of OPA over the past decade, more than three million visitors have attended performances by world-class artists and entertainers at the Holland Center and Orpheum Theater, 409 S. 16th St. In addition, approximately 200,000 students have participated in OPA's

education and community engagement programs, and nearly 60,000 visitors attend the organization's free Jazz on the Green summer concert series at the Midtown Crossing.

"We are extraordinarily fortunate here in Omaha to have the Holland Center and the Orpheum Theater," Squires acknowledged. "Both buildings are signature landmark facilities, not just for this community, but across the country. The wonderful acoustics in the Holland Center are amazing and the ornate beauty of the Orpheum is renowned. Performers love appearing in both venues."

When Squires started at OPA she had a desk, a computer, and an assistant production manager. Today, the organization has more than 50 full-time staff members, 50 part-time employees, 600 volunteers, and sponsors more than 250 events per year.

Over the past decade, OPA has set Orpheum Theater attendance records with Broadway shows like Disney's "The Lion King," and headline entertainers like Tony Bennett, James Taylor, Yo-Yo Ma, and Wynton Marsalis at the Holland Center. A 10th Anniversary celebration at the Holland Center will feature actress and singer Kristin Chenoweth on October 16, followed on October 17 by a full day of free entertainment that includes a concert by Conor Oberst.

Representing Nebraska's largest arts institution, OPA has an annual economic impact of \$40 million in Douglas County. Both the Holland Center and Orpheum Theater have been recognized among the best theater venues in the nation by



Now in her 13th year with OPA, Squires has never lost her enthusiasm for the job or the enjoyment the organization brings to the Omaha community.



A former vaudeville house constructed in 1927, the 2,600-seat Orpheum Theater was restored to its original ornate splendor in 2002.

Photos courtesy of Mike Markoff

national industry trade publications.

Squires credited the success of OPA to the generosity of the community and the ongoing support of the people attending the performances, as well as the organization's board of directors, administrative staff, and founding donors such as First National Bank of Omaha.

"As a founding donor, First National Bank has been incredibly generous to us," Squires explained. "First National Bank's sponsorship of our performances has really helped Omaha Performing Arts present these great artists and performances to the community. As a tribute to the generosity of the Lauritzen family and the bank, we have dedicated

a First National Bank lobby at the Holland Center and the Lauritzen Lobby at the Orpheum Theater."

First National Bank was the original credit card processor for Ticket Omaha, which is the official retailer for the Orpheum Theater and the Holland Center, as well as the Omaha Symphony, Opera Omaha, and the Omaha Community Playhouse.

Looking ahead to the next decade, Squires emphasized, "The future is all about connecting to the region, to reaching young people, and really ensuring that we get a chance to participate with everyone in this great community. You really touch lives through the arts and that is a tremendous gift that we're able to give to the community."



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