SWOT ANALYSIS OF THEATRE 8:15
A CHILDREN’S COMMUNITY THEATRE

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
HISTORY

Founding

Richard Reed Moore, from Mobile Alabama, started taking ballet classes when he was a senior in high school. He was also an avid football player, but found that dance was the greater passion. Ultimately, he turned down a college football scholarship to the University of Alabama to pursue a career in theatre and dance.

Moore started his professional ballet career as a soloist with the Hartford Ballet Company in Connecticut. He then went on to study with various ballet companies such as the Joffrey Ballet and the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in New York. Not only did Moore dance in the United States, he also performed abroad in Paris and London. Some of his other credits included working as a stuntman in major motion pictures, print work and modeling. During the seventies and eighties, Moore took dance and theater classes at the Joe Jefferson Playhouse. This theater is the oldest community theater in Alabama. It is now celebrating its sixty-third year of continuous operation. Eventually, Moore became involved with dinner theatres and summer stock, where his leading roles in musicals were endless.

Moore’s dance career ended twenty-five years later when he tore his Achilles tendon and discovered he had a degenerating disc in his back. He then, took a job as a
fundraising sales representative in the Massillon, Ohio area and remained a resident there for twelve years. Getting restless and wanting to dance, he started teaching in the Mid-Ohio area. An opportunity arose when a dance studio owner in Canal Fulton wanted to move to Florida and decided to sell her business. Moore and his friend, Fred McWhorter, bought the Mary Jo’s Dance Studio in 1988 and turned it into Theatre Dance Centre.

Fred McWhorter was employed by J & L Specialty Steel in Louisville for thirty years. He also had a great passion for the arts. He met Moore through mutual friends and they became the life-long friends and partners. McWhorter provided support to Moore by taking on the financial side of the dance business as executive director and producer, leaving Moore more time to devote to the position of Artistic Director of the dance studio. In 1992, McWhorter and Moore rented an old grange hall as a satellite studio for the Dance Centre in Canal Fulton. They rented the building with a purchase option and in within four months the owners of the building asked McWhorter to make an offer. Appraised at $76,000, McWhorter made an offer and bought the Highland Grange for $25,000.

When Moore and McWhorter took over the space, it was definitely a work in progress. In order to convert it into a performance space, it needed new wiring and plumbing. Church pews had to be removed from what had originally been a sanctuary. The downstairs, one large open room had to be reconfigured. They started to make structural changes, creating dressing rooms and a concession stand. At that time, Moore’s ultimate goal was to turn the building into a small cultural center. First, they needed to get the “Theatre” ready for production.
McWhorter was fortunate to be able to hire Tom Skelton to do all the original lighting for the Theatre. Although Skelton lived part of each year in the Canton/Canal Fulton area, his reputation had been made in New York City, primarily as a lighting designer for dance, for which he had been nominated for a Tony Award. He had designed lights for the Joffrey Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet and Ohio Ballet.

Ultimately, Moore and McWhorter turned the grange into a seventy-five seat theater, which they named Theatre 8:15 and Friends. The name is a reference to the fact that in the 1950s, Broadway shows started at 8:15. The company was set up as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, charitable organization dedicated to nurturing and showcasing area talent of all ages. The Articles of Incorporation for Theatre 8:15 state:

The purpose is to educate and showcase children and young adults from the Canton and Greater Akron Area, in the disciplines of the performing arts i.e. Vocal (singing), Dance and Drama, and to make a significant contribution to the enrichment of live theatre. (Articles of Incorporation)

From the start, Theatre 8:15 was dependent on volunteers for a variety of jobs such as stage management, concessions salespeople, lighting and sound design and operation, as well as for the construction and painting of scenery. Six productions were staged every year. Five were family oriented and one show was for “adults only.” High school students from area schools such as Green, Coventry, Jackson, Springfield, Canton McKinley and Firestone High School, as well as students from colleges and universities such as The University of Akron, Ashland, Ohio State, and Kent State, performed in the Theatre.

The Theatre opened its doors to the public in April of 1993, with a production of Grease. Moore was the choreographer for this production, a role he always filled.
Occasionally, he performed as well. The next production was *Cabaret*, choreographed by Gary Thomas, who was also the jazz teacher at the Dance Centre. This production was staged again in 1999. Other musical productions mounted over the years included: *Bye Bye Birdie* (‘94), *Cinderella* (‘95), *Fame* (‘95), *Oliver* (‘96), and *Annie* (‘97).

Each season, Moore and McWhorter did two “Broadway” shows, but they also produced shows that used texts they created to incorporate well-known popular music and choreography. They called them “Rock Productions.” These shows included *Passion* (96), *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (97), *WYZARD – the Dark Side of Oz* (98), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (99).

Some of the other musicals performances at Theatre 8:15 were variety shows. All but one of these shows was still done as part of the company’s repertoire until 2011. The *Rocky Halloween Show*, mounted in 1995, uses excerpts from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Phantom*, and Edgar Allen Poe’s poems and stories. The *Haunted Theatre* (1997) was a version of the *Rocky Halloween Show*. This production consists of a variety of musical numbers. Some of the other variety shows were *Broadway Kids…Rock!*, which was changed to the *Best of Broadway*, and the *Jingle Bell Follies* (1993).

Moore created other programs for Theatre 8:15, including “Broadway Kids,” a performing arts training program for children, introduced in 1998. Moore also provided a hands-on stage technique class that took children through the production process from the audition to the final bow. He initiated a sponsorship program to make it possible to provide scholarships for children interested in the arts but unable to pay for classes. He
started by raising money for shoes, costumes, transportation, and classes. His plan then was to raise enough money to offer scholarships to talented students. A panel of dance and theatre teachers would hold auditions and identify students for scholarships. Unfortunately, this program never came to fruition.

On August 28, 1998, after purchasing four acres of land, McWhorter and Moore moved their dance studio from Canal Fulton to Green, Ohio, within walking distance of the Theatre. A new vision emerged, which included a 500 seat outdoor amphitheatre with a 2000 square foot stage. The amphitheatre was inspired by Blossom Music Center, with the audience sitting on the open field, watching the productions. Construction was planned for the spring of 2000. Moore was now the artistic director for both Theatre 8:15 and the Dance Centre. McWhorter became the producer of all the productions at the Theatre.

In 2000, the Theatre mounted a show called *Noah*, a production written by Green resident Kathleen Conrad. She was not sure Moore would be interested in her musical. He was interested and decided to direct it. The show evolved around the biblical story of Noah’s Ark. It opened on June 10, 2000. This would be the last show for Moore.

Unfortunately, Moore’s health began to deteriorate from his old dance injuries and from his growing dependence on drugs and alcohol. On the morning of June 14, 2000, Richard Reed Moore was found unresponsive in his home in Massillon. Richard died that morning in his home at the age of forty-nine. He did not have a will, which left McWhorter in a predicament. Not only had he lost his life-long friend, but now he had to buy Moore’s share of the Dance Centre and Theatre from Moore’s family who
“inherited” it. This put a financial strain on McWhorter that would continue to challenge him into the future.

**Longevity**

At the time of Moore’s death, all seventy-five seats at Theatre 8:15 were generally sold out for each performance. The company continued to produce four variety shows a year. Guest directors were brought in to mount the shows. Admission ranged from ten to fifteen dollars a ticket. These variety shows still brought in spectators from all ages and areas of Ohio. Cast members ranged in age from six to adults. The family orientation and great variety of arts incorporated into productions satisfied all tastes for the arts and entertainment.

With no paid staff, Theatre 8:15 continued, as it had in the past, to rely heavily on the volunteers. Over the years, a dedicated and dependable group of volunteers had been created. The parents offered their time and services to see that the shows ran smoothly. Family members provided help with painting, maintenance, web design, cleaning, set design, cleaning and sometimes even choreography, writing and directing. The Theatre enjoyed a “family” feeling in which everyone worked together.

The activities in the Theatre 8:15 space were not limited to in-house productions. Outside arts organizations would sometimes use the Theatre to host performances or events. Particularly welcomed were such things as workshops for new plays, performances of home-school choirs, and local magic shows. These activities were in keeping with the mission to be a cultural center for the residents of the area. Theatre 8:15 also began helping with summer programs in the Green area by giving acting, drama and
dance classes through The City of Green Parks and Recreation. Working with children in the community helped bring new participants into the educational classes offered at the Theatre.

Over the past decade, the Theatre has undergone changes that indicate that it is advisable to reevaluate its organizational objectives. One way to assess the mission of Theatre 8:15 and its operations in regards to a changing environment is to perform what it commonly called a SWOT analysis. This kind of analysis evaluates the internal Strengths and Weaknesses of the organization, as well as an external evaluation of Opportunities and Weaknesses, which may affect its ultimate success.
CHAPTER II

A SWOT ANALYSIS OF THEATRE 8:15

The history of Theatre 8:15 demonstrates the positive and valuable experiences that such an organization can have on a community. Richard Moore started with a defined goal for his nonprofit organization; however, upon his death, the organization seemed to lose some of its focus. Continuing analysis and strategic planning is important for growth and success in any organization, particularly in times of major transitions. At these points, the mission should be revisited and clear objectives identified to determine how to maintain organizational integrity.

The first two elements of a strategic SWOT analysis involve the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the organization itself. It is internally focused and creates a snapshot of those elements at a specific point in time. The subjects of this analysis may include such concrete elements as facilities, identifiable audiences, a donor base, or a core of volunteers. The analysis should also include evaluation of such non-tangible elements as leaderships, public perception, staff effectiveness, and organizational morale. The final two elements of a SWOT analysis examine the environment in which the organization exists. Unlike the snapshot developed by the internal study, an analysis of opportunities and threats is more effective in discovering trends that will affect the future development of a successful organization. Every healthy entity is marked by its ability to
adapt to change and to anticipate and take advantages opportunities that may arise. These may include identifying or developing a specific niche and keeping ahead of current or emerging competition for that niche. It also may include responding to environmental factors such as changes in economic conditions, public taste and expectations, or developing technology. The following SWOT analysis for Theatre 8:15 will identify the potential of the organization to continue to thrive.
CHAPTER III  
STRENGTHS

Location

Green, Ohio is located in the southern part of Summit County. Green is a booming city, growing in population about 3,500 people every ten years. There is a continued increase in development of housing and businesses. Today, Green has over 25,500 residences with approximately 6,400 families. The median household income is $64,000. There are more than 1,200 businesses. The largest of these employers are Diebold, Fed Ex, Harry Londons and the Akron Canton Airport. (cityofgreen.org)

Theatre 8:15 is located on a route 241/Massillon Road which runs through the city of Green, Ohio. The Theatre is near all of the schools and many of the housing allotments, making it accessible to both participants and audiences. The Theatre also is centrally located approximately fifteen minutes from both Akron in Summit County and Canton in Stark County.

Staff

Over the years, staff and directors have been selected that have developed regional followings. For instance, Nate Smith who directed two shows at the Theatre grew up in the dance studio affiliated with the Theatre. Prior to moving to California in 2006, he had danced in almost every production and became a local favorite. Diane Mehok, who
taught Broadway-style classes at the Theatre and directed a show called *Back to Broadway*, a mixture of Broadway tunes with choreography reflecting that Broadway style, also developed a loyal following. Kimberly Lawver took up the responsibilities Smith left behind, bringing with her expertise in all forms of dance, and arts administration, as well as a love for Theater. When she became Artistic Director of both the Dance Centre and the Theatre, she was able to promote productions and build the casts. The children and their parents in the Green area who have participated have a great devotion to these directors.

Theatre 8:15 has had some well-respected musical and vocal directors. Barry Busse, who has performed in over eighty roles, twenty-five concert works, 800 performances in fifty-seven opera houses, and created seven world premieres, taught voice lessons at the Theatre. Mr. Busse retired from Theatre 8:15 approximately five years ago. Holly Robey brought in home school children, using the Theatre during the day. She also produced some mini Broadway musicals. Ms Robey was the musical director for years under Moore.

**Theatre Dance Centre**

Theatre 8:15 traditionally has been connected to the Dance Centre. Many of the students who have danced at Theatre Dance Centre became involved with the Theatre. The children who came to the Theatre to perform often become friends with the students from Dance Centre. The Dance Centre also helped support the Theatre financially by helping pay for such things as trash and other miscellaneous bills. Apparently, it also
contributed to mortgage payments. The financial connection between the two organizations was complex and hugely advantageous to Theatre 8:15.

**Perception**

There is a strong sense of community throughout Green as a whole. Theatre 8:15 has been well integrated into the community and has been perceived as a place children and parents can share experiences. Families involved in the Theatre have held a positive perception towards the organization. The Theatre felt like home for many.

There is also an emotional perception due to the Theatre’s history. For over a decade, some of the same families that were involved when Moore was Artistic Director are still involved. Experiences in the Theatre were positive and fond memories continue to be shared. With the success of relationship building, many in the community felt that if the Theatre were to close there would be a loss of “family.”
CHAPTER IV

WEAKNESSES

Organizational Structure

The two primary responsibilities of a non-profit organization are to serve the public in regards to its mission, and to be financially viable (Wolf 19). In order to receive 501(c)(3) charitable tax status, a non-profit must have a unique, stated mission that establishes its commitment to the public service. The board of directors, which in Ohio must consist of at least three members, has an ethical and legal responsibility to see that the mission is carried out by the professional staff in daily operations.

Other responsibilities of a board of directors include making sure that the organization is in compliance with all laws related to charitable corporations. These laws can briefly be summarized by the concept of a series of duties. The duty of care requires that directors must act in good faith on behalf of the mission of the organization they serve. Daniel Kurtz states in his book Board Liability that “good faith,” which is synonymous with duty of care, refers to the responsibility of a director to guide participation on a non-profit board by exercising “honesty of intentions, openness and fair dealing” (Kurtz 25). The duty of care, which demands that board members exercise “due diligence” in the execution of their responsibilities, does not require extraordinary knowledge; but it does require a director to use “care that an ordinarily prudent person would exercise in a like
position under similar circumstances.” (Kurtz 23) The practical application of the duty of care by acting with due diligence includes such things as the following:

- reviewing, modifying, or clarifying the organization’s mission if necessary
- establishing, approving, and monitoring policies and procedures related to budgeting and fiscal control
- hiring, monitoring, and evaluating the work of senior staff members
- ensuring there is a procedure for board member succession
- making sure that the organization is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, or local laws
- making sure that no board member acts in any way that might be perceived as self-serving.
- serving as an advocate for the organization within the community

(Wolf 75)

In addition to these duties, boards of organizations with limited staff support also may find it necessary to be actively involved in day-to-day operations—particularly in the area of fundraising. As Kurtz points out, because of the wide variety of duties that board members must assume, or may assume, the statutes contained in non-profit law regarding board responsibilities are necessarily general (Kurtz 18).

When this SWOT analysis performed in 2011 was completed, Theatre 8:15 appeared to outside observers to be a viable organization. However, a close analysis of the internal structure of the organization illuminated some serious problems—problems that
ultimately threaten the future of the corporation, and may even present legal vulnerability.

When Theatre 8:15 applied for non-profit status with the state of Ohio in 1997, the Articles of Incorporation listed the required number of three board members as being the owner of the building, Fred McWhorter, the Artistic Director, Richard Moore and Fred McWhorter’s sibling, Robert McWhorter. There is no record of any additional board members; and, in fact no new board members have been named in spite of the fact that Richard Moore, passed away in 2001. Since that time, there has been a board of two.

There is no evidence, either by published agendas or by approved minutes that board meetings have been held on a regular basis. Without this evidence it is impossible to be sure that due diligence, even as generally as it is described by law, is being met. In order to avoid being perceived or being proved of negligence, directors must participate actively in the work of the organization by seeking information as needs present, attending regular board meetings, and maintaining documentation of those meetings.

Another issue of concern is that it appears the policies outlined in the original bylaws, are being ignored. Bylaws, required for non-profit incorporation, outline operational policies and procedures. Particularly important are procedures that ensure proper fiduciary controls. The bylaws of Theatre 8:15 were written in 1998, but have never been updated. Directors and officers are charged with exercising the “duty of loyalty,” which demands that they act in the best interest of the organization and should avoid using their positions to benefit themselves. They can and should not use their position for their own personal or pecuniary gain, or for a third party’s financial gain. Directors have a
fiduciary obligation not to use the organization’s money for personal use. When these bylaws are not followed, or perhaps need to be amended to suit current situations, the board of directors puts itself in jeopardy.

There appears to be a need to examine and possibly amend bylaws to respond to changes in the organization or changes in the environment. As Wolf points out, “if [board members] approve major decisions, involving the corporation’s funds without soliciting any background financial information, or if they engage in any illegal financial activity,” they have not exercised due-diligence (Wolf 76). Because the board of directors of Theatre 8:15 consists of only two people, a number which does not meet state requirements, the mission of the organization is essentially in the hands of one person. When creating a plan of action, the producer/owner is making all decisions. New programs are discussed, but only the owner can approve these new programs.

Theatre 8:15 seems to have little transparency. This situation, again, could be remedied by the development of a fully functional board of directors. The business of non-profit organizations as reflected in financial statements must be available to the public at large. This provision is designed to assure that the organization is functioning in compliance with laws—a function referred to as the “duty-of-obedience.”

Issues which might arise would be the inability to provide evidence of broad community support required to be eligible to maintain non-profit status. The IRS demands that ongoing fundraising activities from the general public be documented, and that no individual source of contribution exceed 2% of the total contributed income over a four year period. The exception to this rule is that contributions from public
foundations or government agencies count *de facto* as “broad support.” The sale of services or programs is not accepted as public support. Theatre 8:15 needs to be able to demonstrate broad based support.

Another issue which might be questioned is whether contributions given by donors who designate their gifts be used for specific purposes are being appropriately used. A designated gift used for purposes other than those for which it was given opens the organization to a loss of credibility at the least, a legal suit at most. All issues related to the solicitation of gifts, the documentation of the amounts relative to tax advantages to the donor, and the ultimate use of designated gifts should be documented for the protection donors as well as for the protection of the organization and its board members.

It appears that Theatre 8:15 has not and does not have a plan for systematic generation of contributed funds. Member donations are usually in the form of a check and the donor gets free tickets to a show and is able to deduct the value of the gift as a tax deduction. No member is informed of where that money goes. There are examples of donors who contributed to a specific project only to find that the project never came to fruition. This situation has had an impact on the credibility of the organization, and could result in legal action. One fundraising event has been held in five years. However, again, the projects for which the money was being raised are still projects in waiting.

In other potential areas of fundraising, it appears that there have been no corporate sponsorships solicited, nor has there been any effort to apply for foundation grants. This is not surprising considering the very high degree of transparency and proof of fiscal
responsibility required by foundations—proof which Theatre 8:15 could not provide at this time.

There is no systematic reporting or inventory in place at Theatre 8:15. Records of expenditures and receipts are not kept. It appears that box office receipts are being used to make mortgage payments on the building that houses Theatre 8:15, however this building is not owned by the corporation, it is owned by the president of the board of directors. If this is true, it places that person in serious legal jeopardy. The misappropriation of funds, co-mingling of corporate and personal finances by trustees is a breach of loyalty. A breach of this duty is far more critical than a breach of care. Written policies should be in place to eliminate the possibility of self-dealing. Directors are responsible for ensuring that the corporation abides by all conditions set forth by the Internal Revenue Code.

Theatre 8:15 is vulnerable on a wide variety of fronts. There are apparent breaches of care, loyalty, and obedience; and directors and officers can be sued if there is a breach of one or all of the three duties. “Limited liability” means that the organization will be liable for its own acts. No one person can be sued unless they fail in exhibiting “such care as an ordinary prudent person in a like position would use under similar circumstances,” there is a conflict of interest, or gross negligence. Generally, directors are not held liable for bad financial decisions, assuming those decisions were made based on reasonable information; but they cannot use the organization property for personal use, take advantage of the organization’s funds at the expense of the corporation, or not disclose information about self-dealings. Directors normally are not responsible for the
debts of an organization or any breach in contracts; however, limited liability is predicated on adherence to the various duties outlined.

When a director has directly participated in wrongdoing, like illegal or fraudulent activities, they are held accountable. “Someone who commits or directs a criminal act is subject to prosecution for the consequences of that action” (Kurtz 98).

Facility

Theatre 8:15 is small building which can accommodate seventy-five patrons. Public buildings are subject to a variety of building codes related to safety and accessibility. There is, however, some leeway in enforcing those codes in older buildings. These buildings may be “grandfathered,” which means they may be granted an exemption because they were constructed under a different set of standards. Grandfathering allows current business or property owners to continue to operating under previous laws (wisegeek.com). This exemption benefits those who would face debilitation financial hardship to meet new regulations. An example of a financial hardship would be an exemption from installing a modern sprinkler system, because the installation would be too expensive or difficult. If a property is sold, the new owners may be responsible for meeting current city or county standards.

By any standards, Theatre 8:15 is in need of updating and dealing with deferred maintenance. For instance, the Ohio Fire Code has minimum standards for safeguarding life and property from fire and explosion (Ohio administrative code 1301:7-7-01). These standards state that storage and structures must be safe from fire or explosion. Theatre 8:15 is exempt from the modern sprinkler system laws listed in the current fire safety
codes because putting them in would cause a hardship on the business. However, by law the Theatre is supposed to have four fire extinguishers, which must be replaced once a year. By law, the Theatre is supposed to have no fewer than four working fire extinguishers. Currently, there is no regular policy about checking that the extinguishers are in working order.

There are also building codes that establish legal occupancy and accessibility. The law requires that there must be emergency exit signs that stay lit when there is loss of power. The Theatre has these exit signs, but there is no lighting on either floor to help with getting to these exits. When entering the facility through a rear entrance, there is no way to turn on lights without crossing to the other side of the building. This makes for hazardous conditions for anyone entering the building from that level. Steps leading to restrooms and the concession stand are in need of repair and present a negligent danger.

Individuals with a disability, by law, are to have the same opportunities to participate in activities, services, and programs offered to the public. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sets these regulations, although these standards are also flexible when it comes to old buildings. Some of these issues are funding for facilities that are in need of architectural changes, undue hardships on an institution, and removal of barriers both tangible and psychological.

The ADA allows organizations to make “reasonable” changes that would not alter the operation of the business or have the organization make changes they could not afford. An example of an undue hardship on an institution may be the widening of all doorways to accommodate wheelchair or walker access.
Theatre 8:15 has two floors, with the stage located on the second floor. To reach the stage, one must climb a set of stairs from either the front door or back door entrances. The steps have two sharp turns to reach the second level, and are not wide enough to accommodate a chair ramp. Other barriers include narrow doors and aisles. In 2010, the city of Green decided to widen Massillon Road, including the section that passes in front of Theatre 8:15. The widening of the road has left little area in front of the building where the public enters removing a “drop off” area for parents or participants, creating a real danger of cars pulling in very close to the front of the building. A request for a fire zone to be designated in front of the building was rejected.

Stopping in front of the building and trying to enter the parking lot obstructs traffic on Massillon Rd. Parents are naturally anxious to drop off their children at the front door. If they do this, they are literally in the line of traffic and cars have to wait or go around them. Parents can drop off their children at the back of the building, but with as many as fifty people in a cast, there is a lot of traffic going in and out of a single car driveway.

When it rains excessively, the ground water outside of the Theatre leads to over flow of the septic tank. The ground becomes saturated and cannot absorb the excess water fast enough. This causes the system to overflow and the bathrooms to become unusable in the Theatre. This situation obviously affects patrons as well as performers. In the past, the run off has drained into the Theatre causing flooding in the downstairs area. Theatre 8:15 would definitely benefit from the new sewer system.

Green has a chapter 648 in the Ohio Code of Ordinances that is about peace disturbances. The Theatre sits between two houses. During the summer, the windows
are open to keep air circulating throughout the building. Neighbors have complained in the past about the noise coming from the building. Law enforcement has been involved in “keeping the peace.” Complaints of this matter could lead to a misdemeanor of the fourth degree.

Other minor issues in the Theatre are outdated or broken equipment. The lights that are used for the production of the shows were put in 1993. As time has gone on, it is not certain if this equipment has been updated or meets fire code. One organization was going to donate heating and air conditioning to the theatre, but backed out when they started to take a look at the building and realized that codes were outdated.

The parking lot is made of gravel and has many potholes that are in need of repair. There is no runoff for rainwater or melting snow causing the lot to always seem flooded and/or muddy due to bad weather. Icy walks cause patrons to fall on their way into and out of the building. The lights on the outside of the building do not always work, so patrons have to leave the building to get to their cars in the dark. Fender benders are not uncommon before and after the shows due to lack of space to move cars around the parking area.

Staff

At this time, Theatre 8:15 has no paid professional staff. All tasks are performed by unpaid volunteers who run the concession stand, sell tickets, make phone calls, design and make costumes, design the programs and run box office at show time. The very nature of volunteers suggests that there is a high turnover of unpaid “staff.” The instability of the organization and lack of leadership has resulted in the fact that there is
no systematic recruitment effort to develop a dependable and knowledgeable group of volunteers.

The single paid employees are guest directors who receive a specific amount per production. The conditions of employment are not laid out in a legal contract, increasing the chances of misunderstanding and unhappiness. The problem of not having a dependable production team makes this job much more difficult than it should be. Critical time that should be devoted to creating a good product and a good experience for the performers is spent simply trying to get the curtain up on opening night. In many cases, the cost of producing the shows must come out of the director’s salary.

**Marketing**

Theatre 8:15 does not have the financial or manpower capacity of creating a marketing plan. With no marketing, the community has little or no knowledge of up and coming shows or the methods available to purchase tickets. With no paid staff, it is almost impossible to take advantages of resources in the community that could be used to promote the Theatre. As building audiences is the first step in building contributors, there is a limited expectation of building a meaningful donor base.

Unfortunately the reputation of Theatre 8:15, once a center of community arts activity and civic pride has diminished over the years. At this point, the number of productions has been reduced, and the all-important volunteer base has diminished. The perception of the organization among long-standing stakeholders is that without serious adjustments to the way the organization is run, there is very little future.
Founders Syndrome

Nonprofits offer vitality to our communities. As nonprofits develop over the course of time, they face organizational change. One of the most critical moments in the life of any organization is the point at which a person with a great idea must face the fact that without building an infrastructure and delegating responsibilities, the organization cannot thrive. In fact, change is inevitable and therefore should be strategically managed. When there is uncontrolled change, it is usually “a consequence of nonprofit managers’ inability to resolve problems effectively.” (Block 4)

In the theory of non-profit management, the difficulty in managing this institutional evolution is often referred to as Founder Syndrome. The identification of the founder with the organization he or she has founded makes it difficult to give up control, limiting the organization’s success to what one person can accomplish, and making it impossible to set up an organization that can withstand crisis or prepare for change. Block says that, “Founders tend to dominate and control the direction of the organization they started” (Block 136). This is particularly true when an effective board is not in a leadership position. Theatre 8:15 appears to be the victim of this very common circumstance.
CHAPTER V
OPPORTUNITIES

Community Impact

One of the key opportunities that Theatre 8:15 can capitalize on is the social impact that it once had on the community. Although it is considered the "best kept secret in Green," many people in the community are aware of its presence and have become involved in the shows produced there, either as spectators or cast members. The Theatre has provided the community with a venue in which to perform. Being the focus of an artistic community has been the source of pride and enriched lives.

A creative community provides an opportunity to diversify peer groups, bringing families from Green and surrounding counties together in a unique way. It also provides opportunities for children to develop self-esteem and self-confidence through participation and achievement in the arts. The children gain knowledge of social skills through the ability to collaborate with others, both children and adults. There are certain responsibilities they learn by working with a group or choreographers. Those responsibilities include being on time and prepared to teach or be taught depending on their role that day. They also learn to process material quickly and are willing to take risks to achieve goals they may have thought beyond them. These life skills are in
addition to the specific techniques they learn in preparation for production—skills such as
dance, acting, choreography, and music selection to name the most obvious.

The activities provided by organizations such as Theatre 8:15 also provide alternatives
to high-risk behaviors, such as violence, drug abuse, dropping out of school and/or
antisocial behaviors. There is an initiative to counteract negative impulses. Bullying is a
recognized problem in schools today, yet children who are involved in activities such as
those for which Theatre 8:15 has been known are providing a safe place/meeting place
where they can bond with others who have the same interests. Participation in theatre
creates a place where they are free to develop self-expression through the arts. It has
provided an outlet for self-expression without discrimination. Self-realization gives these
children social skills and the ability to control impulses and moods, and to develop
empathy and understanding of the emotions of others and social skills.

Another unique opportunity Theatre 8:15 has is to provide multigenerational activities.
Not only can families dance, act and sing together, but they sew costumes, work
backstage, work in the dressing rooms, and help with set design. Time spent together as
a family unit bonds family members. The value of developing this parent/child
relationship is that it is modeling instead of instructing. Parents and children work
together on an equal level and learn from one another. Theatre 8:15 has the opportunity
to be an important element in the artistic/cultural life of Green, Ohio.

Models for collaboration

Currently, Theatre 8:15 is the only community theatre in the Green area. The Theatre
has its own nitch and little competition since it deals with children’s variety shows. The
socialization that comes with being a part of the Theatre enriches the lives of the people in the community. There are approximately 26,000 people living in Green and the community continues to grow. Two new hospitals, Summa and Akron General are being built on Massillon Road. This will bring in more families to the area.

Models of collaboration exist to reach out to all those people and Theatre 8:15 can make use of all of them. For instance, Green has two local newspapers, *The Suburbanite* and the *Green Leader*. Both papers reach out to area communities including Coventry, Hartville, Jackson, Lake, Lakemore, Manchester and Springfield along with Green. One reporter in particular has written many stories on the shows at Theatre 8:15.

There is also the Green Community Television, which is a government and educational access channel found on channel 16. A local “Our Town” cable show produced every few months and airs up to three weeks provides an additional media outlet for local information.

The “Our Town” newsletter is a quarterly newsletter sent to all the residents in Green. This newsletter shows upcoming events, including dates, times and costs. This newsletter is also sent via web to anyone who signs up. Information can also be found on the Theatre 8:15 website and Theatre Dance Centre website.

**Community Awareness**

Community awareness has been important in the growth of Theatre 8:15. The opinion makers in the community have been a big support. There is possibility of collaboration with local businesses. Theatre 8:15 has provided entertainment for the opening celebrations of new businesses in Green.
There are many performing arts events in the community. Kidz Day and Art-a-polooza are two of the more popular. There may be community organizations, such as day care facilities, retirement homes and the local YMCA looking for programming. Green Parks and Recreation has programs during the summer that involve many different type of learning activities.
CHAPTER VI
THREATS

City Improvements

The city of Green has enjoyed a period of substantial growth in recent years. With the development of commercial enterprises, there is a need for land on which to build. The land on which Theatre 8:15 and the Dance Centre reside are both prime retail spaces. Many landowners around the studio are selling or are considering selling their properties to make room for new businesses. This situation creates a threat for Theatre 8:15 because its property does not include the parking lot used by patrons. The sale of that land would create a major deterrent to both participation in program, and attending performances. The other spaces across the street from the Theatre that have been used for audience parking is becoming less available as new business come in and reserve the use of those spots for their customers.

The expansion of the Green business district also involves the building of a new sewer system. Although the Green City Planner has indicated that at this time residential and business owners are not required to tie into the new system, there is certainly a desire that sewer upgrades be made as comprehensive as possible. The cost of making these improvements is substantial, but it is believed that it would ultimately be offset by the
intensity of use. If business’s opt out of being involved with this plan and their onsite system fails, the EPA, which can mandate participation, may get involved. At this time Theatre 8:15 has not indicated that it will participate.

New Theatres

In recent years, two competitive theatres have started up in the area. The directors of each of these theatres were at one time directors at Theatre 8:15. The Jackson Community Theatre (JCT), established by Holly Robey in 2009, can be found not far away in Canton, Ohio. Ms. Robey has twenty-five years of experience in the theatre business. JCT provides community programming that focuses on youth, and, includes acting classes, piano lessons, voice lessons, home school classes, and quarterly theatre productions.

Two other former directors at Theatre 8:15 have co-founded an organization called Spotlight Theatre Company (STC). STC provides an outlet for both children and adults to perform in theatre productions, using local facilities to rehearse and performing in local schools. The work they do is similar to what Theatre 8:15 has been doing; although, not having a home facility, they have added the touring component. They put on approximately three and four shows a year. A substantial number of people who had been involved in Theatre 8:15 are now involved in Spotlight productions.

Current Economic Climate

The economic challenges the United States has faced since 2008 have had a profound effect on all non-profit arts organizations. Unemployment has curtailed discretionary spending. The typical American consumer may prefer to stay at home and get their
entertainment from television or the internet, rather than spending money on a ticket for a live performance. (Boggs)

According to the Hyton Performing Arts Center, ticket sales make up approximately 50-60% of funding for community theatres. (Sharp) The remainder of the money must be obtained through sources such as individual donors, corporate sponsorships, or foundation grants. However, businesses and foundations have hit hard economically as well, and competition for charitable dollars is great. Non-profit arts organizations that operate on a small undependable income source are particularly at risk. Theatre 8:15 falls into that category. Without money to cover costumes, set design, programming, or possible royalties, the show simply cannot go on. Theatre 8:15 is one of those struggling community arts organizations.

Without acknowledging a changing environment, and adjusting the organization to anticipate the implications of threats ahead, there is little hope for this organization to thrive as a community theatre in Green, Ohio.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Theatre 8:15 traditionally has had a strong relationship with the Green, Ohio community—both as an organization that provides opportunities to be involved in creating performances, and in terms for providing entertainment for a wide variety of audiences. Because of those relationships, the Theatre has remained an active non-profit for over ten years. Richard Moore started out with a dream and he had many people who wanted to make his dream come true, and the loyalty of volunteers over the years has been extraordinary.

An analysis of the Theatre at this time in its history acknowledges the fondness the community has had for the facility and for its programming. Unfortunately may of its strengths come from its history rather than its present circumstance. A major weakness is Theatre 8:15’s lack of institutional structure. It lacks a board structure and a commitment to demonstrating broad community support that makes it appear to be more of a hobby than a functioning non-profit corporation. This situation, which has potential legal ramification in regards to the organization’s 501(c)(3) status, appears to have frustrated the people who have kept it alive, and ultimately threatens it future.

The analysis of the environment in which Theatre 8:15 exists presents a picture of serious threats. Although it is possible to approach dealing with threats as opportunities
to make strategic decisions and take actions to avoid crisis, this option does not seem to be the case in this situation. Without an active board, aggressive and systematic fundraising efforts, and the exploration of community collaborations, the threats this organization faces appear to be insurmountable.

It is always difficult to see an arts organization close its doors, but there comes a time when that may be the logical course of action. Without a complete alteration in leadership and management styles, and an aggressive process of strategic planning based on realistic evaluations of the current and anticipated circumstances of the organization, perhaps it is time for Theatre 8:15 to close its doors.
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