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Middlesex County Invests in the Arts to Drive Economic & Cultural Growth

State Theatre Launches Largest Capital Campaign in its History to Modernize and Upgrade Customer Experience

Middlesex County, NJ (August 21, 2020) — Middlesex County in partnership with State Theatre New Jersey, a non-profit organization, is investing towards the modernization of this historic landmark and cultural icon in New Brunswick. As part of a larger capital fundraising effort, the **Next Stage Campaign**, initiated by State Theatre New Jersey, has set a target goal to generate \$26,500,000 for renovations that will dramatically improve accessibility, safety, and operation of the nearly 100-year-old facility, owned by Middlesex County and operated by State Theatre New Jersey under a long-term agreement.

“Middlesex County has a long history of investing in the Arts – it is a cornerstone of this community. The Arts bring us all together, transcends color and economic background, and is a key facet of our identity,” said **Ronald Rios, Freeholder Director of the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders**. “State Theatre New Jersey showcases world-class artists from around the world, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year – it is a significant economic driver for our County. This investment is part of a long-term strategic plan to improve the quality of life for our residents both now and into the future.”

“This is a defining moment in the history of the State Theatre, and we are so grateful for the support of the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders,” said **Sarah K. Chaplin, State Theatre New Jersey President & CEO**. “This grant of \$12 million from the Middlesex County Arts and Cultural Trust Fund and the funds raised by State Theatre represent a pledge to our patrons and our community that we are committed to improving our accessibility and operations to ensure that we are here to provide the finest performing artists and arts education programs for the region and the state for the next 100 years and beyond.”

With this announcement, the State Theatre’s Next Stage Campaign has reached 86% of its target goal of \$26.5 million thanks largely to the generosity of Middlesex County and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Other major donors include the late philanthropist Betty Wold Johnson; Johnson & Johnson; Joan and Robert Campbell; the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation; Andrew J. Markey; the Presser Foundation; the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust; the John and Susan Heldrich Family Fund; the Hyde and Watson Foundation; and Investors Bank. Long time and recent State Theatre New Jersey members have stepped forward to provide exceptional gifts to the campaign, allowing State Theatre New Jersey to close in on the goal and make this vision a reality. The funds raised for the renovation represent a strong public and private partnership of those who support and recognize the impact the theater has on the arts, the economy of the region, and the well-being of its citizens.

“Beyond just positive economic development, investing in the Arts drives vital cultural change. Creativity and imagination empower our people to express their true selves, it allows them to dream and aspire for a better world. In a polarizing time, the Arts connects us all under one unified community. The Board of Chosen Freeholders is proud to be part of the modernization of this prestigious and historic institution in our County, the State Theatre – for generations to enjoy, celebrate and be inspired,” said **Freeholder Deputy Director and Chair of Business Innovation, Education, & Opportunity Committee, Kenneth Armwood.**

The COVID-19 crisis has brought into sharp focus the immediate need for many of the upgrades planned. “The campaign and accelerated construction timeline allow us to immediately address projects that focus on the safety and security of our patrons, staff, and artists,” shared Chaplin. “In addition to the structural improvements that will make the building more accessible, we can be at the forefront in providing a safe and clean environment for the community to experience live performing arts and entertainment in a post-COVID-19 world.”

At a time when the world is facing an economic downturn, Middlesex County’s strong AAA bond rating ensures that its financial strength and stability is unmatched not only in the State of New Jersey but in the Tri-State Area. This puts the County in a unique position to continue to invest in major capital projects such as the transformation of the State Theatre. The County has achieved this financial status by reducing its overall debt by 35 percent, or a staggering \$250 million over the last five years, while increasing its retained surplus position to \$80 million dollars through sound, strategic financial planning. This has empowered Middlesex County to invest in vital economic growth initiatives both now and in the future.

State Theatre was built in 1921 as a silent film and vaudeville palace. Today, it is the largest performing arts center in Central New Jersey and has welcomed **over 5.9 million people through its doors** since reopening as a non-profit performing arts center in 1988. State Theatre New Jersey averages a total economic impact on New Brunswick and the surrounding area of more than **\$18 million dollars a year**. Additionally, State Theatre **provides free and heavily subsidized tickets to more than 40,000 people annually in the local community.**

For additional information about the Next Stage Campaign, and to make a contribution, please go to stnj.org/nextstage. And to learn more about Middlesex County’s focus on the Arts, please visit the [Office of Arts and History](#).

About State Theatre New Jersey

The theater exists to enrich people’s lives, contribute to a vital urban environment, and build future audiences by presenting the finest performing artists and entertainers and fostering lifetime appreciation for the performing arts through arts education. State Theatre New Jersey’s programs are made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. Grant funding has been provided by the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders through a grant award from the Middlesex County Cultural and Arts Trust Fund.



Architectural rendering of State Theatre New Jersey for its Centennial Celebration in 2021. Courtesy of Mills + Schnoering Architects, LLC & Design Distill



Next Stage Campaign Honorary Chair Audra McDonald with Middlesex County Freehold Director Ronald Rios following her 2017 Gala Performance at State Theatre New Jersey. © Jeffrey Auger



State Theatre New Jersey President & CEO Sarah K. Chaplin. © Alexandra Pais



State Theatre New Jersey's new LED Marquee in February 2020. © Jeffrey Auger

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