

THE CALEDONIAN RECORD

Established 1837

Tuesday, January 26, 2016

Bethlehem: Colonial Theatre Advances Renovations Fundraising

By Robert Blechl Staff Writer

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BETHLEHEM -- As 2016 unfolds, the Colonial Theatre is advancing its fundraising for extensive renovations planned to take place next winter.

This summer, the nonprofit theater will also be embarking on a campaign to raise private donations.

Being sold now are N.H. Community Development Finance Authority tax credits, with pledges for the first round, which began last year, due by March 30 and paid by June 30. The new round begins July 1.

"We're trying to cast as wide a net as we can and are doing this over two years," said Colonial Theatre Executive Director Steve Dignazio. "It's critical we sell these tax credits for this project to move forward. It's a substantial amount of the budget for the project."

The tax credits are expected to comprise about \$300,000 of the total \$640,000 renovations project.

"To make up the difference, we'll be looking at government and private foundation grants and private donations," he said.

Last year, the theater that is the oldest or one of the oldest continuously operated movie theaters in the nation celebrated 100 years in the North Country.

The renovations planned to take place during the winter of 2016-2017 are part of its Campaign for the Next Century and are aimed at long-term sustainability.

The project involves adding amenities primarily for its increasing number of live performers and entails adding a few thousand square feet onto the back of the theater.

Plans are for fire and life-safety upgrades, a green room, new dressing rooms and two restrooms for artists as well as storage space for instruments, a loading dock off the parking lot and an in-house theater office.

Currently, there are two restrooms for 300 audience members and the project will add two additional restrooms for audience use.

The CDFA application process was highly competitive and the Colonial was one of only two projects in northern New Hampshire to be funded, said Dignazio. The approval demonstrates the confidence CDFA has in the Colonial and its supporters, he said.

The two allotments of CDFA tax credits are an opportunity for area residents to invest in the local economy and in a theater that is an economic driver in the town, said Dignazio.

Also known as the Community Development Investment Program, the tax credit program that involves nonprofit projects



COURTESY PHOTO The Colonial Theatre in Bethlehem, in the early days, left, and today. After celebrating its centennial last year, the theater is advancing its fund-raising campaign for planned renovations to take place next winter.

and businesses partnering for community development gives a 75-percent state tax credit against a donation made to any approved project. The credit can be applied against the state business profits tax, business enterprise tax or the insurance premium tax. The donation also may be eligible for treatment as a state and federal charitable contribution.

It costs 11 cents on the dollar to make the tax credits, which are good for seven years and can be purchased at the theater, said Dignazio.

"Then this summer we'll go to private donors and do a big push," he said.

Since the Friends of the Colonial began running it in 2001, the theater has become a fully functioning cultural center in the North Country, said Dignazio.

Offerings added or expanded in the last decade include independent and rural cinema, live theater, live music, children's series and Live at the Colonial series.

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