

A BRIEF HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF THE FORT WAYNE CIVIC THEATRE

In 1927 the Fort Wayne Community Theatre Guild was formed. That year the volunteer group produced two shows, one in a local high school and the second at a neighborhood church.

In 1928 another group, the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre Guild, comprised of many of the same people as the original group, began producing shows. They had no permanent home and mounted three to five shows each season.

In 1931 this group of dedicated theatre volunteers changed their name to the Old Fort Players and continued to move from venue to venue. Then in 1933 the Players moved into the 800 seat Majestic Theatre in downtown Fort Wayne. The stage was so large (80' wide and 40' deep) that for a 1930's production of Ben Hur, live horses were used on a treadmill for the chariot race! The building was leased in the early years, then in 1940, a mortgage was drawn up and the building was purchased by the company.



The Majestic Theatre

Though classes in acting and other theatre arts had been offered to the public since 1933, the classes were formalized in 1940 and included instruction in scenic and lighting design, voice and diction, make up and set construction as well as acting and pantomime. Also, the children's theatre grew from an audience of 900 in 1933 to over

10,000 in 1946. Then in 1940 tax exempt status was awarded by the state and the company changed the name to the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre.

In 1953 the Anthony Awards were given out for the first time. Only four trophies were handed out that year. In 1955 the Women's Guild was formed. This branch of the organization is still active and vibrant. In 1955 the Fine Arts Foundation (now Arts United) was established, 28 years after the founding of Civic Theatre.

A total of 231 productions were mounted in the beautiful Majestic Theatre until the city condemned the building and tore it down in 1957. So the organization moved, temporarily, into the Palace Theatre. The plan was to move into the new Fine Arts Building, at that time still in the planning stages. But the Fine Arts Building never came to be and the Civic Theatre remained until 1969 at the Palace Theatre.



The Palace Theatre

In 1966 the Youtheatre, as the children's theatre arm was called, hired their own director for the first time, beginning the process that would eventually make them an independent company. To this day the Youtheatre shares space with the Civic Theatre, but thrives as a separate theatre organization.

When the Palace could no longer support the Civic Theatre, the company moved for three years into the Maiden Lane building. The space had only about 150 seats and didn't serve the company well at all. By the end of the 1972 season, the Fine Arts Foundation (ancestor to Arts United) neared completion on the Performing Arts Center (renamed in 2005 to the Arts United Center) and the Civic Theatre prepared to make another move to that facility which is now home to Fort Wayne Civic Theatre offices and Main Stage productions. In 1973 the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre moved into the brand new Performing Arts Center, designed by Louis Kahn and constructed after his death,



Arts United Center

The time period from the late 1960's through early 2006 saw major growth and stability in the organization. The 1966 budget was \$77,500 and by 2006 the budget was \$807,670.

In 1988 Fort Wayne Civic Theatre presented the world premiere of *Fahrenheit 451* – a musical version of the Ray Bradbury dystopian classic. The musical featured lyrics by Georgia Bogardus Holof, music by David Mettee and book by Bradbury himself. The show was directed by Michael D. Mitchell, who was the Executive Director for the theatre at that time. The show went on to New York’s Off-Off-Broadway Wings Theatre. 1988 also saw the establishment of Civic Theatre’s educational and outreach program “In The Wings.” Since 1988, we have provided over 136,000 theatrical experiences to at-risk and economically disadvantaged youth and families, school and senior groups and social service agencies. In The Wings performances are typically the final dress rehearsal of the current show, providing the same experience as a public performance for these audiences. Online study guides and post show discussions are a part of the “In The Wings” experience.

In 1992 Fort Wayne Civic Theatre brought back one of their most famous former performers, Jane Lanier, in a production of *Love Letters*. Jane started as a young performer on the Civic stage and went on to perform as an actor/dancer on Broadway, in addition to numerous professional credits as a choreographer. She was nominated in 1989 for the Tony Award as Best Actress in a featured role (Musical) for *Jerome Robbins’ Broadway*. Jane returned to Civic in 2015 as the Director and Choreographer of Civic’s highly successful production of Disney’s *Mary Poppins*.



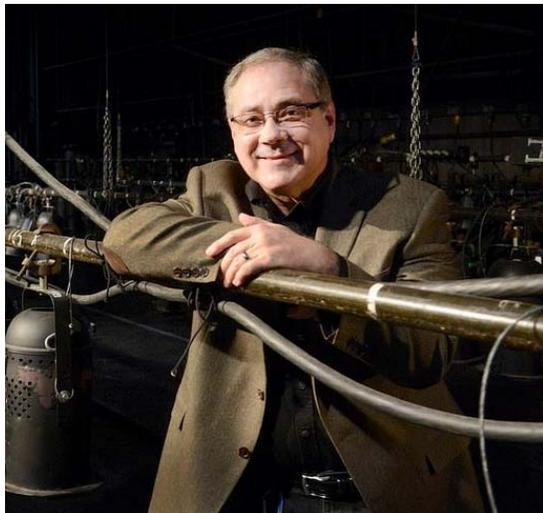
Jane Lanier



Heather Headley

Another notable Civic performer is Heather Headley who in 1997 originated the role of Nala in *The Lion King*, the Broadway musical. Headley earned the 2000 Tony Award for Best Actress for her performance in *Aida*. Most recently Headley assumed the role of Shug Avery from Jennifer Hudson in 2016 in the recent Broadway revival of *The Color Purple*.

Fort Wayne Civic Theatre started one of its most endearing traditions in 1994 with their first production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. To date the organization has performed this modern classic musical six times and has reached audiences of well over 50,000.



Phillip H. Colglazier

In 2000, Phillip H. Colglazier became the 27th in a long line of executives to lead the organization. In his role of Executive/Artistic director, Colglazier oversees all aspects of the organization. A native of Fort Wayne, Colglazier got his start on stage at the Civic Theatre at the age of 15. After graduating from Ball State, he performed professionally as an Actors Equity Member for twelve years in musical theatre and television in Seoul, Korea, Vienna, Rome and throughout the U.S. Formerly he held various positions with Fort Wayne Civic Theatre (from 1993-1999) before serving as the Managing Director of Edyvean Repertory Theatre in Indianapolis. He was honored at the Indiana Arts Leadership Awards as the 2008 Arts Administrator by the Indiana Coalition for the Arts. He is a playwright and a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, Inc., having written *Best Intentions*, *The Marquee Quest* and *...before I wake...* Over the years, Colglazier has directed and choreographed numerous Civic productions.

The 2003-2004 Season marked the 75th Anniversary of the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre. In 2005, the Performing Arts Center was renamed the Arts United Center and continues to be home to the Civic Theatre offices, costume shop, prop storage and scene shop. While the Arts United Center is the Mainstage for the theatre, Civic productions have also been mounted at the Allen County Public Library, the Scottish Rite Auditorium, First Presbyterian Theatre, the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and the Parkview Physicians Group ArtsLab at the Auer Center.

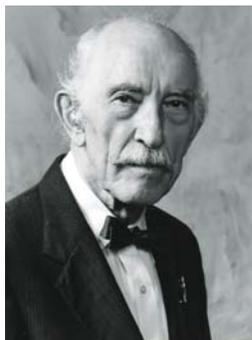
The 2008-2009 Season celebrated 8 dramatic decades with the Civic Theatre's 80th Anniversary and featured the Midwest Premiere of *Frankenstein the musical* starring Broadway Star Steve Blanchard. Executive /Artistic Director Phillip H. Colglazier worked closely with the Off-Broadway Producer and former Executive Director of the Embassy Douglas C. Evans to bring this production to the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre. It was well received by the community and showcased the extraordinary talent of our local actors and actresses.



Steve Blanchard

The ninth decade of Fort Wayne Civic Theatre saw continued artistic and economic growth. The organization has a full time staff of nine professionals in business, marketing, music and technical theatre. However, at the heart of the theatre's success are the 600 volunteer experiences we rely on each season. Volunteers, giving over 30,000 hours annually, donate their time and talents to bringing productions to the stage. They are involved in all aspects of the theatre including serving on the Board of Directors, appearing on stage, assisting in the creation of scenic, lighting and costume pieces and in various other capacities.

In 2015, two new initiatives were launched providing performances of family friendly shows for unique audiences. "Project Lights Up" performances for individuals with disabilities and their families provide a sensory friendly experience in a welcoming atmosphere. "Operation Science Theatre" performances provide tickets to veterans, military personnel and their families, with preshow activities explaining the science behind the scenes. Both of these programs provide free tickets to their audiences due to funding from AWS Foundation for "Project Lights Up" and Raytheon for "Operation Science Theatre."



**George H. Koegel,
Dec. 10, 1914-August 27, 2007**

To honor outstanding achievements by volunteers, the Lifetime Achievement Award began in 1996. Recipients include: Mildred Cutchin in 1997-1998 George H. Koegel, in 1998-1999 Jayne Kelley, and in 1999-2000 Bill Wunderlin. Then in 2000-2001 the George H. Koegel Lifetime Achievement Award was established honoring George H. Koegel and, as well as, Robert D. Sandmaier, Scenic Designer/Artist. Other individuals who have been awarded this honor include: Harvey G. Cocks in 2001-2002, in 2002-2003 Jayne Kelley, in 2003-2004 Joyce Van Ry, in 2005-2006 Larry A. Wardlaw, 2011-2012 David G. Ball, and in 2014-2015 Del Proctor. In 2004-2005 the Civic Theatre honored Arts United with a Special Recognition in celebration of their 50th Anniversary.

Plans for the 2017-2018, 90th Anniversary season include four Mainstage musical productions: *Beauty and The Beast*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *White Christmas* and *La Cage Aux Folles*. At the Parkview Physicians Group ArtsLab, the one-man comedy, *Buyer & Cellar* will be staged. As the finale to the season, the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre and the Fort Wayne Philharmonic will collaborate for the first time to present *A Tribute to the Music of Rodgers & Hammerstein and Andrew Lloyd Webber* at the Historic Embassy Theatre. Throughout the season there are plans to celebrate the patrons, donors and volunteers who have contributed to the on-going success of the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre.

