

MUSIC, MOUNTAINS & MAGIC.....

The Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre Story

By: Susan Brandt



Overnight successes seldom are. Throughout Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre's 47 year history run common threads of sacrifice, dedication, generosity of time, spirit and dollars. It has been a coalescence of individuals, businesses, groups and organizations who know the ability of the arts in general, and live, professional theatre specifically, to positively affect the aesthetic and economic fortune of Grand Lake and Grand County - - and have consistently done "whatever it takes" to keep the dream alive and moving ahead. The unceasing support of these individuals is at the heart of RMRT and much gratitude is owed to them.

There have been challenges - - lots of them. In the late 90's, as property values soared in the Grand Lake area, housing for RMRT's professional actors became a critical issue and was addressed by the 1999 purchase of a complex now known as the **Betty Dick Off Broadway Cabins**, named after Betty, then serving as RMRT's board president, and whose leadership - - to say nothing of co-signing the mortgage - - brought about this essential purchase. In 2003, RMRT initiated the **Encore! Capital Campaign** which culminated in a symbolic burning of that mortgage in 2007.

The year 2005 brought changes both administrative and artistic as Carol Wolff was named executive director, and RMRT veteran Michael Querio became its artistic director, bringing with him a talented cadre who were RMRT alums as well, and who, yes, "knew the ropes", but also had fallen subject to the magic that is the Town of Grand Lake. Michael, dubbed RMRT's "magnet for excellence" and his artistic staff have, over the last eight seasons, consistently hired an entire company of "lead quality performers". **Beauty and the Beast**, their first offering, set the tone for the next few seasons with packed houses the norm and 80 people plus being turned away from each performance. The intimate and charming Community House, capacity 172, no longer allowed the theatre to fulfill its mission to bring fine, professional theatre to the most possible patrons, and, in so doing, draw visitors to the community and its businesses. Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre needed its own home not only for the benefit of its patrons, but also for the benefit of the community where it lives.

In 2006, an anonymous donation allowed the purchase of the property at the corner of Grand Avenue and Vine Street. That this property became available at just the right time, coupled with the generosity of this donor, was fortuitous indeed and in 2007, the theatre announced a capital campaign, "**Raise the Curtain! A New Stage for Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre**". In less than three years, and at a time of economic downturn and uncertainty, and in a town who lists its population at about 450, RMRT raised \$5.2 million dollars, donations running the gamut from yet another anonymous donation of \$1 million dollars, to that of a child, involved in RMRT's Youth Theatre, having donated the contents of her piggy bank. (The RMRT Youth Theatre offers professionally taught theatre classes to about 115 youth, ages 8 to 18, each summer in this most rural of Colorado counties).

The first shovel of soil was turned on April 11, 2010, by then board president Judy Jensen and on June 10, 2011, Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre opened its first production in its 297 seat, state of the art, cozy, not-a-bad-seat-in-the-house new home - - complete with a red carpet for those amazing patrons who made it all happen. The completion of this structure eliminated the need to consistently turn away those 80 plus patrons, night after night, as RMRT had been doing for the majority of the summer season as referenced before, and allowed set building to take place in a spacious and safe environment, a tremendous improvement over the previous construction area behind the old venue and near the town playground - - less than desirable for the staff and the children alike.

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As a result of this necessary spending for construction of the theatre, an economic impact on Grand County of over \$3.4 million dollars, equating to 83.4 percent of the total construction cost, was realized. Grand Lake proper was the recipient of almost \$200,000 dollars. Overall, 97.7 percent of the entire project, or a little over \$4 million dollars, stayed within the boundaries of Colorado with only 2.3 percent leaving the state.

And remember those cabins referred to above? They were built circa 1930 and, over what is approaching a century of wear and tear, have gotten a little tired.....an understatement for point of emphasis. Enter the McMurry – Spieles family with an offer to fund construction of new housing to accommodate over a dozen RMRT actors. Construction began in the fall of 2011 and by June of 2012, that new space was happily occupied by members of the company. ***Another influx of money was injected into the Grand Lake Economy as a result of this \$300,000 project - - all of which was paid to a Grand Lake contractor.*** Now, tentative plans are in the works for construction of additional housing to augment the aforementioned 1930's era cabins which are well past their prime.

The most recent addition to RMRT's "prudent things to do" list is that of an Endowment Fund to assure that all that has gone on before, and the results of those efforts having moved RMRT forward to where it is today, will be safeguarded and enhanced for generations to come.

In the spring of 2012, because of the many recent changes in the life of RMRT, the decision was made to hire a professional firm to evaluate the theatre's financial influence - - not only on the Town of Grand Lake, but also on Grand County and the State of Colorado as well. The driving purpose behind this study was its anticipated use as an educational tool to assist RMRT in its quest for grants and other forms of needed financial support. Were the results of the study to indicate RMRT's influence as reaching far beyond what is seen on that stage, and into the realm of being a viable contributor to the local, county and state economies, then financial support for the theatre would also be correctly viewed as having a benefit on the entire region economically as well as aesthetically.

It is noteworthy that RMRT's ticket sales cover just slightly more than 50% of expenses, making generous donors and grantors integral and essential players in RMRT's financial well-being. RMRT employs but two full-time administrative personnel and boasts an admirable personnel to budget percentage of 8.7% within an administrative percent of total budget of just 13.7% percent.

Beginning in 2008, numbers of Grand Lake merchants, realizing the value of RMRT in their community, and continuing a long held tradition of local business support for RMRT, pooled their financial resources and have sponsored a production each season! There has developed over many years a healthy and happy history - - a synergy - - between local businesses and Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre.

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THE ECONOMIC IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE STUDY RESULTS

The **Economic Impact and Significance Study** results are in and the numbers quite remarkable! The accompanying document spells out in detail the specifics of the study. To summarize, through the efforts of RMRT, over \$3.4 million dollars was injected into the Grand Lake economy last year just from patrons residing outside of Grand Lake. If one includes the local population's involvement with RMRT, and the fact that a dollar spent changes hands several times before leaving the community, that number soars to more than \$6.7 million dollars. Utilizing these same guidelines, by combining the Town of Grand Lake, along with the rest of Grand County, all the way through to the state level, RMRT was responsible for generating almost \$10.5 million dollars of revenue for the State of Colorado!

The accompanying study also points out that ***Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre's presence in Grand Lake creates 20.65 Full Time Equivalent jobs (FTE's) within the community which may take the form of full time, part time or seasonal employment.***

Theatre aficionados embrace words and phrases such as ***BRAVO! STANDING OVATION! BREATHTAKING PERFORMANCE! SOLD OUT! SRO! THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE!*** And the *Denver Post's* assessment of RMRT as ***COLORADO'S PREMIERE SUMMER MUSICAL THEATRE!***

Perhaps of equal importance are the words and phrases which Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre can confidently assign to the impact of its presence in the community where it lives - - ***AESTHETICALLY IMPORTANT and CULTURALLY VALUABLE TO THOSE IT SERVES. ECONOMICALLY SIGNIFICANT TO THE TOWN, COUNTY and STATE WHERE IT LIVES.***

Grand Lake, Colorado, with its friendly people and rustic charm and opportunities for all things outdoor, juxtaposed against Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre's world class Broadway theatre performances in a state-of-the-art venue, makes for an irresistible combination.....one to be embraced and celebrated!

Written by:

Susan Brandt – Board of Trustees
Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre
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