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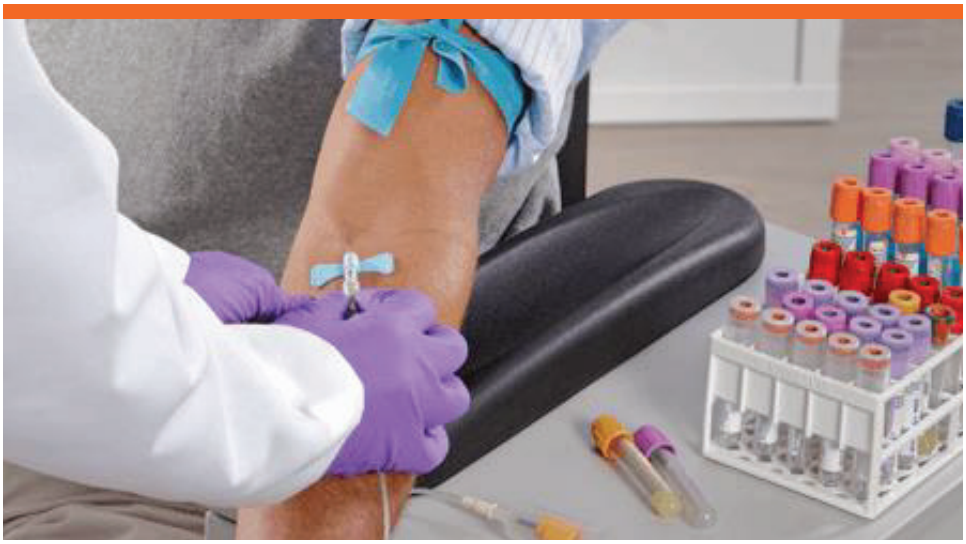

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A LETTER FROM THE

CULTURAL MANAGER

ON BEHALF OF THE CITY OF SUMTER, welcome to the Sumter Opera House and our year of celebration! 2020 marks one-hundred, twenty-five years of existence for Sumter's iconic venue. What word is used for the 125th Anniversary, you ask? It is Quasquicentennial and it was coined the official phrase for "125th Anniversary" in 1962 by an engineer and publishers of a popular encyclopedia, Funk & Wagnalls. We also wondered, who else celebrates such a milestone? How about Swarovski Group, Hershey and Sumter's own "The Item" It will be our pleasure to "open the doors" on another year of diverse creative experiences!

Throughout decades the building at 21 North Main street has provided a seat for many patrons, but most of the stories that have been told to me revolve around affection for the activities that took place here and the familiarity of the friends you would meet once inside these walls. I mention these stories and conversations because they are a terrific example of how the Sumter Opera House has been woven into the tapestry of Sumter. All across America, audiences have bonded with their historic theatres because of the architectural detail, the acoustics and the entertainment they offer. Simply stated, they are the best place to see a show.

I understand that you will still go to arenas to see specific shows. Any town can build an arena, but not every city has an Opera House like this. I can't imagine seeing Delbert McClinton (Feb. 21), Jeanne Robertson (April 25) or The Duke Ellington Orchestra (Oct. 23) in a massive arena. They demand intimacy and sometimes require an actual theatre. I am blessed by those who came before us to see beyond their years, the importance of the Sumter Opera House for our state and our community.

Community support continues to grow and attendance is on the rise. I think this serves as a positive signal to the rest of the state that you support the artistic experiences here and that you want more opportunities! I invite you, if you are not already, to consider a financial contribution as I would be delighted to find the best use for your sponsorship. Participate with us, join our newsletter, communicate with us, follow us on our numerous social media platforms and patronize the businesses you find within this program.

Looking to the future, we will strive for the Sumter Opera House to be a reoccurring destination for people to connect with history, share experiences and enjoy a brief escape from everyday life. I believe art matters, its importance in our lives and our cultural empathy only increases with our participation. For audiences that love live entertainment, the Sumter Opera House provides the paradigm of venue intimacy and sensational artists. Thank you, and I am grateful you joined us tonight.

Seth J. Reimer
Cultural Manager

MISSION

The Mission of the Sumter Opera House is to enrich the cultural lives of our community, neighbors, and visitors by providing diverse creative experiences.

VISION

The Vision of the Sumter Opera House is to be an indispensable cultural asset to our community through collaboration with educational systems, civic organizations, corporate sponsors, and individuals.

We Value:

- Promoting arts as a catalyst for community vibrancy, quality of life, education and economic development.
- Preserving and archiving the heritage of Sumter's iconic landmark for future generations.
- Presenting diverse concert experiences.
- Partnering with public schools, private schools, and homeschool groups to provide arts education opportunities.

HISTORY OF THE

SUMTER OPERA HOUSE

On **January 14, 1872**, the doors of a two-story wooden structure opened to Sumterites. Located in the same location as the current Opera House, the original building included the town hall, city offices, city guard house, market, and a theater with 500 seats. In the late 19th century, it was very common for an opera house to be combined with government offices. The town hall was often the only large public space in a small town. Also, funds generated from theater events could help repay the debts incurred in building the municipal structure.

On December 9, 1892, a fire broke out in a dressing room while the Chick Company from New York City performed on stage. No one was injured, but the entire building, including the town records kept in an office on the second floor, was destroyed. Several surrounding stores were also lost in the fire. The total damage was figured at $70,000, the equivalent of $1.8 million today. Despite the significant loss, Sumter officials didn't hesitate in making plans for a new building.

Less than a year after the fire destroyed the original building, a cornerstone was laid for a new building on the same site. The new structure was designed by architect J.C. Turner of Augusta, GA and brothers J.W. and D.J. McKiever of Charleston, SC. The building, as you see it today, was made of Cumberland Buff Stone and constructed in the Richardson Romanesque style. The structure featured a 100-foot tall, four-faced tower with a clock operated by weights. The first theatrical performance given in the new Opera House was on **September 19, 1894** and featured the comedian Milton Nobles in the play called *For Revenue Only*.

By the 1900s, motion pictures were becoming more popular, proving to be the greatest threat to opera houses like Sumter's. The city began looking for other ways to utilize the property which led to a proposed $120,000 renovation to transform the Opera House into a motion picture theater. The large expense, equal to over $2 million today, was due to the need to move the theater from the second floor to the first floor of the building. The Sumter City Council applied for a grant through the Public Works Administration

(PWA) and was awarded $50,400 for the project. The City provided the remaining $70,000 needed. At a time when money was low and jobs were few, this renovation created 300 jobs for local workers.

Earle Stillwell of Hendersonville, NC and J.W. Cunningham of Sumter served as architects for the renovation. Upholstered seats, a modern cooling system, and a state of the art sound system along with Art Deco ornamentation around the proscenium and a grand marquee made this venue stand out among those in the Southeast. The newly renovated Sumter Theatre opened on Monday, **August 31, 1936** with a grand celebration and featured the movie *Earthworm Tractors* starring Joe E. Brown.

As technology progressed, attendance at the Sumter Theatre decreased. By the late 1970s, movie theaters had opened nearby with multiple screens. Individuals could now rent movies and buy VHS tapes to enjoy movies at home. Malls opened up outside of the main district pulling traffic away from downtown and Main Street shops were closing. The Sumter Theatre closed its doors in 1982 and its future remained uncertain.

In 1984, the City of Sumter decided to relocate city offices to the Opera House because they needed more space. While many opponents argued against spending money on an old building, City officials maintained the move would help revitalize downtown and save a building that was historically significant to Sumter. General Obligation Bonds in the amount of $1.8 million were finally approved and the architecture firm of Drakeford-Jackson & Associates was hired to begin renovations.

The renovated building housed city offices on the second, third, and fourth floors. The revamped auditorium included a balcony and six boxes, the architects enlarged and curved the stage, while the Art Deco murals were painstakingly restored and painted. A new section in the rear of the building housed the water department, business license department and credit union. City operations officially began on **May 2, 1988**. The renovation project was a defining moment and the first of many steps to reclaim downtown.

Find us online to be first to know about shows, giveaways and more!!

SumterOperaHouse HistoricSOH SumterOperaHouse

VISITOR INFORMATION

PARKING

All parking in downtown Sumter is FREE. You can park on the street for up to four hours or park all day in any of the public parking lots and parking garages. All public parking is less than a five minute walk from the theatre.

ACCESSIBILITY

Seating and assistance for persons with special needs are available. Designated seating is reserved for patrons in wheelchairs and is only available when purchasing tickets in person or over the phone. **The balcony and box seating is accessible only by two flights of stairs.** Please notify our Box Office before you purchase tickets if anyone in your party requires special seating due to visual, auditory or physical impairments.

CONCESSIONS

The concessions stand is open one hour before curtain and during intermission. Snacks and drinks purchased at the concessions stand are permitted in the seating area.

WILL CALL

Will Call is open Monday through Friday 8:30 am – 4:30 pm on non-performance days. Will Call always opens one hour prior to curtain on performance days.

LATE ARRIVALS

Late patrons are seated at the discretion of the House Manager at an appropriate break in the performance.

CANCELLED AND RESCHEDULED EVENTS

If the event you plan to attend is cancelled due to factors out of our control, we will inform you of the cancellation and refund your order. If your event is rescheduled, we will inform you of the rescheduled date and give you the option to attend the new date or receive a refund.

RESTROOMS

Restrooms are located in the lobby and in the City Centre.

LOST AND FOUND

The Sumter Opera House is not responsible for any items lost or stolen. Please turn in any article found to our Box Office. Items found by other patrons or our staff will be placed in the Box Office and kept for 30 days. Unclaimed items will then be donated. Personal items such as wallets, purses, cell phones, or jewelry will be returned to their proper owners when provided with identification and an accurate description of the item.

GIFT CERTIFICATES

Gift certificates can be in any denomination and are available for purchase through the Box Office. Gift certificates are good for any event for which tickets are available and on sale to the public. Valid for one year from date of purchase.

DONOR & CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

Tax-deductible donations from individuals and corporate sponsors are greatly appreciated and always welcome. Your contributions ensure low ticket prices and high quality performances. Call 803-774-3955 to have a representative contact you with more details.

MAILING LIST

The Sumter Opera House maintains an e-mail mailing list comprised of only those individuals who have specifically requested to receive updates. E-blasts are generally sent out weekly and keep recipients up-to-date on the latest news, upcoming events, and special offers. We will not sell or share this list with anyone and you may unsubscribe at any time. You may sign up for the mailing list by visiting SumterOperaHouse.com or by visiting the Box Office.

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Please be a good neighbor to those seated around you! If you experience any disturbances during the event, please do not hesitate to contact a member of our staff to assist. Disruptive guests will be asked to leave the seating area and are subject to ejection from the premises.

ENTERING AND EXITING THE SEATING AREA

Please time your exists and re-entry to the seating area to occur only at intermission or breaks between songs. This is a courtesy to other guests around you who will appreciate you keeping these disruptions to a minimum.

QUIET, PLEASE!

Once the show starts, silence or turn OFF all cell phones and limit conversation. If children are attending this performance with you, please exit the theatre immediately if they become restless or talkative.

IT CAN WAIT

Save texting until AFTER the show. The light from tablets and phones is distracting to others.

IT'S A THEATRE, NOT A TRASH CAN

Snack and drinks purchased from the concessions stand are allowed in the seating area, but please take any waste with you when you leave. Trash cans are distributed throughout the venue for your convenience.

CAMERAS & RECORDING

Photography and video recording are frequently prohibited. Please refer to any signage or announcements before the performance to know if photography is prohibited or permitted. If photography or recording is prohibited and you use your phone to take pictures or record the show, you could be asked to leave. If photography is permitted, do not use flash as it is disturbing to the artists and other patrons.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

It is through the dedication of volunteers that the Sumter Opera House can provide an inviting facility known for its historic beauty and southern hospitality. We are grateful to the many volunteers which have become valuable members of our team.

For more information about volunteering, contact:

Seth Reimer, Cultural Manager
sreimer@sumtersc.gov
803-774-3955

Ellen Jansen, Operations Manager
ejansen@sumtersc.gov
803-436-2505

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STAFF:

Cultural Manager	Seth Reimer
Technical Director	Tim Langford
Operations Manager	Ellen Jansen
Support Specialist	Lauron Haney

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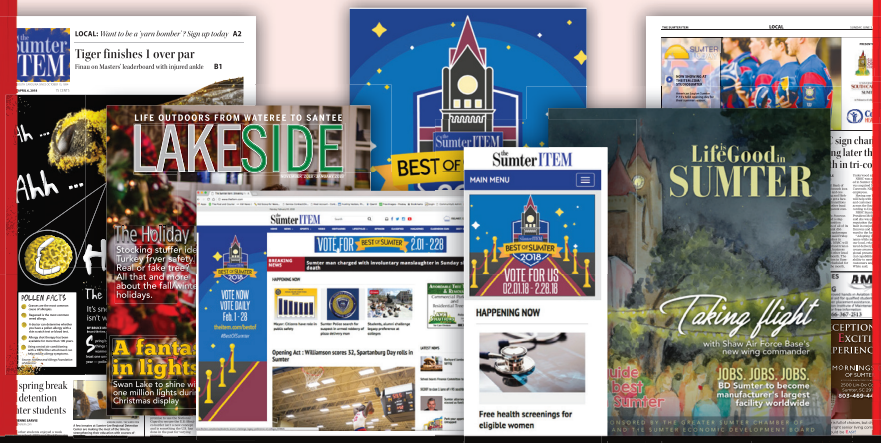

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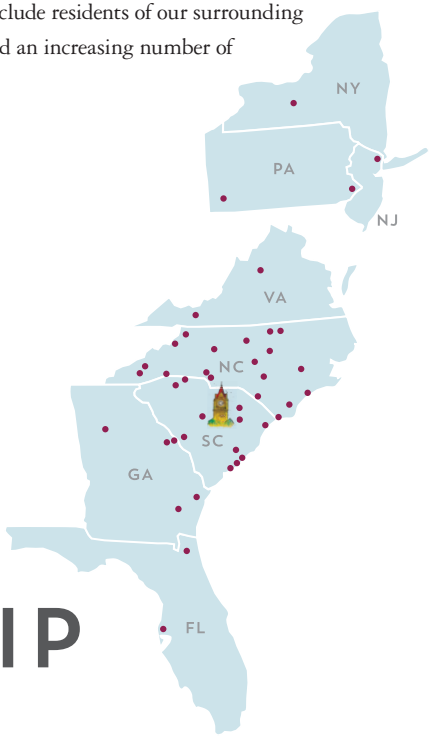

VISITATION

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Michael Larrivee
Lucinda Liles
Eleanor Norsworthy
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BJ Reed & Jo Thames
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Susan Scouten
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Jeffrey Varn
Kenneth Weaver
Charles West

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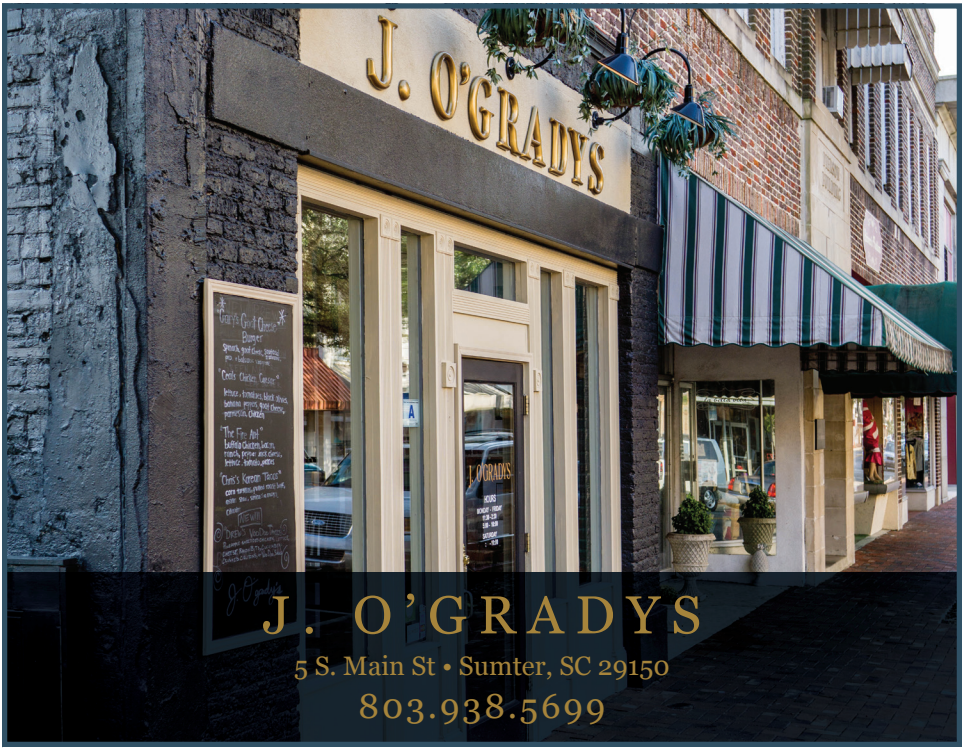

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