MUSICAL THEATRE IN THE MOUNTAINS:
AN EXAMINATION OF WEST VIRGINIA PUBLIC THEATRE’S HISTORY,
MISSION, PRACTICES, AND COMMUNITY IMPACT.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which a professional theatre can impact its community and to provide useful suggestions for young producers hoping to start their own theatre. By using the West Virginia Public Theatre as a case study and by examining its three-part mission (to entertain, to educate, and to improve the quality of life), this study highlights both effective and ineffectual practices conducted by the theatre, its administration, and its staff to ascertain the efficacy of that mission. Furthermore, the numerous voices stemming from my personal interviews with a cross-section of the community have served as a principal source of data from which to analyze the theatre’s impact on the blue-collar, sports-focused society of North Central West Virginia.

West Virginia Public Theatre was established in 1985 and since has grown to be a reputable summer stock company. Modeled on the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, West Virginia Public Theatre has developed from a small, unknown theatre performing in a parking lot tent to a well-respected summer stock theatre with aspirations of further developing into a regional company. By investigating the efficacy of the theatre’s attempt to satisfy its three-fold mission through the guiding lens of Jill Dolan’s theories of “utopic performance,” I have gleaned several considerations for burgeoning producers to contemplate as they attempt to launch a new theatre company or to grow an already established company. These considerations, meant to be suggestions assembled from the analysis of my case study, will provide touchstones for fledgling companies to contemplate as they develop their own missions and attempt to impact their own communities.
Dedicated to my mother, Linda S. Sollish, for her never-ending love and support.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Historian Joseph Wesley Ziegler writes:

The rise of regional companies depends upon the concept of theatre as an institution rather than as the entrepreneurial phenomenon that it is on Broadway [...] the theatre institution is eleemosynary and nonprofit [...] While proud and independent, the theatre as an institution is technically a charity. This status places upon it a responsibility to serve the public, which it does not only by presenting plays of merit but also by allying its program with those of the schools and other institutions of the community. (2)

Situating itself within this concise definition of what Ziegler calls the “Revolution of Regional Theatre,” West Virginia Public Theatre was established in 1985 as a summer stock theatre, but has grown to be a highly respected resident stock company in the industry. Presently, the theatre belongs to the Council of Resident Stock Theatres (C.O.R.S.T.) and operates under a C.O.R.S.T. contract with both the Actor’s Equity Association (AEA) and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC). However, the company is currently in a period of transition as it moves into a new venue and attempts to establish itself as a year-round regional company with the addition of productions mounted in the fall and winter months. This is indicative of a trend that several other theatres have followed including the Barter Theatre in Virginia and Georgia Shakespeare.

The theatre does not only boast that it is the state’s “only professional musical theatre” bringing in to its facility some of the most sought after theatrical artists in the country, but also serves—as articulated in its charter—to impact its community through entertainment, education, and through improving the quality of life for its community residents. Utilizing Jill Dolan’s
ideals of “utopic performance” as a guiding lens, I will examine West Virginia Public Theatre as a case study to illuminate ways in which a regional/stock theatre company can impact its community. Furthermore, I will highlight considerations learned from examining the practices of the West Virginia Public Theatre and its Executive Producer, Ron Iannone, to provide insights and considerations to assist would-be producers looking to start their own theatres.

Dolan, in *Utopia in Performance*, argues that “live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting imitations of a better world” (Dolan, “Utopia” 2). Dolan’s vision of a theatrical Arcadia throughout varied performance genres in both commercial and non-commercial venues in the United States provides hope that theatre can stimulate social awareness and the dream of a better world. Dolan’s concept of bringing people together to share experiences—creating community—is an essential aspect of my investigation of West Virginia Public Theatre. It is through this lens of optimism that Dolan examines and critiques “non-traditional” forms of theatre. However, her message is applicable to many theatrical endeavors: “being passionately and profoundly stirred in performance can be a transformative experience useful in other realms of social life. Being moved at the theater allows us to realize that such feeling is possible, even desirable, elsewhere” (Dolan, “Utopia” 15). It is through this call for theatre and performance to move its audience to awareness and change, as well as to be a central maker of both community and meaning, that my study will measure, utilizing West Virginia Public Theatre as a case study, the effectiveness of a more traditional, commercial theatre in its mission to entertain, educate, and to improve the overall quality of life within its community.
Ziegler writes:

the regional theatre phenomenon has been a major and determined attempt to spread American culture throughout the country and even more to create a new basis of theatre not dependent on Broadway. The purpose of decentralization has been less to spread the wealth than to triumph in an ideological war between the institutional theatre and the commercial theatre. Those in the forefront of the regional theatre movement see it as a way to strip Broadway of its power. The primary force of their crusade has been centrifugal. (4)

Theatre historian/theorist Scott Walters posits that the trend Ziegler describes in the early 1970s no longer exists and that the decentralization of American commercial theatre seems to be starting a reverse movement: American audiences are being pulled back to New York. On his website, Theatre Ideas, Walters writes: “entropy has robbed this centrifugal force of most of its energy, and the gravitational pull of Broadway (and its once rebellious but now equally tamed sibling, Off-Broadway) has reasserted itself.” However, as can be garnered from the numerous closings of once profitable productions on Broadway, Walters’ theories, which just a year ago may have been deemed accurate, are slowly losing credence. As a result the possibility of smaller, regional and stock theatres gaining patronage and funding seems likely. Economic exigencies also support this idea: more expensive gas, less travel, and fewer vacations would encourage people to seek more entertainment outlets closer to home.

Richard Florida posits the theories of the “creative class” through which he argues that in order for communities to thrive and develop economically, they must cultivate the “3T’s” of economic development: “Technology, Talent, and Tolerance” (249). By fostering the expansion of
of new technological endeavors and encouraging innovation in technology driven by talent (those members of the population with a bachelor’s degree or above), the “creative class” will grow. Moreover, Florida highlights the importance of tolerance of minorities in order to promote diversity in community. Florida examined what he calls the “Gay Index” and surmised that “gays have been subject to a particularly high level of discrimination. Attempts by gays to integrate into the mainstream of society have met substantial opposition. To some extent, homosexuality represents the last frontier of diversity in our society, and thus a place that welcomes the gay community welcomes all kinds of people” (256). Communities that encourage growth in the “3T’s” will also cultivate an arts scene desired by a diverse population, which will, in turn, continue to attract an influx of younger residents looking for cultural opportunities in their new homes. Accordingly, the trend of decentralization combined with Florida’s conceptual models of the “creative class,” create a direct correlation between the viability of producing regional theatre and the community’s inherent need (as posited by Florida) for an artistic outlet. These theories are vital to this study as I investigate the ways in which a professional theatre (West Virginia Public Theatre) contributes to its community and how, as a result, it continues to change and grow.

Due to the demands of the new “creative class” and the decline in both corporate and private sponsorship, theatres such as WVPT find themselves faced with a dilemma: produce shows that draw an audience or perish. In examining the history of both the theatre and the communities (to be defined in a later section of this chapter) it serves, I document the development of the theatre and various ways it has interfaced with its communities in its search for financial, artistic, and educational/social viability. Additionally, this historical exploration will examine justification for the theatre’s move toward regional status as a means to maintain a
community based artistic environment that entertains, educates, and improves the quality of life for its residents. In this chapter I will provide a brief history of the West Virginia Public Theatre, provide a geographical context for the theatre’s community, and then state the principal questions of the study and the process through which I will investigate those questions.

**Brief History of West Virginia Public Theatre**

Upon the shoulders of Founding Executive Producer and Artistic Director, Ron Iannone, West Virginia Public Theatre began in a tent as many summer stock theatres do. In 1985, after one year of serving as an apprentice to Bill Thunhurst, then producer of the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, Iannone opened the first summer season of what was called Lakeview Theatre in a tent in the parking lot of the former Sheraton Lakeview Resort and Conference Center approximately eight miles from the Morgantown city center. Designed after the Pittsburgh CLO model, this first season consisted of three musical revues each with a headlining Broadway/Hollywood star: Dean Jones, Judy Norton-Taylor, and Carol Lawrence. The total audience attendance for that inaugural season was two-thousand patrons over fifteen performances. Subsequent tent seasons over the next three years included more musical revues, fully-staged musicals, additional Broadway and Hollywood stars, and the first appearances of Iannone’s long-time friends and daytime soap opera stars Bill and Susan Seaforth Hayes, of *Days of Our Lives* fame.

In 1989, West Virginia University President Neil Bucklew noticed the importance of this new professional theatre in the area and sought to find it a new home away from the parking lot tent. Looking back, President Bucklew recalls that period of the theatre’s development: “It was clear that the time had come to think about a new location and home for the theatre (“Building”

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1 According to “Building on a Dream,” a brochure designed to attract sponsors and donors, “A large fan provided ‘air conditioning.’ Summer rains brought mud, and the actors, actresses, stage hands, and musicians nightly shared the spotlight with the biggest fluttering bugs West Virginia had to offer” (1).
3). That summer, the theatre moved into its new home: the West Virginia University Creative Arts Center and its two main performance spaces, the Concert Theatre (later renamed the Lyle B. Clay Concert Theatre) and the Studio Theatre (later renamed the Gladys B. Davis Theatre). No longer housed in the conference center parking lot, the theatre changed its name to West Virginia Public Theatre. Producer Iannone, with the encouragement of his board of directors, changed the theatre’s name because: “We wanted the theatre to be for all the people not just the elite. Diversity is the key: I wanted to share the art of musicals and drama with all segments of society. This meant not only for West Virginians, but for all people in the region” (Iannone, “Re: name”). That year the theatre produced a full summer season of musical theatre, a fall offering of the theatre’s first original musical concerning the area’s coal mining industry (Streets of Gold), and its first children’s theatre offering that winter. Since relocating, the theatre’s attendance has grown from that first summer’s audience of two-thousand to an annual audience of over twenty-five thousand.

Geographical Context: Morgantown, West Virginia

Morgantown, West Virginia is located in a rural area in the Appalachian Mountains with a population of approximately twenty-six thousand residents (not including twenty-eight thousand students when West Virginia University is in session). The nearest metropolitan area is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is located seventy miles to the North. The principal industries of this region are coal mining, engineering, pharmaceuticals, and education. The tourist trade has become more popular over the last decade as travelers have begun to notice the natural beauty of the West Virginia landscape. The area is a fast-growing region due to the ever-increasing development of technologically-based commerce and the continued growth of West

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2 Four musicals were presented. Please see Appendix A.
3 This attendance statistic is from the 2007 season.
Virginia University. This expansion helps to situate the area in Richard Florida’s model of municipal areas suitable for the rising “creative class.”

Morgantown also has an increasingly diverse (tolerant) population that continues to grow as West Virginia University and the technology quarter expand. The area is home to a large population of residents with Asian heritage, as well as a growing Muslim population. The community has also welcomed a growing gay population with a local alternative night club, Vice Versa (opening in the mid 1990s), as the social center of that segment of the population. The LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community is incredibly important to West Virginia Public Theatre as, traditionally, members of that community have been long-time supporters of the theatre and, in turn, WVPT has supported many LGBT owned businesses including the night club mentioned above. In fact, the owners of Vice Versa have been long-time patrons of the theatre and one of the owners has appeared onstage at WVPT. Anti-hate crime laws, domestic violence laws, the lack of laws concerning sodomy, and the existence of BiGLTM (West Virginia University’s student organization providing support and resources for members of the queer population both on and off campus), all serve as evidence that Morgantown is making strides to promote a healthy and tolerant community for alternate lifestyles. Furthermore, these trends are surprising given the rural nature of the greater Morgantown area and the noted conservative character of West Virginia. The trend toward tolerance is not recent as the area has been, in my experience, open to diverse populations. Consequently, through this increasing tolerant population, the Morgantown area continues to see a rise in its “creative class” as it is, indeed, fulfilling the “3T’s”, which Florida asserts is necessary for the growth of a “creative community.”
Despite this, the arts have not historically played a major part in the development of this area. Morgantown’s one vaudeville theatre (established in 1924), the Metropolitan, was turned into a movie house in the 1930s and remained so until the early 1990s when the space was renovated back to its former glory as a venue for theatre. The space has remained dark for the majority of the year, but, most recently, has begun to show signs of life with concerts, pageants, and performances of the local amateur children’s company. For many years the only organized arts institution—outside of West Virginia Public Theatre—resided in West Virginia University’s College of Creative Arts (a college consisting of three departments: Theatre, Music, and Art). Since the West Virginia Public Theatre was established, two new (amateur) theatre companies have emerged: the aforementioned children’s company (The Morgantown Theatre Company) and M.T. Pockets Theatre. Still, the arts scene in Morgantown is overshadowed by the more popular and lucrative spectator athletic events.

With such a lack of artistic prominence and opportunity in the Morgantown area, Iannone wanted to put the arts, specifically theatre, at the forefront of the area’s cultural landscape. He created his new endeavor with a strong foundation focusing on three primary tenets: to entertain, to educate, and to improve the quality of life of the region’s residents. Over the past twenty-six years, the impact of West Virginia Public Theatre cannot be underestimated: the community benefits from tourist and patron dollars (including, currently, well over one hundred tour buses annually) at local hotels, restaurants, and shops, as well as from service purchases (ninety percent of which are spent locally) for the theatre’s annual operating budget of over three and one-half million dollars. Additionally, the theatre strives to educate the young artists of the community in a number of ways: theatrical training (internships) alongside professional artists who have worked on Broadway and in Hollywood; annual children’s theatre productions that
reach students who, otherwise, would never see a live theatrical event; and touring productions with professional artists that attempt to promote social change. As West Virginia Public Theatre begins its twenty-sixth season in 2010, it remains dedicated to its foundational mission, but—like other regional/stock theatres in the United States—has a tough road ahead as it fights to remain an integral part of its surrounding region. This study will highlight both the positive and negative impacts that the theatre has had on its communities and, as a result, will uncover some of the reasons for the theatre’s present-day struggles.

Statement of the Problem and Key Questions

Utilizing West Virginia Public Theatre as a primary case study, this dissertation will delve into the impact that a regional/stock theatre company can have on its community in three major aspects: entertainment, education, and quality of life. West Virginia Public Theatre was founded on these three primary principles, which became its three-part mission:

1. To deeply entertain
2. To educate
3. To improve the quality of life of the residents of the region (Iannone, “Mar.”)

Through an investigation of how the theatre attempts to meet its mission, I will highlight ways it has fulfilled and ways it has fallen short of its stated mission in an attempt to provide considerations for future theatrical producers. The three central chapters of this dissertation will examine, in-depth, these three aspects of the theatre’s mission using Jill Dolan’s ideals of “utopic performance” as a framing lens. The key questions of my study are as follows:

- In what ways does the theatre “deeply entertain?”
- In what ways does the theatre “educate” its community?

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4 A working explanation of “utopic performance” in regard to this dissertation can be found beginning on page 14.
• How does the theatre attempt to “improve the quality of life” of the region’s residents?
• Is the theatre an integral part of the community and, if so, how can it flourish as a contributing member of the community? If not, how can the theatre change its practices to become a more respected member and steward of the community?
• What is the audience’s reception of the theatre and its productions?
• What lessons might a fledgling theatre producer learn through examining this theatre’s history and practices?
• How does the theatre promote the existence of Richard Florida’s “creative class?”
• Does the theatre encourage and/or provide what Jill Dolan terms “utopian performance?”

The primary source of my examination will come from first-hand accounts and opinions garnered from a cross-section of community residents, patrons, and employees of the theatre (both current and former). Secondary sources will include articles and reviews written about the theatre, the theatre’s own published materials, financial and historical archives, as well as published histories of comparative theatres and guiding lenses that will help frame the collected data.

Definition of Key Terms

It is important, at this juncture, to define two key terms that are integral to this study. The term “public” as in West Virginia Public Theatre, is the first to be defined. The theatre’s producer has stated that his aim in changing the name from Lakeview Theatre to West Virginia Public Theatre was to offer theatre to “all people.” Thus, it seems that “public” in this case may be simply defined as “open to all people.” However, as that theory is examined, this is not exactly the case. Many of the theatre’s offerings are not free and, thus, eliminate certain members of the population that cannot pay the admission price. This also speaks to the
challenge of balancing a desire to reach all people with the exigencies of financial viability that are faced by many theatres

Joseph Papp, founder of the New York Shakespeare Festival and the Public Theatre, perhaps the United States’ most renowned public theatre, had “persisted in a policy of a theater for all regardless of ability to pay” (Horn 7). Papp subsidized his public theatre through private and public donations and grants. However, despite this philanthropic vision of theatre for all, Papp ultimately had to give in to financial concerns and began to charge admission to the theatre, though the ticket prices were not as high as those of other professional New York theatres. After Papp left the Public Theatre, the mission changed from a goal of presenting theatre for all, to a dedication to “achieving artistic excellence while developing an American theater that is accessible and relevant to all people through productions of challenging new plays, musicals and innovative stagings of the classics” (Public Theatre.org). Thus, the theatre evolved from presenting for all to being relevant to all.

Similarly, another “public” theatre, the Pittsburgh Public Theater, began as a theatre for all, but has altered its mission to reflect the financial realities of presenting theatre in America. Their mission states:

The mission of Pittsburgh Public Theater is to provide artistically diverse theatrical experiences of the highest quality. Pittsburgh Public Theater also strives to serve, challenge, stimulate and entertain while operating in a fiscally responsible manner. The Public shares its resources with the community through education and outreach initiatives intended for a wide range of people with the goal of expanding and diversifying the audience while enriching the community. (Pittsburgh Public Theatre.org)
Pittsburgh Public Theater, though not directly inspired by, seemingly reflects both Papp’s initial vision and the necessities of a commercial theatre institution to exist in the present-day financial climate. It is important to note the similarity of the missions of these two public theatres in the region: to entertain, educate, and enrich the community (improve the quality of life), reflecting a trend for theatres that use that particular term in their titles.

With the discussion of “public” theatre, it is propitious to return to the work of Jill Dolan to understand why her theories provide an appropriate frame for this study and to help spur the discussion of a second important term. For Dolan, theatre has the potential to bring together a group of strangers for a common goal: to feel (Dolan, “Utopia” 59). This feeling can be of love, confusion, hate, emotional turmoil, anything inherently human. By bringing together this audience to feel, Dolan believes we create what Victor Turner called “communitas”: “the moments in a theater event or a ritual in which audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way” (Dolan 11). It is within this “communitas” that the ideals of the public theatre are brought to the forefront. Public theatres, as exemplified above, bring together the people of the community under a common bond—the theatre—which, as Dolan argues, “provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting imitations of a better world” (Dolan, “Utopia” 2). It is within the “public” theatres’ ability to bring together a community and then to offer either entertaining or educating programming (or both) to provide enrichment, that the connection between commercial theatre and utopic theatre exists.

Furthermore, it is through this idea of “communitas” that we can better understand the word “community.”
The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “community” as “a unified body of individuals,” “the people with common interests living in a particular area,” and “a group linked by a common policy.” While these explanations of the term would be sufficient for most uses, a further designation is necessary for this study. The notion of “community” is central to Benedict Anderson’s definition of “nation” in his seminal work Imagined Communities. He posits that all communities are imagined “as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Anderson continues to explain: “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). These nations and imagined communities, according to Anderson, are “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Of course, Anderson is actually theorizing about communities that join together to “die for such limited imaginings” (7), but his theories can certainly be used to describe smaller groups of people with, perhaps, less brutal goals in mind. Anderson’s imagined communities are not always material or geographic and, thus, help to define my use of the word “community” throughout this study. By using Anderson’s notions of “imagined” communities, I will be able to group certain individuals together into communities with like goals or interests, as well as into geographically based groupings.

The WVPT “community” is two-fold and, thus, the term can be used to define two distinct populations that intersect, at times, to serve a common goal. The first community (community A) is the population that is directly involved with the workings of the theatre itself: theatre artists, the board of directors, front of house staff, and administrative staff. This community also includes those who were directly involved with the theatre in years past. The members of this community would, metaphorically according to Anderson, “die” for the
common goal. In other words the community works together to achieve a particular aim: to produce theatrical productions that meet the theatre’s three-part mission. The second community (community B) that will be investigated in this study is the population that is affected by the theatre: the theatre patrons; businesses who receive an economic boost from dollars spent by the theatre and its patrons; West Virginia University faculty, staff, and students; and the travel industry. Thus, this community consists of a cross-section of the population bound together by Anderson’s “horizontal comradeship.” Although there are several distinct groups within “community B,” I have chosen to group them together to create a dichotomy of two distinct communities: one directly involved in the workings of the theatre and one directly affected by the workings of the theatre. These two imagined communities, therefore, are this study’s focus populations.

Methodology

This study will primarily employ the methodology of case study. Robert E. Stake, in his book *The Art of Case Study Research*, writes:

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case…We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (xi)

It is this methodology that will guide my investigation of the history of West Virginia Public Theatre and its operations. The theatre is the single case: the various components of the theatre and various ways those components impact the community are the contexts and the complexities. The various types of shows and the varied agendas and audiences they are designed to address are part of that complexity. In each chapter the investigation will support the larger goal of the
piece: to illuminate the issues in regard to my research questions focused on the impact the theatre has on its community. By using this one theatre as a case study, I will investigate the challenges of fulfilling a broad mission statement and creating a theatre, which serves its community in many ways. Finally, by utilizing Jill Dolan’s theories, I hope to examine how the theatre does or does not strive toward a utopia in its performance practices.

*Utopic Performance*

Jill Dolan, in her essay “Performance, Utopia, and the ‘Utopian Performative’” writes:

> People are drawn to attend live theatre and performance for [...] less tangible, more emotional, spiritual, or communitarian reasons [...] Audiences are compelled to gather with others, to see people perform live, hoping, perhaps, for moments of transformation that might let them reconsider and change the world outside the theatre, from its macro to its micro arrangements. Perhaps part of the desire to attend theatre and performance is to reach for something better, for new ideas about how to be and how to be with each other. I believe that theatre and performance can articulate a common future, one that’s more just and equitable, one in which we can all participate more equally, with more chances to live fully and contribute to the making of culture. (455-6)

This description of the utopian performance provides the lens for my research: audiences gathering to make community, becoming aware of the world, considering changes, and making culture. Utopia, according to Dolan, is not romantic, but rather inherently emotional and points us toward a better world; thus, it is also inherently political. Dolan also believes that theatre can be used as a tool to help promote awareness, as well as change:
I want to train my students to use performance as a tool for making the world better, to use performance to incite people to profound responses that shake their consciousness of themselves in the world… I don’t think we should expect anything less. Theatre remains, for me, a space of desire, of longing, of loss, in which I’m moved, by a gesture, a word, a glance, in which I’m startled by a confrontation with mortality… I go to theatre and performance to hear stories that order, for a moment, my incoherent longings, that engage the complexity of personal and cultural relationships, and that critique the assumptions of a social system I find sorely lacking. (Dolan, “Performance” 456)

Thus, for Dolan, theatre should do more than simply entertain: it should incite debate, deep reflection, an awakening of the consciousness, and, ultimately, change. Theatre can also provide hope and a sense of one’s place in his community, the world, and in history. Utopic theatre does not draw an audience in the traditional romantic notion, but rather the audience is drawn in to be shaken and challenged to think.

Dolan’s definition of utopic performance also provides a limitation for my research. As I use her theories to examine West Virginia Public Theatre as a case study (and as a micro-representative of the larger idea of commercial theatre), I find that the theatre tends to produce theatre that is, indeed, romantic and that draws an audience in rather than challenging the audience to think, debate, and strive toward changing the world for the better. Despite this obvious limitation of contrasting agendas between commercial and utopic theatre, I hope to illuminate potential elements of the utopic in even the most commercial of theatrical productions and to examine how a theatre that depends on commercial success for its very existence might hope to fulfill Dolan’s criteria.
Data

In order to provide an accurate history of the theatre and to measure the effects of the theatre on its two communities, several sets of data will be used. My data sets for this study focus on the artistic, educational, and community-related practices of West Virginia Public Theatre, as well as people’s responses to various aspects of the theatre’s work. The data related to this study will assume a multiplicity of forms. To examine the artistic practices of the theatre, I will use reviews published in local and regional newspapers, archival records of past productions and events, production histories, and a total of sixty-five personal interviews conducted with members of both communities A and B. Since many of the subjects interviewed see themselves as part of both communities, the breakdown is twenty-two from Community A, fifteen from Community B, and twenty-eight subjects who bridge the two communities. Archival records of the theatre’s educational programs, literature produced by the theatre, reviews and articles written about the theatre, and personal interviews will be used to investigate the history and effectiveness of the theatre’s educational mission. Finally, I will utilize audience surveys, demographic records, newspaper articles, financial records, and personal interviews to discuss how the theatre attempts to improve the quality of life of the region’s residents.

My study will be conducted through ethnographic practices. Renato Rosaldo defines the work of the ethnographer as “mak[ing] other cultures intelligible” (1). To be more specific, my study will be, at times, auto-ethnographic due to my unique situation as both a member of the theatre’s community and as a field researcher. It is important to note my long-time association with the theatre as actor, director, historian, and Director of Marketing. I began my relationship with the theatre and Iannone as a performer in 1999. In the nearly thirteen years since, I have

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5 Also called “insider’s ethnography,” this is a form of autobiographical personal description that explores the researcher’s knowledge of life. In this case, my first-hand experiences as an employee of the theatre allows me the opportunity to conduct this type of research.
spent twelve seasons with the theatre working on over forty-five productions as an actor, sixteen as a member of the directing staff (either assistant, associate, or full), and three seasons serving in the capacity of historian, marketing and development director. My history with so many facets of the theatre gives me both a unique perspective from which to analyze the theatre’s mission and access that many scholars would not have: full access to the theatre’s archives and members of the two focus communities. Additionally, I am an alumnus of the West Virginia University Division of Theatre and Dance, an institution that factors profoundly in both the history of the theatre and my research. A brand new relationship has developed during the process of my study: the role of researcher and scholar, which allows me to view the data from a more expansive perspective.

Data Collection

The organization of the archives was my first step in data collection driven both by the needs of my research and as part of my managerial duties as I prepared to edit a photographic retrospective for the theatre’s twenty-fifth anniversary. These dual agendas informed my data collection in similar and disparate ways. As I was organizing a working production history of the theatre, the photographic timeline (and accompanying newspaper reviews) were useful in both projects. Once that collection was complete, I was able to focus on the gathering and arranging of materials essential to my dissertation research.

The theatre’s records and files have not been kept in order over the past several years and are in a state of disarray. Years of neglect in regard to the archives left important files, journals, spreadsheets, and piles of photographs, programs, and newspaper articles strewn across several rooms of the main theatre office and jammed away in over-flowing file cabinet drawers. Electronic records and out-dated copies of those same files were on several different computers
with a dire need for updating and compiling. Other files, I was saddened to hear, were lost during the theatre’s move to the new office location or were simply thrown out by seasonal employees unaware of the importance of the archives.

Therefore, my first order of business was to organize the extant materials first according to relevance and date and then into appropriate categories from photographs to budget records, audience surveys to newspaper articles in order to provide a clear chronological retrospective and a classification system suitable to my research needs. The financial records and demographic materials were updated and logged onto spreadsheets, unnecessary copies of obsolete files were deleted, photographs and articles were filed, and seasons of programs were organized. As a result the collection of that data was a more efficient process, yet there were still archival materials lost or missing that I could not replace; my hope was to reclaim some of that missing data through personal interviews. Once the materials were organized, I began to purge resources from my dissertation database that were irrelevant to the study or, perhaps, simply tangential to my investigation. I then created a more in-depth history of the theatre and its productions by piecing together the timelines provided by the relevant archival data.

In December of 2008, I received approval from the Bowling Green State University Human Subject Review Board6 to conduct interviews to use as primary source material. I wanted to obtain interviews from a cross-section of the two primary communities central to my study: community A (West Virginia Public Theatre staff and the board of trustees) and community B (patrons, educators, and officials of the city, county, and West Virginia University). To select my potential interview base, I used the theatre’s mailing and board of trustee list, as well as a compiled list of local business owners and faculty, staff, and students that were either part of the Division of Theatre and Dance or who had some association with the

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6 ID#H09D098GE7
theatre in past years. I used electronic mail, postal mail, and personal invitations to recruit subjects for my study. From nearly three-hundred potential subjects to which I sent interview requests, representing the cross-section of both communities described above, sixty-five agreed to take part in my study. Interviews were then conducted in three ways: in person, through electronic mail, or via telephone. Inclusion of quoted material was drawn from these interviews with permission from the subjects, as well as notes made from archival research.

_Areas of Investigation_

In framing the data collected for this study, there are a few distinct qualitative methods of examination that I will use to evaluate my findings. First and foremost, I will use Jill Dolan’s ideas of “utopia in performance” as an over-arching theory from which to gauge the effectiveness of West Virginia Public Theatre’s mission: do the theatre’s actions in production and the acts thereof strive toward Dolan’s vision of evocative performance that stirs emotions and propels the audience toward imagining an alternative world? The theatre’s mission statement and its goals invite the application of Dolan’s theories here. Intrinsic to my study on West Virginia Public Theatre is the relationship between the theatre and its audiences. By using Dolan’s discussion of the instinctively emotional relationship that audience members experience when attending a performance and her theories on how these connections can help us attain utopic feelings that can motivate us toward social awareness and coming together as a community, I will be able to examine the extent to which the theatre does or does not reach toward Dolan’s ideal through its mission statement. Each chapter in the body of this study will investigate one component of that mission: to entertain, to educate, and to improve the quality of life. Dolan’s theory is, of course, optimistic, but it provides a goal which every performance can strive to reach and a perspective from which to measure effectiveness.
The second chapter, focusing on entertainment, will rely, primarily, on descriptive history and analysis, as will the third chapter centered on education. In Chapter Four, where I will examine the theatre’s perceived affect on quality of life, I will use a framework developed by the Quality of Life Research Unit at the University of Toronto in Ontario. This structure focuses on three distinct domains from which one can study the quality of life of a community. Through their theories of “being, belonging, and becoming,” I will gauge how the work of West Virginia Public Theatre affects the well-being of members of both community A and community B.

Finally, and most importantly, I will utilize qualitative analysis methods to examine the numerous responses garnered from personal interviews, which provide an expansive perspective for the study. Used throughout, qualitative analysis will be the focus of the investigation of entertainment in Chapter Two and the conclusions in Chapter Five of the study. The use of personal interviews and the subsequent analysis is intrinsic to this study.

Limitations of the Study

One of the major limitations of this study is my intimate association with the theatre. Of course, the fact that I am uniquely situated within the structure of the theatre will provide many opportunities for research that others would not have. It also allows me to examine the material from a variety of perspectives, as mentioned earlier. However, it also brings with it several caveats including, but not limited to, objectivity in presenting the whole story of the theatre and its impact on various communities, both positive and negative. This study is not being written in order to serve West Virginia Public Theatre and, as a combination of ethnography and autoethnography, comes with significant challenges. I understand, fully, the pitfalls of such a close relationship with my research subject, which include the possibilities of: focusing primarily on the positive and resisting objectively assessing decisions that have been made or, conversely,
focusing on the negatives as proof of “objectivity.” My advisor and committee have been instrumental in helping me stay unprejudiced in my examination.

Secondly, the limitations of the archives are a concern. As mentioned previously the archives have not been kept organized for the past several years and there are missing items, incomplete records, and I spent a great deal of time wading through materials that are unrelated to the study. I hope that my personal interviews with members of the theatre’s communities have been able to fill in many blanks.

Significance of the Study

In the current political and financial climate affecting the United States, the arts seem to suffer significant losses exemplified by the number of professional theatres closing their doors. Across disciplines and from major arts centers, such as New York, to small, rural arts communities, hardships are felt in every possible corner. The small, non-profit arts organizations are the hardest hit; these institutions must restructure themselves in order to maintain their viability. This investigation will not only look at the history of a working, non-profit theatre, but will also measure its effectiveness and viability in today’s America. Jill Dolan, through her theories of utopic performance, has challenged the theatrical world to do more than merely entertain. West Virginia Public Theatre has stated its mission as to entertain, to educate, and to improve the quality of life. Accordingly, this study will use this theatre as a case study from which to examine ways that Dolan’s utopia can and cannot be reached through commercial theatrical endeavors.

Moreover, my study will provide the only written history of this particular theatre and will contribute significantly to the scholarly community’s better understanding of a commercial theatre and the challenges it faces in staying financially viable, while serving its community in a
variety of ways. I will provide a detailed written history of a theatre company from its very beginnings through turmoil and triumph, as well as an examination of how the theatre has impacted its community and suggestions for ways in which other theatres can have similar community impact. This will not be a “how to” manual for running a regional theatre, but it will serve as a case-study of one theatre and its producer’s desire to improve the lives of his neighbors through live theatre. Through the contribution of this scholarship, I hope to join the ongoing conversations taking place today in the realms of theatre studies and arts management, specifically concerning the commercial theatre and its ability to both educate and contribute to a community’s overall artistic and economic well-being.

Outline of the Study

In the first chapter, I have introduced the study, stated the research questions, the methods by which I will analyze collected data, the significance and limitations of my study, and the literature reviewed. In the second chapter, dealing with entertainment, I will examine the region’s support of and need for a live theatre, the company’s production history, its use of professional artists, and audience reception. In Chapter Three, I will analyze the emergence of education as part of the theatre’s mission, the ways in which the theatre has attempted to meet its mission, and its subsequent successes and failures. In Chapter Four, I will investigate how the theatre strives to improve the quality of life of the community. The final chapter will provide a conclusion for the study as well as suggest avenues for further research. I will summarize the key points I have made, and then posit questions that arise that may be useful for subsequent scholars examining regional theatre and theatre’s impact on the community.
CHAPTER II.
ENTERTAINMENT: CREATING AN AUDIENCE

According to Jill Dolan, audiences create community. They come together at a set time and place to share an experience. While each individual audience member has his or her own opinions about the story being told or the way in which it is being told, there is a shared energy that bonds the audience members into one communal body. In *Utopia in Performance*, Dolan posits that “engaging in performance as a public practice, as a rehearsal for an example that yearns toward something better and more than just social arrangements that divide us now, theater becomes a sort of temple of communion with a future we need to practice envisioning” (135). Dolan, in her definition of utopic performance, also calls for audiences to be challenged and to be incited toward social change. Thus, theatrical audiences coming together is only the beginning to reaching utopia. In order for true utopic performance to occur, an audience must be “shaken from their consciousness” in order to strive towards a better world.

Even when audiences come together for simple entertainment, the premise of the “temple of communion” forges a kind of “communitas” because of the inherent communal nature of theatre. This remains true even in the most commercial of theatrical endeavors. However, the question of social change remains. Does commercial theatre, in the case study of West Virginia Public Theatre strive toward promoting awareness and provoking action toward changing the world for the better as utopian performance should as proposed by Dolan? Through a discussion of the theatre’s production history, I hope to examine how the theatre’s performances do and do not meet this criteria.

For the past twenty-five years, West Virginia Public Theatre has touted itself as West Virginia’s “only professional musical theatre and one of the nation’s top live regional family entertainment companies” (“Building” i). With well over one hundred and sixty major theatrical
productions to the company’s credit and a total attendance nearing one million patrons, the theatre has maintained its reputation as one of the premier entertainment destinations in a state known nationally for its state parks, sporting events, and other outdoors activities. By exploring the entertainment offerings by other theatre venues in the state and surrounding region, the validity of the theatre’s popular tagline, stated above, will be examined. This chapter will also investigate the ways in which the theatre has grown into one of the state’s most visited cultural destinations through an investigation of its production history, utilization of nationally recognized artistic talent, and audience reception/perception. Finally, through this examination, I hope to see what patterns arise which might provide examples of both best practices and cautions, which might be useful to prospective theatre producers hoping to build regional theatres.

Production History: Defining Moments

From its very inception, West Virginia Public Theatre has—as part of its mission—attempted to bring quality entertainment to its patrons. The first major issue that Iannone solved concerned attracting an audience for the theatre. His solution was establishing a trend that he would reuse in every subsequent season: casting “name” or “star” celebrities in the summer season. Using his actors’ past success and publicizing it in every possible media outlet, Iannone has been able to sell his shows based, primarily, on the careers of often nationally recognized names. During the first season, Iannone banked on three well-known personalities from Broadway, film, and television (Dean Jones, Judy Norton-Taylor, and Carol Lawrence) each starring in a musical revue constructed around their individual talents. The first season certainly saw its share of “growing pains” as the theatre’s artists and patrons alike had to share uncomfortable conditions under the intimate vinyl “big top.” Executive Producer Ron Iannone

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7 Note that social change through entertainment is not a primary tenet of the theatre’s mission.
further discussed several vivid memories of that first season in the theatre’s anniversary souvenir program, “West Virginia Public Theatre Celebrating 25 Years”: “Broadway star Carol Lawrence shows up with a broken leg […] Judy Norton-Taylor (the oldest daughter on The Waltons) shows up without our knowledge of [her] having recently appeared nude in Playboy” (5). Each of the three stars was placed at the forefront of the new theatre’s advertising campaign and, once they arrived in Morgantown, they made several public appearances. Without the status and power behind their names, the theatre might not have had such a profitable beginning. Despite the less-than-ideal performance conditions and the surprises brought by the theatre’s star performers, the theatre made a name for itself, which paved the way for a second season.

Marketed as the “Smashing Broadway Season,” the theatre’s second season saw burgeoning artistic development in its first productions of scripted, Broadway “book” musicals: A Chorus Line, West Side Story, and I Do! I Do! Iannone also continued the successful model of the musical revue built around a “name” by inviting Tony Award winner Phyllis Newman to Morgantown; three of the four productions were directed by musical theatre veteran Ron Tassone8 who had returned to his native Pittsburgh to teach Dance at Point Park College.9 Continuing to utilize entertainers from the Broadway stage and television, the theatre hired Niki Harris10 to play Cassie in A Chorus Line, which received the theatre’s first major regional recognition in the form of a visit by The Pittsburgh Press11. In a review, Music and Theatre editor, Carl Apone, wrote: “This production of A Chorus Line is right up there with any previous

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8 Tassone was featured in the 1969 Broadway musical flop Billy.
9 Now Point Park University.
10 Harris was featured on Broadway in A Chorus Line, A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine, My One and Only, and Grand Hotel.
11 The Pittsburgh Press was a major regional newspaper in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania between 1924 and 1992. It has since merged with the region’s largest newspaper, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.
staging—be it on Broadway, touring companies, or the Pittsburgh Playhouse” (Apone “Review”).

The second season also saw the first appearance of soap opera performers Bill and Susan Seaforth-Hayes. The theatre’s production of *I Do! I Do!* began a long-time friendship and working arrangement between the *Days of Our Lives* “star-couple” and Executive Producer Ron Iannone. According to an interview conducted with Bill Hayes, the relationship began when Iannone was an apprentice to William Thunhurst, Jr., the artistic director of the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera in the early 1980s. Hayes had starred in the CLO’s 1967 *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* with Shirley Jones. Thunhurst suggested that Iannone give Hayes a call once he had established his theatre in West Virginia. After the success of the first season, Iannone didn’t hesitate to call Hayes and his wife to invite them to journey from Los Angeles to play in Morgantown. Hayes recalls:

> We went to work and said ‘we need to stage it here because we can only take off the two weeks, which would be one week rehearsal and one week of playing.’ So, he (Iannone) agreed and said ‘I can pay for a director there.’ It was Stuart Bishop and we staged *I Do! I Do!* here in our church social hall [...] As we went over it, Stuart gave us a list of props we needed: two hundred and sixty-four [...] So, about four or five weeks ahead of our going to West Virginia, we sent the list of needed props—two hundred and sixty-four—and we said we had a few of them that we would bring along [...] well, we arrived ready to do our week rehearsal and...the prop person thought the week of rehearsal was the time to get the props [...]”

In an interview, Susan Seaforth Hayes remembers the performance conditions:
Of course we were performing under plastic, the perfect summer venue […] if you’re a cabbage and want to really bloom quickly. And Ron continued to say ‘It’s air-conditioned!’ as he greeted people out there; he was wonderful […] The costumer was a dedicated bridal gown maker and she was able to show me, on the first day we had our meeting, a beautiful sleeve for the wedding dress […] I said ‘it’s a great sleeve…where is everything else?’ There was no everything else. Nor did they understand all of the technically difficult props such as the razor strop. So, we spent a good bit of time chasing down the costumes ourselves and the props ourselves […] the tricycle I was supposed to ride across the stage on was set up for a child that couldn’t use his legs, so you really had to shove yourself across and then get off […] Nevertheless, it was the only time both of our parents got to see us on stage together…It was a wonderful, hysterical time!

As with many fledgling theatre companies, Lakeview Theatre had its growing pains as is illustrated here; however, these anecdotes also speak to the creative spirit of the new theatre and the lengths to which its performers were willing to go for success.

In addition to securing celebrities to perform in his productions to promote ticket sales, Iannone had to hire and train support staff that had the knowledge and skill set to produce quality, professional theatre in a limited amount of time. The staff was faced with the challenge of meeting the high personal demands of “celebrity” talent (appropriate housing, transportation, and other amenities) and the artistic demands of the productions. The Hayeses demonstrated calm and patience during their first engagement in Morgantown and jumped completely into the spirit of summer stock theatre by collecting props, costumes, and making every effort to ensure a successful production. Due to their positive experience, the Hayeses eventually made a long-
term commitment to the theatre and to the greater community; they would return for productions, fund-raisers, and community celebrations for years to come. For a producer in the first few years of development, finding the appropriate combination of personalities is key to continued success. Furthermore, Iannone’s finding of the Hayeses provided an artistic and publicity boost for the theatre and he was fortunate that they felt so connected to the community that they became lifelong friends of theatre. Relationships such as this are rare and vital to the continued success of a new theatrical endeavor.

Following popular success and regional recognition in its second season, Lakeview Theatre’s third summer installment urged artists and patrons alike to “Be a Part of It!” This marketing slogan marked the second season in which “taglines” were used by the theatre to entice patrons to purchase tickets and to enjoy the entertainments offered by the theatre. Every subsequent season since 1986 has been publicized with a catchy, one-line catchphrase used on all marketing materials and advertisements. This practice has served the theatre well in both appealing to patron’s desire to connect to something special about that particular season (not just a season, in general) and in creating a history for the theatre: the slogans help to create a historical timeline and progression through which patrons and employees can remember the past.

In 1987, Ron Tassone returned to the director’s chair for four major productions under the parking lot tent commencing a positive trend: many of the theatre’s artists were making Morgantown their regular summer home. Broadway veteran Karen Prunczik, known best for her turn as Peggy Sawyer in 42nd Street, took on the role of Charity Hope Valentine to great acclaim from the local media. The Pittsburgh Press returned to Morgantown to review No, No, Nanette; Carl Apone remarked, “As summer theatre productions go, this one rates four stars…in the wrong hands, it can all be cotton candy, but Tassone keeps it from being sticky” (D8).
Bringing the season to a close, Bill and Susan Seaforth Hayes returned to Morgantown for the hit Broadway comedy, Bernard Slade’s *Same Time Next Year*. This production marked a breakthrough for the young company: the first time it had staged a non-musical play.\textsuperscript{12} *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, reviewing Lakeview Theatre for the first time during the play’s run, printed: “Indeed, the Sheraton Lakeview ends its third season more capable and self-assured than ever” (qtd. in “Celebrating” 12)! 

The fourth season established the theatre as a regional entertainment destination with media coverage from not only Pittsburgh and the local Morgantown outlets, but from many of the smaller towns in between and beyond. *The Washington [Pennsylvania] Observer* wrote: “The crescendo of tapping feet echoes off the hillside east of Morgantown, while the 23 talented young people who comprise the cast of 42\textsuperscript{nd} *Street* dance and sing into the heart of the audience” (qtd. in “Celebrating” 15). With a season dedicated to Jack Reese, the former editor of *The Dominion Post* (Morgantown’s award winning local newspaper), who was integral in the theatre’s growth over the previous three years, the theatre’s audiences were treated to a continued tradition of Broadway-style entertainment from a mix of nationally known performers, and, for the first time, young, local talent. Headlining the season were Broadway veterans Kim Cea (an award winning stand-up comedian who starred in Broadway’s *Smokey Joe’s Café*) as *Funny Girl*’s Fanny Brice and Norman Atkins, best known for playing the leading role of Tony Esposito in the first Broadway revival of Loesser’s *The Most Happy Fella*, as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The period after the close of its fourth season was a time of rapid growth and immediate change for the now established theatre company: West Virginia University president and

\textsuperscript{12} Although it was the first time, it would not be the last. The theatre has produced several non-musical plays throughout its history including the establishment of an “American Classic Play” cycle with one play produced every season between 2004 and 2009.
supporting patron of the theatre Neil Bucklew appreciated how the theatre’s presence in the community had such a positive impact on Morgantown and its residents. Bucklew also noted that Ron Iannone had a dream that was both contagious and ever-growing. As a result the university president organized a move from the parking lot tent to the fourteen-hundred seat Concert Theatre at the university’s Creative Arts Center (CAC) located on the Evansdale campus about three miles from the heart of Morgantown. Bucklew reflects on that move:

It was clear that the time had come to think about a new location and home for the theatre. I was pleased to see it happen. It was good for the WVU theatre program and the leadership seemed excited about it. I didn’t foresee the full degree of interest and audience reaction, the kind of traffic brought in by people touring the area. You can’t put a price on it. If it should ever disappear it would leave a big gap in the community. (qtd. in “Building” 3)

In a recent interview, Bucklew, now a member of the Board of Trustees of West Virginia Public Theatre13, maintains his belief in the theatre’s high artistic and entertainment standards. When compared to other local entertainment venues, Bucklew insists that the theatre “has a high artistic grade and both exceeds the university’s ventures into Musical Theatre production and compares favorably to national tours that are sponsored by the WVU’s Arts and Entertainment program and to similar companies in the greater Pittsburgh area.” Bucklew and Iannone had found a perfect solution that would serve both the theatre and the university: the theatre needed a home and the university theatre, heretofore unused during the summer, became a destination for summer entertainment.

13 Bucklew stepped down as WVU President in 1995, but remains a member of the College of Business and Economics faculty. He joined the WVPT Board of Trustees shortly after the 1989 move.
The inaugural season (1989) at the theatre’s new home on the WVU campus flaunted “We’re on the move…and on the map!” Not only did the physical structure of the theatre change, but also the format. The facilities at the CAC included a 300 seat black box theatre simply called the Studio Theatre in addition to the much larger Concert Theatre. The Studio Theatre was home to the majority of the university’s own Division of Theatre and Dance events, whereas the larger space was reserved for national touring companies, large-scale operas, orchestra and choir performances, and other university-related events such as commencement exercises. The flexibility of the Studio Theatre allowed Lakeview Theatre to experiment with a popular Off-Broadway comedy called *A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking* featuring Kitty Whitty, daughter of theatre professor Dr. John Whitty. This first season at the new location was successful both artistically and politically as the Creative Arts Center seemed to be a suitable home for the theatre; the two institutions seemed to complement each other.

Touted as “Our Best Ever,” the theatre’s sixth season featured four musicals on the Concert Theatre stage and saw the first appearance of soon-to-be regular leading lady, Peggy Taphorn, fresh off of her Broadway debut in *Me and My Girl* and her subsequent turn in the flop revival of the Abbot and Dunning play, *Broadway*. Making her Lakeview debut as Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Taphorn would be—for the next decade—one of Iannone’s preferred actresses, playing some of musical theatre’s most prominent roles. The 1990 season also saw Iannone’s first attempt at producing completely original material: a two performance production of *Riverboat Man*, penned by Iannone himself, played the West Virginia state capital, Charleston in late August. This would not be the theatre’s last foray into original, historically-based performance.
The 1991 “Musical Celebration of Broadway!” saw the theatre’s reputation growing within the industry. For the first time, Iannone held open calls in New York. Previously, the theatre had relied on local auditions in Morgantown and Pittsburgh, along with agent submissions from known Broadway talent, to cast its shows, but Iannone saw the potential of going straight to what is often considered the Mecca of musical theatre to discover both recognized and unknown talent. According to Iannone, the March auditions had “professional performers lined up around the block just for the opportunity to perform for our audiences” (qtd. in “Celebrating” 21). Future Tony Award nominee Rob Marshall14 was hired to helm the theatre’s first ever production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic Carousel. According to The Dominion Post’s Beth Casteel, Carousel was “a thrilling ride” and she “Thanks, Rob Marshall…Thanks for bringing a Broadway cast together for a ride on the Morgantown Carousel” (6A). Once again Bill Hayes returned to Morgantown, but this time as a rookie director taking the reins of The Music Man. Hayes, in a personal interview, remarked how “each year the production values got better” and that was one of the reasons that he agreed to direct at the theatre. Hayes’ direction was overlooked in most reviews, but the production was acclaimed nonetheless. Casteel wrote: “(Choreographer) David Wanstreet…took advantage of Willson’s organized score. His choreography kept the show moving. And he didn’t seem to forget that for musical theater to work, actors have to create enough musical energy that audience members feel a part of the excitement” (5A).

As the theatre was “Continuing the Tradition” in 1992, state and local organizations began to take note of the theatre’s increasing popularity and impact on the area. The West Virginia Arts and Humanities Council, the West Virginia Division of Tourism, and the

14 Marshall has received six Tony Award nominations for his work on Broadway, has won several Emmy Awards, and an Academy Award for his direction of the feature film musical Chicago.
Monongalia County Commission all joined the theatre’s ever-growing list of corporate and organizational sponsors. According to Iannone the theatre had brought in over five million dollars to the Morgantown area over the previous seven seasons and this encouraged the largest donation base that the theatre had seen (Iannone). For the 1992 season, the theatre mounted a production of Agatha Christie’s *The Mousetrap* in the Studio Theatre featuring several of the university’s own performers, which was an attempt to further connect the theatre and the university in more than simply shared space. The experiment, at that moment, was successful in allying the two organizations, but that was short-lived. The theatre also began its Future Stars program, which offered singing, acting, and dancing tutelage to young performers in the area.

As Lakeview Theatre grew toward its ninth season (audiences, budgets, and donations were on the rise), the list of American stage and screen entertainers that had appeared on the stage in Morgantown was ever-growing, and so Iannone and his marketing staff decided to entitle their next season the “Great Season of Stars.” As the theatre’s financial resources grew, Iannone strove to find the best balance he could between the growing number of Broadway performers who came to Lakeview every summer and new faces. Typically, the theatre hired six AEA (Actor’s Equity Association) performers per production (this has since increased to eight as required by the union) and the size of an average large-scaled musical cast, such as *Oklahoma!*, was thirty-five including, on average, five to eight local performers. *Fiddler on the Roof*, presented for the second time in the theatre’s history, featured Broadway’s Joel Kramer as Lazar Wolf and Broadway legend Zero Mostel’s understudy during the original run of

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15 Casting local talent was important to Iannone and the theatre for two primary reasons: the education of young talent helped to support the theatre’s mission and local talent did not cost as much as performers from New York, allowing Iannone to stretch his budget.

16 Due to financial constraints, the average cast size has shrunk to an average of twenty-two.
Fiddler, Jerry Jarrett, as Tevye. Peggy Taphorn joined Bill Hayes, for South Pacific. Hayes recalled:

I was playing Oliver! in Florida and Ron had already asked me to come play (Emile) de Becque in West Virginia, so I had it in my contract in Florida that I was to leave during this period and go to West Virginia to play this part […] In order to play Fagin (in Florida) I had rinsed my hair red and that wasn’t too good for de Becque. So, just before leaving, I rinsed my hair and goatee with a brown and slowly it began to fade into a mauve as the week of performances went on. And, by the time I had returned to Florida, where I was playing Fagin, my hair had turned to purple and it just looked awful, so I went to a place to have them try to take it out and it came out rather blonde. It’s just one of those things that actors go through for their art.

The fact that Hayes made sure to be proactive and to include his production at Lakeview in his Florida contract (and the turmoil he faced because of his hair) proves his dedication and firm commitment to Iannone and the theatre. The dedication of seasoned professionals (especially those who become audience draws) to return year after year can help a theatre establish both ongoing credibility and a loyal audience base.

The theatre had begun to gain visibility and credibility in many distinct ways including a noticeable increase in coverage by the media. Monte Maxwell of The Dominion Post reported that South Pacific’s leading lady was exquisite in the role: “Taphorn, as Nellie, is sweet and sings beautifully” (D1). He also summed up the theatre’s commitment to quality entertainment: “With actors of professional caliber, Lakeview Theatre’s production lives up to all preconceived notions” (D1). The theatre was making a name for itself in the community and the region;
critical acknowledgement of the theatre’s successes, like that above, was now commonplace in the media. The production history of Lakeview Theatre, through 1993, had included a long list of theatrical professionals with extensive credentials that made Morgantown a temporary home and entertained the theatre’s patrons through both their talents and their celebrity status.

In 1993, the theatre stepped beyond its traditional production material and developed a major performance project based on material written specifically for the theatre and concerning events from the region’s storied past. *Streets of Gold*, a play about the experiences of immigrants settling in Southwestern Pennsylvania in the 1920s, was commissioned by Fayette County (PA) commissioner Fred Lebder and Robert Eberly, a local philanthropist and President of Greystone productions. Co-produced by Eberly and Lakeview Theatre, the musical narrative was produced as part of the 1992 celebration of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ discovery of America. The original epic drama, written by Tom DeTitta and based on interviews with local residents, made its world premiere at the State Theatre Center for the Arts in Uniontown, Pennsylvania on October 16, 1993. This venture would help to establish a working relationship between the theatre and the State Theatre for future productions at their venue. *Streets of Gold* was the theatre’s first truly successful original musical and would be revived in 2000 to celebrate the new millennium. Although *Streets of Gold* has remained the only viable and successful ethnographic production17 mounted by the theatre, the West Virginia Arts and Humanities Council is currently in discussions with the theatre to produce a play based on the 1907 Monongah mine disaster in nearby Marion County (WV). Iannone hopes to have this venture—part of the theatre’s continued mission to educate—in production within the next three to five years. This commitment to presenting the region’s history is just one way the theatre

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17 An ethnographic production is one in which the words of the piece are derived from first and second-hand accounts of the people whose story is being told. Examples in the theatrical canon include *The Laramie Project* and the solo works of Anne Deavere Smith.
proves its dedication to educating the community. West Virginia Public Theatre and its administration do not seem to fear stepping beyond the tested material of Broadway in order to perform material more specific and important to its constituents; this is a primary reason for the theatre’s sustainability. If a theatre can connect to its community in more ways than simply providing entertainment, then it can become an institution that is integral to the cultural, educational, and social milieu of the area.

The theatre’s tenth anniversary season in 1994 saw many changes including, most importantly, the change in name from Lakeview Theatre to West Virginia Public Theatre (WVPT). According to Iannone the name change came about “in order to reflect our long term goals to be a source of pride and economic advantage for the State of West Virginia” (Iannone, “Re: name”). During a public ceremony at the opening of the theatre’s summer season, state and national dignitaries applauded Iannone on the theatre’s long-time impact on the community and on the name change. Then Governor Gaston Caperton proclaimed: “I especially want to congratulate, and thank your founder and producer, Mr. Ron Iannone. Ron, I certainly want to commend you, your staff, cast members, and ‘behind the scenes’ people of West Virginia Public Theatre” (qtd. in “Celebrating” 26). Senator Robert C. Byrd, at the same ceremony, noted the importance of the theatre: “For a decade now, the West Virginia Public Theatre has brought the excitement of the theatre to the community. I extend to you my best wishes for even more decades of service” (qtd. in “Celebrating” 26). The anniversary season saw an increase in summer productions to six including a Studio Theatre production of *Love Letters* starring Bill and Susan Seaforth Hayes. By using the second space, the theatre was able to add productions without increasing the length of the season, which proved to be financially profitable. This season also featured future Tony Award nominee, Christian Borle, as Mark in *A Chorus Line*. 
Borle’s professional career began at West Virginia Public Theatre during the 1994 and 1995 seasons. Since his time in Morgantown, Borle has been seen in six Broadway productions, including a Tony Award nomination for his work in *Legally Blonde: the Musical*, and is currently playing the lead role of Bert in *Disney’s Mary Poppins*.

The most significant development during the 1995 season was the establishment of WVPT’s foremost feature of its educational program: the holiday production for school audiences. In December of 1995, *A Christmas Carol* would mark, arguably, the theatre’s most public offering to its community and the further development of a working-relationship with West Virginia University’s Division of Theatre and Dance. With a cast consisting of professional performers (including Bill and Susan Seaforth Hayes as Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Past, respectively), WVU students, and community members, the holiday production offered live musical theatre to school children from the tri-state area. This production was, according to Bucklew, “perhaps, the first and only live theatre that the children had ever experienced.” This staple of the theatre’s educational mission continues today having reached over 120,000 school students over fourteen years (“Celebrating” 5) and, according to current Chair of the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance, Joshua Williamson, is “something that (WVPT) does well…educating future arts patrons is huge, phenomenal!”

The theatre has not only hosted a number of established Broadway professionals, it has also helped to groom local talent for the Broadway stage. Many young performers launched their careers at Lakeview/West Virginia Public Theatre and would, subsequently, find sustainable careers in the entertainment industry; foremost among them was a young star

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18 Although the theatre still charged local school children for admission to the performances, the tickets were deeply discounted and subsidized by governmental grants.
19 A discussion of this relationship will be featured in Chapter Three of this study.
20 Further discussion of this program and West Virginia University’s response to it can be found in Chapter Three of this study.
featured in the theatre’s first *Peter Pan* in 1996. Kirsten Wyatt, who flew to Neverland as Wendy for Lakeview Theatre, was a local child star from Bridgeport, West Virginia (some thirty miles South of Morgantown) where she had been a dance and voice student while growing up. From West Virginia Wyatt attended the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music to study musical theatre, and has since become a mainstay on Broadway. She has been featured in the original Broadway casts of *Urinetown* and *High Fidelity*, the Broadway revival casts of *Grease* and *You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, and was most recently featured in the Broadway company of *Shrek the Musical*.

The 1997 season marked the formation of the theatre’s Lifetime Achievement Award, which was presented to the owners of *The Dominion Post*, Kathleen and David Raese, for their long time support of the theatre. Additional recipients of this award include President of the Board Thomas Rogers, Vice-President of the Board James McCartney, and long-time directors Bob Durkin and Geoffrey Hitch. This honor was established as a means for Iannone and the theatre to show appreciation for many years of loyal and valuable service. Furthermore, the award serves as a link between the theatre, its artists, and the community creating a tie between the economic and cultural leaders of the region to each other and to the theatre. The theatre also showed a commitment to community change through the establishment of the T.A.R.G.E.T. program, which featured a traveling troupe that promoted awareness of the social evils of tobacco, alcohol, and substance abuse. By confronting the community with this unhealthy behavior, the theatre did make an effort to help shift behavioral patterns and, as a result, fulfilled Dolan’s definition of the utopian performative.

Though the theatre’s educational program features a myriad of difference performance genres, musical theatre remains the primary medium through which West Virginia Public
Theatre entertains its audiences. Thus far in the theatre’s history, there have been a few non-musical offerings, but the theatre’s claim to be the state’s only professional *musical* theatre is important to both Iannone and his board (Bucklew). Focusing on the importance of this uniquely American artform, the 1998 season was entitled “An American Musical Theatre Celebration” and featured a mix of musical favorites of WVPT audiences and shows that had never before been produced at the theatre. In addition to *Singin’ in the Rain*, *Shenandoah*, and *Kiss Me, Kate*, the theatre presented *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, which received high praise from critic Sherri L. Shaulis: “*Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* has everything it takes for great American musical theatre: good-looking guys, spunky girls, sticky situations, toe-tappin’ music, riotous dance numbers, and at least one tear-jerking scene. WVPT’s production takes those elements and really makes them cook” (5A). *42nd Street* returned to the WVPT stage and received an equally positive review. Shaulis also noted the importance of experienced, veteran performers: “WVPT picks the cream of the crop from both local and Broadway actors to fill out this cast, who keep things moving along…If you’ve been waiting for the perfect opportunity to cut your teeth on musical theater, *42nd Street*, is the production you’ve been waiting on” (5A). *A Christmas Carol* returned for the holiday production, but this time featuring WVU Acting professor, Gerald McGonigle, in the lead role of Scrooge and Hayes in the supporting role of Jacob Marley. Susan Seaforth Hayes was featured, once again, as the Ghost of Christmas Past. As the holiday programming became an expected part of the community’s holiday celebrations, Iannone attempted to foster consistency and cost-effectiveness in production by reusing sets, costumes, props, and talent. Additionally, the casting of McGonigle in a lead role was an

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21 At this time Iannone established a three-show rotation for the holiday program. This cycle has since been broken.
22 McGonigle had played Marley in the previous production of *A Christmas Carol* and had also played Florenz Ziegfeld in the theatre’s *Funny Girl* in 1996
attempt by the theatre to make a connection to the university, which was successful for that particular moment.

The following season marked not only West Virginia Public Theatre’s fifteenth anniversary, but also many major accomplishments including the expansion of the theatre’s educational program. Continuing its partnership with the State Theatre in Uniontown (PA) and the Eberly Foundation, WVPT presented Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat to over five thousand local students (from the tri-state area) in April of 1999. This production employed students from the immediate local area with an interest in acting and singing as the children’s chorus, further strengthening the theatre’s devotion to fostering young, local talent. Furthermore, the educational/outreach programs Future Stars\textsuperscript{23} (offering training for young performing arts students with the theatre’s professional artistic staff), and T.A.R.G.E.T.\textsuperscript{24} (the traveling troupe that visits schools to create awareness of drug and alcohol abuse) received renewed funding.

As the new millennium dawned, West Virginia Public Theatre adopted a by-line that it would return to year-after-year: “Presenting Broadway’s Best.” The 2000 season was the theatre’s most ambitious yet: a seven musical summer season (expanded in hopes of increasing the audience base), a revival of Streets of Gold in Pennsylvania, and a return of Cinderella to the stage for the holidays. Once again Iannone lined-up a mixture of new shows and old favorites. The Sound of Music led the way into the new season with a cast of young hopefuls. Ward Billeisen, who was featured as Rolf, would spend three seasons in West Virginia before making his Broadway debut in the 2004 Fiddler on the Roof revival starring Alfred Molina. Billeisen would also be featured in Kander and Ebb’s final Broadway production, Curtains. Playing

\textsuperscript{23} Established in 1992.  
\textsuperscript{24} Established in 1997.
Billeisen’s teenage love interest was Morgantown resident Kristen Graeber, who in 2001 starred opposite Chita Rivera in a short-lived tour of a musical based on the Casper the Ghost cartoon show. The theatre’s mission to entice and invigorate the young children of the area towards experiencing live theatre was being fulfilled during the summer season as was the theatre’s commitment to promoting local talent such as Graeber. At age twelve she found herself at the center of attention playing the similarly aged Mary Lennox in The Secret Garden earning praise from critic Sherri L. Shaulis: “West Virginia Public Theatre needs to hold onto Kristen Graeber and make sure she doesn’t get away. The…Morgantown native took on the responsibility of starring in the musical…and handled the task with ease, poise, grace, and style….The Secret Garden is a great family show and a wonderful primer to interest children in musical theatre” (6A).

The production values at the theatre were also improving. As Alene Robertson returned to Morgantown to reprise her role as the famous matchmaker, Dolly Levi, in Hello Dolly! John Hayes of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette commented on the theatre’s growing aesthetic prowess:

The best musicals are built around stories. Some are built around a single song. Hello Dolly! is built around a staircase. West Virginia Public Theatre’s lavish version doesn’t skimp on the stairway, part of a beautifully elaborate rented set and costume combination that provides more than backdrop. World-class set pieces, giant period line drawings, gaslight facades and clothing that illustrates just how far Yonkers is from Manhattan complement the work of this production’s formidable cast. (Hayes, “Stage”)
With a strong combination of onstage talent (from across the country and across the street) and artistic expertise in design, the theatre appeared to have established itself as a mainstay in the summer stock circuit.

The next summer production brought two Broadway veterans together on the WVPT stage. *The Most Happy Fella* was Broadway veteran performer Michael Licata’s directorial debut at the theatre. Licata, featured as Zach in the theatre’s 1990 *A Chorus Line*, returned to Morgantown a decade later to direct Tony Award nominee (for the 1992 Broadway revival of *Fella*) Spiro Malas in the lead role. Shaulis applauded the production: “The music of *The Most Happy Fella*…is some of the best to grace the WVPT stage…And its so remarkably presented by everyone in the cast, most notably Malas” (5A). *Fella* also marked the final onstage performance in West Virginia for Peggy Taphorn (as Cleo).

The 2000 season brought the theatre’s first truly unfavorable review in its history. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* critic John Hayes took this season’s *She Loves Me* to task:

…look at what the WVPT has to work with: a national caliber stage facility, a substantial budget and a college campus and surrounding suburb from which to draw an audience…with all that going for it, WVPT’s *She Loves Me* ought to be a gem. Instead, it’s a roller-coaster ride of aesthetic highs and draining lulls… (Hayes, “Two Companies”)

This lackluster report slowed ticket sales for *She Loves Me* and caused a brief panic throughout the administration for the remaining season productions. Furthermore, Hayes’ goes on to pit WVPT against one of its local summer stock competitors by contrasting the WVPT show with a production of the same title at the Mountain Playhouse running at approximately the same time:

At first glance, it might seem that the Mountain Playhouse is outranked by the

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25 Licata was featured in both the 1986 revival of *Sweet Charity* and the original Broadway run (and tour) of *Evita*. 
larger venue to the southwest. Isolated in a tiny rural mountain town 30 minutes from the nearest substantial suburb, its tiny stage was once a 19th century gristmill…But the playhouse compensates for its lack of space and financial resources by attracting top-notch Equity talent to stay for the summer. Director Joe Deer takes full advantage of every inch of space and puts his cast members where they can make their own magic. (“Two Companies”)

Although the theatre recovered from its first major critical failure in its fifteen-year history and finished the season with successful productions of *Grease* and *West Side Story*, Iannone took note of the criticism, which has inspired a desire to improve the quality of the theatre’s productions (Iannone, “Mar.”).

During the interlude between the 2000 and 2001 summer seasons, Iannone decided to highlight purely American shows (most written by American composers and portraying American ideals in locations across the globe) for the following year. Beginning with the story of American independence in 1776, the 2001 summer season featured poignant productions that focused on what it meant to be an American or, in some cases, what it meant to want to be American. *South Pacific* (with SaLoutos) presented the dichotomy of racial tolerance and intolerance, followed by *Camelot* (said to create nostalgia for the Kennedy administration), *Annie* (starring Graeber and highlighting one girl’s attainment of the “American Dream”), *Fiddler on the Roof* (with Malas as Tevye and focusing on the importance of cultural tradition), and *Carousel* (one of the foundational American musical theatre texts) featuring Broadway’s Tony Capone and Kristen Carbone as Billy and Julie Bigelow. The theatre’s “Celebration of American Ideals” was presented before the tragic events of September 11th and little did anyone at the theatre know how appropriate the theme would be. Just one month after the summer
season closed, the high jacked airplanes would change the world forever and the lessons that were learned that summer resonated throughout the hearts and minds of both the citizens who had watched those productions and those who had created them. A post-September 11th version of *A Christmas Carol* was presented to the area’s children for the holiday program, which focused not on lavish sets, costumes, and celebrities, but rather on the importance of community, family, and the meaning of Christmas. This production marked one of the few moments in the theatre’s history when a mainstage showing purposely attempted to foster awareness of world issues beyond the egocentrism of America. By focusing on the building of community and not on the commercialism of both Christmas and professional theatre, audiences were encouraged to think about how humans treat one another and, in many ways, taught how to interact on a more humane level. This, in my estimation, was an instant when West Virginia Public Theatre came close to utopic performance.

The 2001 season also commenced the theatre’s “Building on a Dream” campaign, the goal of which was a state-of-the-art musical theatre in Morgantown. Bill Hayes, present for the kick off of the campaign, remarked: “Ron is a teacher and a dreamer. Boy, do I give him credit! With his dream and his enthusiasm, we all were happy to be along for the ride.” Iannone’s dream that began in a tent in a parking lot sixteen years earlier was entering yet another phase of expansion. In the theatre’s campaign brochure, Board President Tom Rogers emphasized the need for a permanent home for the theatre:

> We love having the West Virginia Public Theatre at the University’s Creative Arts center, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for both of us to grow our programs. They have been very cooperative and great hosts. But, scheduling conflicts and our need to produce new shows and concerts all year round, take
some of those shows on tour, and to develop a two-year training academy for young people interested in theatre careers, makes it imperative that we have a permanent home. (“Building” 5)

The capital campaign launched this season is still very much active and will be discussed, in depth, in Chapter Four of this study.

Ironically, as the theatre was gearing up to raise funds for a permanent home, it lost its temporary one: the Creative Arts Center was to undergo a two-year long renovation. The structure, built in the mid-1970s, was to receive both structural and cosmetic upgrades primarily to the grand lobby, the Choral Recital Hall, and the Concert Theatre. Out of necessity and in recognition of the theatre’s past, Iannone and his board decided to, once again, raise a tent. This time a state-of-the-art, fully air-conditioned “vinyl structure,” was constructed across Mononghela Boulevard from the Creative Arts Center in the parking lot of WVU’s basketball arena, the Coliseum. According to Iannone, for those patrons and staff who had been around during the first four seasons, it was “like returning home.” The 2002 season featured eight musicals in nine weeks under the circus-like tent. Iannone decided to offer eight shows during the 2002 and 2003 seasons for two reasons: first, there was no restriction on time as there was at the Creative Arts Center and, second, the theatre needed to make up revenue based on the reduced number of seats in the structure as compared to the CAC. This practice proved, in part, financially beneficial. With arena seating, the theatre, for the first time in over a decade, had to rely on very little scenic design for its productions, which included *Forever Plaid*, *Chicago* (starring Bob Fosse dancer and Broadway veteran Dana Moore), and *Smokey Joe’s Café* (directed by Peggy Taphorn). This season also marked the professional debuts of three would-be Broadway stars. Erica Piccininni, who would find success in the original cast of *Jersey Boys*,
starred as both Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* and as Ariel in *Footloose*. Leigh Ann Wielgus, known nationally as Leigh Ann Larkin who starred opposite Patti Lupone in the most recent Broadway revival of *Gypsy*, appeared in the 2001 WVPT ensemble, but was not featured at the theatre until her “star turn” as Emma Carew in *Jekyll and Hyde* in 2002. Michael Minarik would leave Morgantown after the summer season and begin his Broadway career (*Les Miserables*, *Rock of Ages*). Perhaps, the most renowned star to develop from this summer season was Megan Hilty who, just a sophomore in college, came to Morgantown to play small, featured roles in both *Godspell* and *The Music Man*. Just two years later Hilty would star as Glinda in the Broadway production of *Wicked* and in 2009 would be nominated for a Drama Desk Award for her portrayal of Doralee Rhoades in Broadway’s *9 to 5: the Musical*.

The *Music Man* was presented in Morgantown just a week after the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera produced the same title. *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* critic, Alice T. Carter, discussed the WVPT production:

If the recently concluded, thoroughly enjoyable Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera season left you longing for more, West Virginia Public Theatre can prolong the pleasure—at least through Sunday…The temporary structure and the in-the-round playing area naturally reduce technical and scenic elements. But director Bob Durkin, choreographer Paula Sloan, and their cast of professional and accomplished performers overcome those minor hindrances with ardor and vitality.

Carter’s review of these two productions (and, in turn, the two theatres) was momentous. Never before in the theatre’s eighteen-year history had it been publicly compared to its fifty-five year
old inspiration. This defining moment in the theatre’s history helped to further establish the theatre as a legitimate arts presenter.

After an eight show summer season, the theatre continued with a successful October production of *Annie* in Uniontown (once again utilizing and featuring the local talent available to the theatre) and a holiday production of *The Wizard of Oz* presented at East Fairmont High School in Fairmont, WV (fifteen miles South of Morgantown).  Although the *Annie* production was successful and continued the new Uniontown connection to the theatre, the necessitated move of the holiday production to Fairmont was not as successful. This change in venue was difficult for several reasons: schools from Morgantown and points North were not fond of the required additional travel to reach the venue, the high school’s auditorium was not technically capable of handling the requirements of the production, and the seating capacity was less, meaning that the theatre could not bring as many children in to see the production as in years past.

Prior to the 2003 season, the public portion of the Capital Campaign was launched with the “Hats off to Broadway” fundraising luncheon featuring Bill Hayes and Morgantown resident (long-time WVPT performer) Catherine Thieme. Not only was this event significant in its effort to include the greater community in its fundraising efforts, but it also brought together the “stars” of the theatre with local entertainers and patrons helping to further solidify the theatre’s integral place within the cultural and social milieu of the community. The theatre’s unique position as arts presenter, educator, and philanthropic organization aids in its ability to connect the citizens of the area to their own traditions through storytelling, music, and history. In this way functions that bring appreciative patrons in contact with the theatre—in a casual setting—allow for specific feedback, communication, and a deeper connection to the community.

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26 This location was the only available venue due to the construction at the Creative Arts Center.
Due to the continued construction at the Creative Arts Center and the success of the previous season, 2003 brought another summer to the tent. To increase the morale of both his patrons and his employees, Iannone began to call the venue a “festival structure” and, in turn, it inspired the theatre’s theme of “A Summer Festival of Musical Theatre.” Also in 2003, the brief partnership with the State Theatre in Uniontown ended due to financial difficulties on both sides. The traditional fall presentations there would cease and the theatre would need to rely on its holiday programming for off-season revenue. Once again, due to the construction on the WVU campus, WVPT’s holiday home was in Fairmont as the musical *Scrooge!* played to sold-out houses of local school children. However, this year would be different as the theatre was able to adjust its expectations in terms of the venue; alterations in curtain times were made for groups that had to travel a greater distance and the technical elements were amended to fit the capabilities of the theatre space: sets were scaled-down, set pieces that would normally fly were made into wagons, and the production’s focus centered on storytelling rather than on spectacle.

In February of 2004, as plans for WVPT’s 20th Anniversary Season were underway, Executive Producer Ron Iannone suffered a debilitating heart attack. Prior to this somber event, Iannone had acted not only as Executive Producer, but also fulfilled the duties of both Artistic Director and Managing Director: Iannone ran all facets of the theatre (in addition to being a full-time professor in WVU’s Education Department). Weak and unable to perform his duties to the best of his abilities, two important new staff positions were created and filled with great friends of the theatre. With Iannone out of commission, the Board of Trustees hired Iannone’s daughter, Mary Beth Sickles, as Managing Director and director/actor Michael Licata as Associate Artistic Director. Under the new leadership and with the Creative Arts Center once again opened for business, 2004 marked the establishment of Iannone’s “American Classic Play” series with a
production of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*. Although WVPT had produced several non-
musical plays prior to this season, Iannone wanted to include an American classic play every
season in an attempt to further the theatre’s educational mission (in terms of producing American
non-musical works that the audience would otherwise not have the opportunity to see locally)
even if the move did not prove to be financially lucrative (Iannone, “April”). In another
unprecedented action, the holiday productions were trimmed both in terms of time and budget.
In order to appease school districts and their bus schedules and the theatre’s own reduced
budgets, a stripped-down version (in terms of playing time and budget) of *Cinderella* was
presented in December to the area’s school children and met with equal success as previously
presented holiday productions. Furthermore, the theatre itself was able to schedule more school
groups into the productions due to the reduced playing times, thereby increasing revenue as well
as the audience base.

The 2005 season saw West Virginia Public Theatre develop two new regional
partnerships. In two separate and mutually beneficial agreements, WVPT teamed up with
Pittsburgh Musical Theatre for *Miss Saigon* and with the Charleston Light Opera Guild for
*Disney’s Beauty and the Beast*. While neither of these productions featured the same casts or
venues, they did share design and constructions costs and received additional support through
government grants. With the increase in production costs, the theatre’s need for partnerships
such as these grew. The theatre is always looking for potential partnerships with other
professional theatres, as well as with collegiate programs exemplified by the recent collaboration
between WVPT and Salisbury University. In 2009, the two institutions teamed up for combined
scenic design and construction of *A Christmas Carol*. The advantages of such a partnership are
clear: lower production expenses for each organization and an expedited construction time
period. However, there are disadvantages as well, including the compromise of artistic visions 
held by different directors, and the innate flexibility required in terms of different venues. 
Despite these challenges, continued collaborations between regional partners would encourage 
more theatres to keep their doors open rather than folding under the weight of fiscal demise.

The 2006 season was WVPT’s largest since the eight-show 2003 “festival structure” 
season and featured eight productions; the return to an eight show format\(^{27}\) was instituted in an 
effort to increase revenue and audience base while still saving construction costs by using sets 
and costumes already in stock from past productions\(^{28}\). In an unprecedented act, Iannone 
decided to bring back the theatre’s highest grossing production ever to begin the season.
Although *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* closed the prior summer season, the production was 
such a success that it was remounted at the beginning of the 2006 summer. With most of the 
previous cast intact, the production sold out its run once again, but this time the musical was 
directed by and starred Rob Lorey, who was featured as Lumiere in the Broadway and touring 
productions of the same show. Kirsten Bracken, who spent the previous two summers in 
Morgantown in ensemble and small featured roles, continued her journey toward a Broadway 
career\(^{29}\) with a star-turn as the title character in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* opposite Broadway 
veterans Lenora Nemetz and Cicily Renee Daniels. This season also saw the WVPT debut of 
one of musical theatre’s longest running titles, *Cats*. An audience favorite, *Cats* would return to 
the CAC stage just a few seasons later in 2009.

Iannone made a special presentation during the 2006 season: Lifetime Achievement 
Awards were given to Bob Durkin, Michael Licata, and Geoffrey Hitch. All three had been with

\(^{27}\) A typical WVPT season features six to seven productions, each rehearsing for one week and performing for one 
week. An expanded season simply means that additional productions were added to the schedule. 
\(^{28}\) The costume, set, and props storage is located off-site about eight miles from the performance venue. Although 
the stock is not extensive, the theatre does make occasional income from rentals. 
\(^{29}\) Bracken would join the ranks of New York’s working actors as Amber in *Hairspray* debuting in October of 2007.
the theatre for more than a decade and were the three principal directors for the theatre’s productions. Additionally, two prominent local businesspeople joined the WVPT family: Ron and Stephanie Stovash, supporters of the arts, asked to be involved in the company’s fundraising campaigns. The couple, together are currently corporate sponsors and also the fundraising committee co-chairs (Iannone, “April”).\textsuperscript{30} This was not the first time that prominent community members have been asked to join the theatre’s board or sponsor’s list. In fact, from the very beginning, two leading Morgantown businessman—Thomas Rogers and James McCartney—have served as board members (currently, they are President and Vice-President, respectively).\textsuperscript{31} Additionally, the theatre has had two long-time corporate sponsors: Morgantown Printing and Binding (whose general manager, Andrew Walls, is also on the board) and Consol Energy. Several prominent business leaders of the Morgantown community have always been a part of the theatre’s development, providing a strong base both financially and politically, for the theatre to grow. This connection not only exemplifies the bridge-building efforts to make WVPT an intrinsic part of the community from its inception, but is actually central to the functioning of the theatre itself.

The 2006 holiday production was a revival of a WVPT favorite seen twice before on the CAC stage: \textit{The Sound of Music}. However, this time the production was sponsored by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in support of the theatre’s educational mission. The production is discussed in an online article from the NEA’s website:

\begin{quote}
The hills of Morgantown came alive when West Virginia Public Theatre staged an NEA-funded production of \textit{The Sound of Music}. An NEA Challenge America grant of $10,000 enabled the theater to offer deeply discounted student tickets
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} Ron Stovash also currently serves on the Board of Trustees.

\textsuperscript{31} The complete history of the WVPT Board of Trustees can be found in the Appendix.
for Rodgers and Hammerstein’s classic musical…more than 7,000 children
traveled up to 90 minutes by bus so they could see the show. (NEA.gov)

The significance of the theatre’s first NEA grant was not lost on Iannone: “The grant was a
special grant…We produced *The Sound of Music* and made it available to students who would
normally not ever see professional theater” (NEA.gov). Not only did the grant help to fund the
production, but support from the NEA provided credibility, through national recognition, to both
the theatre and its educational mission by placing WVPT in the national spotlight alongside some
of the country’s most renowned and celebrated theatrical producers, such as the Pittsburgh Civic
Light Opera, who have shown a commitment to education through theatre.

In 2007, Managing Director Mary Beth Sickles, continuing the vital publicity trend of
themed season slogans established during the theatre’s fledgling days, developed the marketing
catchphrase: “West Virginia Public Theatre, your Broadway getaway!” The slogan helped to
promote the theatre as a prime tourist attraction in the area. In addition, for the first time, in its
history, the theatre focused its marketing plan with current economic trends in mind. With
increasing fuel prices and cost-of-living increases present in the community, the marketing
strategy focused on educating potential audience members that WVPT provided quality,
professional, Broadway-style entertainment for an affordable ticket price. The “getaway”
promised a mini-vacation from normal life and its concerns and provided entertainment closer to
home, so not only was it more economical, but also more convenient. The “Broadway Getaway”
season featured some of the theatre’s most lucrative productions including *Disney’s Aida*[^32], *A
Chorus Line*, and *The Full Monty*.[^33] The season, reduced in the number of productions to the
typical six shows due to financial feasibility, proved to be successful in terms of both box office

[^32]: Starring Marja Harmon who would leave Morgantown to make her Broadway debut in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
[^33]: This season also featured Nathan Lane’s Broadway understudy Gene Gabriel in *The Odd Couple*, Jersey Boys’
Rebecca Kupka as Charity Hope Valentine, and *Les Miserables*’ Jodie Langel as Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl*.
sales and the ability to operate on a reduced budget. The theatre also used the new tagline to its advantage by offering discounted hotel and dinner packages to its customers through the Waterfront Place Hotel.

The 2008 summer season was “Groundbreaking.” Not only did Iannone, with the help of the Hayes family, break ground on the theatre’s new home in the Wharf District of Morgantown, but the theatre continued to present productions never before seen in Morgantown. In addition to old standbys *Forever Plaid* and *West Side Story*, West Virginia Public Theatre produced: the Motown inspired *Dreamgirls* starring Broadway’s Q. Smith as Effie Melody White; *Urban Cowboy: the Musical* based on the film of the same name; the Broadway and cult-classic film hit, *The Producers*; and the classic American play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams and starring television and film star Joe Manganiello as Stanley Kowalski. *The Wizard of Oz* returned to Morgantown and was presented to a record 14,000 students during the holiday production schedule.

The most recent season for West Virginia Public Theatre was the company’s twenty-fifth. The executive and artistic staff, including myself as Director of Marketing and Development, spent nearly a full year preparing for both the season and the 25th Anniversary Celebration, which was held in May of 2009. The gala featured a video welcome by Bill and Susan Seaforth Hayes, a documentary that I wrote and directed chronicling the theatre’s twenty-five year history, several speeches by local dignitaries, the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement award to Iannone’s high school band director, and a concert retrospective featuring some of WVPT’s favorite performers who either began their careers with the theatre or who made Morgantown their summer homes for several seasons. The line-up included Connie SaLoutos, long-time

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34 Starring Broadway’s Julie Hanson as Maria and Angelica-Lee Aspiras as Anita.
35 Manganiello has been featured in Spiderman, Spiderman 3, One Tree Hill, and How I Met Your Mother among many other nationally recognized performances.
choreographer David Wanstreet, Robert Anthony Jones (the star of the previous season’s *The Producers*), and Broadway’s Matthew LaBanca, Christina Sivrich, and Kirsten Bracken. The evening concluded with a two-hour concert by Broadway and pop star Tony Orlando.

For the 2009 season, Broadway’s Renee Brna, Randy Kovitz, and Drew Taylor led the cast of *My Fair Lady* to critical acclaim. *Little Shop of Horrors* marked my solo directing debut at the theatre; *Disney’s High School Musical*, directed by Broadway veteran Joe Deer, sold out for two consecutive weeks of performances; *Doubt*, successfully ended the “American Classic Play” cycle; the musical adaptation of the popular comedy film *The Wedding Singer* was presented on the CAC stage; *Cats* returned with a vengeance becoming the second highest grossing production in WVPT history (behind *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast*); and Tony Award nominee and television star Eddie Mekka made his Morgantown debut as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. After a successful 25th season, including its final holiday production at the CAC (A Christmas Carol), the theatre is preparing for its move into the new Morgantown Event Center for the 2010 season, which will consist of *Hairspray*, *Carousel*, *42nd Street*, *The Full Monty*, *Will Rogers Follies* (under my direction), and *Always…Patsy Cline*.

As West Virginia Public Theatre continues on into its twenty-sixth season, its production history carries a strong tradition of quality theatre created by professional artists and students alike. Every summer the theatre hires nearly one hundred and fifty company members to produce the summer season and another fifty are hired in the fall for the holiday program; this has been the typical company size since the theatre made the move to the Creative Arts Center in

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36 After ten seasons of performing and serving as Associate Director on numerous productions, Iannone saw it fit to allow me to helm a production.
37 At this time there are no plans to continue the production of non-musical plays due to the small audiences the plays attract.
38 Mekka is best known for his portrayal of Carmine Ragusa on TV’s *Laverne and Shirley*. 
1989. With so many people having worked at the theatre, it is difficult to mention everyone in this study. However, the people noted in this study serve as evidence that the theatre is indeed honoring its promise (or at least its publicity) to provide the “highest quality” talent on the theatre’s stage and, according to former WVU President Neil Bucklew, that is one reason that the theatre has lasted so long. In a September 2009 telephone interview, Bucklew listed three reasons for the theatre’s success: “Iannone and Licata bring in the best talent from around the country, we’ve kept the entertainment wholesome by not presenting offensive material, and we have presented a wide-range of things with good taste.” Bucklew’s opinion here is supported by audience feedback.

As is evidenced here, West Virginia Public Theatre’s performance history consists of, primarily, productions meant to provide escapist entertainment to its audiences. While this chronicle supports the first stated tenet of the theatre’s mission, its few attempts at striving toward social change through entertainment provides proof that in even the most commercial of situations, undercurrents of utopic performance can be found. However, the theatre does not exactly endeavor toward utopia in performance as a primary goal and, for the most part, does not come close to reaching that ideal in its productions. In order for the theatre to attempt to reach Dolan’s ideal of utopia in the theatre and to become a more effective maker and supporter of community, it will need to find ways of including social awareness and change more often in its annual offerings by presenting plays and even musicals that focus on social issues (such as Rent or Hairspray). The theatre could also offer talkbacks about the issues raised in such productions or community discussions about those topics; speakers with invested interest and/or expertise in those issues could be invited to give a pre-show lecture. Thus, both the theatre and the community could be challenged to step beyond their comfort zones and to use entertainment as a

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39 However, recently, the company size has been a bit less due to financial restrictions.
source of discussion, disagreement, and deliberation, which may promote change in the greater society. Furthermore, if the theatre becomes a venue for debate (as Dolan suggests theatre should be) and encourages its audience to contemplate ideals such as tolerance of others (either in productions never before seen at WVPT such as *The Laramie Project* or even in traditional musicals such as *South Pacific*), the greater Morgantown community benefits through promotion of diversity and encouragement of the rising “creative class.” In this way the tenets of Dolan’s utopic performance dovetail with Florida’s theories of the “creative class” and, as a result, the theatre becomes a center of change, growth, and community enhancement.

**Audience Reception/Perception**

Dolan writes: “An ongoing audience is perhaps a more receptive audience, attuned to the vocabulary of the theatrical moment and attentive to the responses of its fellows” (“Utopia” 26). Thus, as audiences continue to attend the theatre and be more comfortable with theatrical conventions, surroundings, and other patrons, the community that is made becomes more willing to both escape into the world of the play and to provide feedback to each other and the producing company alike. In addition, that audience community is more likely to feel invested in what the theatre produces and how the theatre operates as it become an essential component of the theatre’s primary communities. As the theatre has grown over the years, the audiences have, indeed, become more invested and, consequently, have grown more engaged in the working of the theatre and more open to providing feedback. This is indicated by the growing number of annual donors, season ticket subscribers, and the increased number of completed audience surveys.
In twenty-five seasons, the West Virginia Public Theatre has presented live theatre to nearly one-million patrons (WVPublicTheatre.com) including students who have experienced the holiday programming, the T.A.R.G.E.T. programming, or patrons who have attended performances in Uniontown, Fairmont, or Charleston. Theatres can receive feedback from their audience through several means, the most significant and impactful being ticket sales. Unless the theatre is able to continue the programming it presents funded only by grants and donations alone, the company will fail. However, additional feedback comes in the form of audience surveys and interviews. In this section I will examine the feedback garnered from the data tallied from the theatre’s own surveys (roughly fourteen hundred from 2003-2009), forty interviews conducted on behalf of the theatre in a 2002 feasibility study, and sixty-five interviews that I conducted for this study.

One type of feedback that WVPT Executive Producer Ron Iannone yearns for is the standing ovation. Though, arguably, less meaningful in our current time because many performances one sees today end in standing ovations, for him it is the ultimate sign of success, proclaiming: “we approve of your theatre.” Dolan questions the standing ovation: “Trying to analyze these moments of reception and response, it’s impossible to know why some spectators stand and why others remain seated. I can only read the moment and my fellow spectators reactions through my response hoping that my description of the emotional energy I felt in the room is in some small way accurate and apt” (“Utopia” 134). Perhaps, for Iannone, the ovation is an indication of audience approval, while Dolan sees the ovation as brought about by the community as a whole: standing is contagious, communal, and—at times—a result of community pressure. Be that as it may, in the past five years, I have personally witnessed that most shows received a standing ovation at every performance.

40 Discussion of ticket sales, donations, and grants will take place in Chapter Four of this study.
At any rate, as the theatre attempts to both create community and to impact the community, the audience’s reaction to the theatre is significant to the basic understanding of both its existence and its mission. If Iannone and the theatre’s supporters are energized by the approving ovation and continue to strive towards producing quality productions, then the result is positive: the theatre survives, grows, and looks for ways in which to further make a lasting impact on Morgantown and its surrounding areas. As Dolan writes, “I fervently wish for theater to claim its place as a vital part of the public sphere. I yearn for performance to be a practice in everyday life, not so that it will become banal and predictable, but so it will provide a place for radically democratic dissension and debate, consensus and hope […]” (“Utopia” 137). Although on the surface it seems that Iannone is not seeking to build a theatre based on politicized agendas as proposed by Dolan, he does desire to build an institution that is a fundamental part of the community, that engages the community, and that provides that community with a forum through which members can enact some sort of social change. Perhaps, then, Dolan and Iannone do have some similar goals, though West Virginia Public Theatre does not, regularly, produce theatre ripe for debate in its regular season. However, throughout its history, there have been exceptions to that rule (i.e. T.A.R.G.E.T. and the post-September 11th A Christmas Carol). By building on these prime examples, the theatre could create community engagement by exploring the potential in each of its productions for issues of meaning to the community. With a production of Hairspray, the theatre could promote discussions of diversity issues in the greater Morgantown area by holding a panel discussion in conjunction with the performance: members of local minority groups/organizations could be invited to speak. Not only would this help the production to foster thought and change, but it would also provide positive publicity for the theatre. A production of Disney’s High School Musical could use the resounding theme song
“We’re All in This Together” to encourage team building in the community to clean up litter or graffiti or to visit nursing homes. Not only would this help to build community, but it would also help the community to feel actively involved with the production; perhaps, anyone involved would receive a coupon for a discounted ticket. Social awareness and change does not have to remain compartmentalized as a phenomenon associated only with one segment of the theatre’s programming, but rather could be a part of most programming that the theatre presents and supports. Moreover, this type of project could also help to fill the theatre’s seats during the production.

Philosophical goals are a fine method of inspiration, but how do the average patrons feel about the quality of theatre presented by WVPT and how are they affected? In a 2002 feasibility and developmental analysis conducted by Jerold Panas, Linzy, and Partners of Chicago, Illinois, the firm conducted personal interviews with a cross-section of the Morgantown community (totaling forty participants) to determine whether it would be possible for the theatre to raise ten million dollars for a new, permanent theatre space. Some of the anonymous, representative comments garnered by the question “Has the West Virginia Public Theatre improved, stayed the same, or gone downhill over the last five years?” include:

- They have been able to hit and maintain a very high standard—much improved.
- Getting better.
- Very seldom do I hear anything but compliments.
- Slight improvements, very good.
- No question it’s getting better. The only criticism is that it seems to repeat South Pacific and Grease a lot. (Lobanov R-4)
For the most part, the comments collected in this study were positive in regard to the professional quality of the entertainment provided by the theatre. Although this in-depth feasibility analysis did ask questions\(^{41}\) in relation to production quality, the majority of the report focused on finances, politics, and management\(^{42}\). However, the analysis made a few significant summary points on the subject of audience feedback. For example:

We usually probe to determine the depth of knowledge interviewees have concerning the organization. It soon became evident in this study that all of these questions were not needed as everyone we spoke to is well aware of the Theatre, and in virtually every case had attended performances on a regular, or at least a sporadic, basis. You are well known. (Lobanov 6)

“Indeed, the external researchers concluded that not only was the theatre well know in the area, but “an indispensible part of the fabric of life in Morgantown” (Lobanov 7).

In my findings the perception of the theatre has not changed a great deal since that feasibility study was conducted nearly eight years ago. I was able to question a different sample of community members that included fifteen patrons (chosen based on either length of patronage or at random). Everyone that I interviewed supports the theatre and its mission, while twelve of those interviewed believe that West Virginia Public Theatre is a vital part of the community’s artistic development. A teenage patron, Brady Dunn, from nearby Fairmont attends the theatre regularly with his parents and finds that “West Virginia Public Theatre is an experience that families can share, discuss, and enjoy together.” Dunn’s mother, Kathy, who sometimes volunteers as an usher, added

\(^{41}\) A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix D.
\(^{42}\) To be discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this study.
A few years ago, I heard a child comment as he entered the theatre and saw the stage and the set. His comment was, ‘Wow! That’s the biggest T.V. screen I’ve ever seen!’ I think a comment like that says it all about the glut of television… technology—in our society—and how important it is that children are exposed to human contact and human interaction where live theatre is concerned.

Dunn’s response, similar to other anecdotal evidence, reinforces my findings that WVPT’s production of live theatre is an intrinsic part of the social and educational growth of this semi-rural community. A large section of the theatre’s patrons are families, especially for holiday programming or for productions such as Disney’s Beauty and the Beast or Disney’s High School Musical and the Dunn family’s positive comments are representative of those families reinforcing the fact that the arts are important to many younger residents of the area and how theatre can speak to various generations in a family.

Christian Cox, a librarian also from Fairmont, affirms the theatre’s commitment to professional entertainment in a recent interview. He states that WVPT helps to develop the culture in the area and that “enrichment of the arts is beneficial in all aspects, adding culture and entertainment to the community.” Peter McCumber, who manages the Concert Theatre space, but also attends the theatre agrees: “There are not many opportunities for entertainment in this community that are not sports related or just a music act. WVPT provides a valuable resource to people like me who are not sports fans and prefer more artistic entertainment.”

Not everyone agrees that the theatre provides “artistic” entertainment. James D. Held, a WVU theatre professor and patron of the arts, argues that

WVPT claims to offer ‘Broadway quality musical productions,’ though
if anyone has seen a real Broadway musical—there is no comparison. That being said, WVPT has offered classical musical shows that are obviously enjoyed by the local audiences, many of whom have never seen a show in New York or Chicago. I strongly question the repetition of some shows over several years. If I were a regular subscriber, I would feel cheated to have to see *Cats* or *42nd Street* over and over again!

WVU Division of Theatre and Dance Chair Joshua Williamson agrees with Held. Williamson believes that the aesthetic quality of the productions is lacking due to a limited budget and a very large space to fill. The CAC Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre\(^{43}\) has a flexible proscenium opening of forty to fifty-eight feet with a stage depth of thirty-six feet (*WVU College of Creative Arts*). Williamson commented, in an interview, that “with that much space to fill and a limited budget, the sets are dwarfed. If the theatre would have moved into the Metropolitan, with its smaller stage, the production qualities would improve a great deal.” The Metropolitan is a renovated Vaudeville-era theatre located in downtown Morgantown with a much smaller stage and nearly half as many seats. Many organizations have urged Iannone to move the theatre there, but Iannone has rejected that notion citing the space’s lack of sufficient dressing room space, an orchestra pit, and an adequate counter weight system and fly house.\(^{44}\) While personal interviews of this nature illuminate the theatre’s shortcomings from a professional perspective, the theatre relies on feedback from its audience to determine the direction its entertainment offerings could go. Held and Williamson’s perspectives are not necessarily indicative of the majority of the patrons who attend WVPT productions. Given their backgrounds and exposure to professional theatre, their expectations are likely to be higher and their opinions more discriminate.

\(^{43}\) The space was named after the 2002-2003 renovation.

\(^{44}\) This will be discussed, at length, in Chapter Four of this study.
Audience surveys\textsuperscript{45} are tools that theatres use for demographic purposes, to uncover trends in ticket sales, and to determine future seasons. Typically, the surveys are available throughout the season in the lobby and, once per week (on a rotational basis to make sure that patrons of different days of the week are targeted as respondents), a staff member will specifically ask patrons to fill them out. On average, the theatre receives close to five hundred completed surveys per season. Although these anonymous surveys are do not provide a great deal of specific answers (by nature the opportunity for follow-up questions is not possible), they do provide useful data for this particular study. Often the comments left on surveys are complaints or ways that the patrons think the theatre should improve. Representative comments include:

- There are not enough toilets.
- Fix the sound—very irritating!
- \textit{Miss Saigon} was too vulgar!
- Shows are often repeated and dated.
- More handicapped parking spaces are needed.

It is interesting to note that very few of these audience surveys present positive written feedback. However, one statistic garnered from the surveys is that an overwhelming majority of the audience attends WVPT because of the theatre’s reputation. It seems as if the audience is willing to cope with certain shortcomings as long as the theatre’s commitment to its mission is strong and it continues to offer the entertainment the community desires.

The importance of spectatorship and audience feedback is central to live theatrical ventures. Dolan writes:

\textsuperscript{45} See Appendix C for a representative example of WVPT’s audience surveys.
Something in the very liminality of theater, in its suspension from the common
distractions of everyday life, allows even an audience of strangers to be receptive to
emotion […] Only in the temporary public comprised by performance does the
audience’s identity cohere. And in that coherence, spectators find themselves recipients
of an ‘amorous outpouring’ that would be impossible to receive without their peers
surrounding them. (“Utopia” 27-28)

Here Dolan posits that, as a community comprised of strangers, an audience can come together
as a cohesive group to share both a common emotional journey and a common response
providing feedback to the performers on stage (i.e. through applause, standing ovations, ticket
sales, reviews and even surveys). This idea can be adapted to the WVPT audience community
identified by its collective emotional response to the quality of entertainment presented on the
stage. In my estimation it is a dependent cycle: theatre is presented to a temporary community of
patrons, they provide feedback through various means, and, ideally, the theatre takes that
feedback and shifts its production approach in order to continue to create community and draw
audiences. Dolan’s utopian theatre community is reliant on perception, reception, and feedback.
Although this may seem simplistic, Dolan’s theory allows for an explanation of the phenomenon
of “communitas” in terms of audience and provides an important lesson for the young producer:
do not underestimate the power of audience reception and feedback. For example, when the
negative review of 2000’s She Loves Me appeared, ticket sales diminished and the remainder of
the run played to half-houses or less. However, when the theatre presents a show suggested by a
bulk of the audience surveyed, such a Cats, the production sells out or plays to near-capacity.
Thus, when a producer allows the natural phenomenon of audience cohesion to occur and
welcomes the resulting and communal response, the theatre is guided in the direction that its
community feels it needs to go and serving that community, in part, is likely to be an element of any successful theatrical venture.

*Repetition and Two-Week Runs*

When looking at the production history of West Virginia Public Theatre, a trend appears: the repetition of several titles. While this is not an uncommon practice, it seems as if it is a customary practice for this particular theatre and the source of criticism from many in the community as evidenced from the representative voice of James D. Held. When asked about this tradition, Iannone remarked that titles are repeated for one of two reasons: popularity and convenience (Iannone, “Mar.”). Most of the repeated titles are reproduced for the former, which virtually assures successful box office sales: *Cats, Disney’s Beauty and The Beast* and *The Full Monty* all produced twice between 2005 and 2010; *The Will Rogers Follies* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* both produced four times. Other titles such as *A Chorus Line* and *Always…Patsy Cline* have been produced four and five times, respectively, because of lower budget requirements and *42nd Street* has been presented four times due to the stock of sets, costumes, or props in the theatre’s storage. This repetition may seem monotonous to some, but the theatre’s cyclical practice is one based in finances and the fact that the often repeated shows keep selling well serves as evidence that a majority of the audience does not find the repetition off-putting. However, despite the lack of objection, this repetition results in an absence of new material to challenge the audience. This trend also limits the amount of work that the theatre can do to promote awareness and provoke change. While the moral lessons learned through the presentations of such productions as *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* or *Joseph*... can certainly point the audience towards a better world, a primary tenet of Dolan’s utopia, the key to utopic performance is challenging an audience to think. If patrons are subjected to the same material
year after year, they will become complacent, comfortable, and confined, which will result in a community stagnant and unable to move forward. Through this result, the greater Morgantown community suffers and, potentially, will lose members of the growing “creative class” to areas more apt to challenge the intellect of its community members.

In the best of all possible worlds, producers would have the resources to mount new productions every season including those that may or may not bring in large audiences, but would potentially force audiences to be aware of social issues (i.e. *The Laramie Project*). However, this is simply not the case in the harsh reality of commercial theatre. In order to make repetition viable not just financially, but also in terms of reaching toward utopic performance, a producer can be creative in how repeated shows are produced. As evidenced by West Virginia Public Theatre’s successful post-September 11th *A Christmas Carol*, performances can be altered to present varying views of world issues or to promote change in other ways including community outreach. For example, a remounting of *Cats* could include a component where certain members of the cast, in character, visit schools to encourage children to be creative and to write poetry. A remounting of *The Full Monty* could include visits to counseling centers for community members who are dealing with job loss and economic hardship. Theatre, even repetitive commercial theatre, can find moments of utopia and producers benefit through the enhanced community involvement and visibility that such programs provide.

The theatre also has a history of presenting a production for two-weeks, rather than the typical one week. This intermittent practice began in 1989 after the theatre’s move to the West Virginia University campus. That season productions of *George M!* and *Harvey* ran for two weeks. Although, throughout the theatre’s history, the two-week run is an anomaly, the spirit behind it makes sense: money is saved on paying actors and staff for rehearsal and on the
construction of sets, costumes, and properties for an additional production. However, the two-week run has only been viable when two spaces have been used. The theatre does not tend to increase its’ profit margin when occupying the same space with one production for two weeks. The 2009 season saw the most successful use of this practice as *Disney’s High School Musical* played for two, highly profitable, weeks on the main stage at the Creative Arts Center while *Doubt* played in the studio space. Two week runs also become more viable if benefit or discounted performances are offered followed by visits with the cast to discuss issues raised within the production. Unfortunately, the theatre’s new venue will not allow for this type of configuration.

Premier Entertainment Destination

As is evident through the discussion of production history and audience feedback, the West Virginia Public Theatre has attempted, throughout its history, to meet its entertainment mission and, for the most part, the feedback has been positive. But, do those facts permit the theatre to call itself West Virginia’s “only professional musical theatre” or the region’s “premier entertainment destination?” In order to answer that question, I will examine the major theatrical venues in the state of West Virginia to determine if the theatre can lay claim to such a title in the state or to reveal how the theatres function together in such a small and sparsely populated state. Furthermore, I will briefly investigate the theatre’s regional competition in order to ascertain the efficacy of the theatre’s second boast.

In West Virginia, there are three other professional theatres: two of them members of AEA and one that is not. Theatre West Virginia, located in Beckley (approximately one hundred and seventy miles from Morgantown) could be considered a semi-professional theatre due to its non-union status: the actors and stage managers who work at Theatre West Virginia do not
belong to Actor’s Equity Association, the professional union for actors and stage managers in the United States. However, the theatre does pay its employees and does offer a number of educational programs including a training academy and several touring troupes: The Actor’s Company, The Marionette Company, and the West Virginia Dance Company (*Theatre West Virginia.com*). Theatre West Virginia’s summer season usually consists of two historical dramas (*The Hatfields and the McCoys* and *Honey in the Rock*) detailing some aspect of West Virginia history and a Broadway musical. Since 1961, the theatre has played to over one-million patrons (*Theatre West Virginia.com*).

Although Theatre West Virginia produces musicals during its season, The Contemporary American Theatre Festival (CATF) held in Shepherdstown (one hundred and sixty miles from Morgantown) does not. However, it is still a major source of theatrical activity in the state and is, perhaps, a more recognized name in the business. According to its website, it is one of the most vital new play development centers in the country. Since 1991, CATF has produced 68 new plays, including 23 world premieres. Adventurous audiences from 32 states and the District of Columbia and Canada have attended the Theater Festival’s productions. The plays are professionally produced using Actors' Equity Association's LORT D contract; CATF operates under agreements from AEA, United Scenic Artists, and the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. (*CATF.org*)

Whereas West Virginia Public Theatre focuses on two primary areas for obtaining its talent (Pittsburgh/Morgantown and New York), CATF attracts a more specialized talent base from across the country. Similarly, WVPT focuses on its immediate community for its patrons, while CATF hosts audience members from around the country. The theatres are disparate in almost
every aspect and share very little in terms of talent or audience base. However, it is interesting to note that several former WVPT company members (most are also WVU faculty), have worked for CATF. I posit that CATF is perhaps more aligned with WVU’s mission concerning non-musical dramatic literature and, as a result, it makes sense that many of these faculty members would have a stronger allegiance to CATF than WVPT. While Theatre West Virginia seems to be a non-union competitor of the theatre in Morgantown and CATF appears to have a completely different mission, a small theatre in the southeastern part of the state has a mission and history more closely reflecting that of West Virginia Public Theatre.

The fourth professional theatre in West Virginia is the Greenbrier Valley Theatre (GVT) located in Lewisburg (two hundred miles from Morgantown). Claiming to be “West Virginia’s Official Year-Round Professional Theatre,” GVT produces between ten and fourteen productions every year including a festival of plays written by community members. GVT was established in 1976 (in a tent) and has been growing ever since acquiring several spaces in Lewisburg to present its mainstage productions, festivals, and educational programs. GVT has won numerous national awards and has received at least one major NEA grant in each of the past five years (GVTheatre.org). Of its year-round offerings, between two and four are musicals. Though not a rival in terms of large-scale musical theatre, GVT is an established year-round theatre, which is what Iannone and WVPT aspire to be (Iannone, “April”).

By looking at these three competing professional theatres in the state, it is safe to surmise that WVPT is, indeed, the state’s only professional theatre that focuses primarily on musical theatre and this serves as justification to publicize itself as “West Virginia’s only professional musical theatre.” More importantly, it seems as if the theatre actually complements the other
companies mentioned here: the physical locations and disparate missions of each theatre do not create rivalry. Instead, each has found its own niche in the state’s theatrical whole providing the citizens of the state a virtual buffet of choices for the entertainment dollar.

There are two major regional companies that compete with West Virginia Public Theatre for patrons: Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera and Pittsburgh Musical Theatre (formerly Gargaro productions). Both companies perform in Downtown Pittsburgh (seventy miles north of Morgantown), are associated with AEA, and specialize in musical theatre. These two theatres also offer numerous educational and training programs throughout the year. The Pittsburgh CLO was established in 1946 and has produced major musicals on the stage of the Benedum Center and Heinz Hall since 1972 (PittsburghCLO.org). The company utilizes celebrity performers from Broadway, television, and film and also uses veteran theatre designers with extensive professional experience. With a total patronage far surpassing WVPT, there is very little comparison. When Iannone served as apprentice to Bill Thunhurst at the CLO, he dreamed of having a rivaling company (Iannone, “April”), but WVPT does not come close in terms of scale, programming, or numbers: The PCLO draws nearly 200,000 patrons annually to its seven productions (each show runs one to two weeks) and the historic Benedum Center (with a seating capacity of twenty-eight hundred) and has yearly operations budget of over ten million dollars.

Pittsburgh Musical Theatre (PMT), on the other hand, is similar to WVPT with regard to structure, performers, and production quality. Operating throughout the Fall, Winter, and Spring, Pittsburgh Musical Theatre was established in 1990:

…with the vision of creating a regional musical theater company committed to quality productions of the best of Pittsburgh's own professional talent at a

46 See Appendix for a map of these locations.
price affordable to all residents, especially children and families. As a non-profit...performing arts organization, the mission expanded to include a strong commitment to education, training, and outreach programs.

(Pittsburgh Musicals.com)

PMT’s five annual productions (running one to two weeks each) are presented at the restored Byham Theatre (1300 seat capacity) in downtown Pittsburgh playing to nearly 45,000 patrons every season. Similar in so many aspects, the theatres seem to be natural rivals. However, they seem to complement each other rather than compete through the sharing of performers, designers, and directors and, at times, designs such as the set and costume designs for Miss Saigon. Since PMT does not operate during the summer, the companies are able to complement each other’s production schedules by sharing temporary staff members (directors, musical directors, designers) and casting pool.

As evidenced by the numerous reviews and community testimonies presented in this study, West Virginia Public Theatre has a decent reputation of producing quality entertainment. After examination of the other professional theatres in the state, it can be surmised that it is West Virginia’s only professional theatre focused on producing musicals and has staked a solid claim as such. However, it doesn’t quite live up to what a theatre with more extensive resources—such as the Pittsburgh CLO—can offer in terms of what James D. Held called “Broadway quality.” Although WVPT and its Executive Producer, Ron Iannone, have been commended for bringing theatrical entertainment to the mountains of West Virginia, the theatre still needs to grow, both artistically and financially, in order to claim its status as a “premier entertainment destination” that attracts a large number of audience members from around the state (and around the country) who make attending the theatre the central part of their leisure time in the area. In order to justly...

47 Including the fact that both producers Iannone (WVPT) and Ken Gargaro (PMT) are college professors by trade.
assert this title, the theatre must reorganize structurally and rethink its entertainment mission (or, more likely, how it approaches meeting that mission).

It seems that one principal criticism of the theatre (at least in terms of production) is that it does not meet the artistic standards of Broadway or even the Pittsburgh CLO: the production quality continues to suffer due to limited technical budgets (an average of five thousand dollars for large-scale musicals and fifteen hundred dollars for non-musical plays) and resources. One possible strategy might be to reorganize the structure of the season by producing more small-scale musicals at a ratio of one small-scale show for every one large scale production. The money saved could be redirected to the larger-scale productions and, as a result, allow for more extensive scenery, costumes, and stage properties. The efficacy of this approach could be equated to Iannone’s decision to scale back the number of “name” performers hired each season. In addition, as the theatre continues to morph, adding a production in the fall and the spring might increase the theatre’s audience base (drawing patrons who, perhaps, miss many of the summer offerings due to family vacations) and provide opportunities for corporate sponsors to contribute to the theatre year-round or as their own budgets allow. This has not been an option in the past due to the scheduling restrictions at the Creative Arts Center, but may be possible in the future.

Considerations from History

West Virginia Public Theatre’s storied history is a unique lesson for would-be theatrical producers. Although numerous fledgling theatre companies meet adversity in many of the same ways that Iannone and his theatre have, the distinctiveness of this journey lies, primarily, in its community. Theatre companies are routinely established in locations where there is already an artistic presence. However, few producers have the vision of bringing the arts to areas of the
country where they are considered inconsequential. In many of these areas—including the greater Morgantown area—the focus of entertainment lies mainly in local sports. Iannone saw the need for social development in the artistic arena in the greater Morgantown area (and its surrounding rural communities) and set the groundwork for creating a long-lasting arts institution that has become vital to the community.

How did he do it? First, he saw the need and established a plan. Second, he became educated in the methods of producing professional theatre by serving as an intern to the Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera. Next, he found a space and community partners (initially the Sheraton Lakeview Resort). Perhaps, the most vital step to this process was networking: Iannone established friendships with community leaders across the area and used those relationships to create both his board and his donor base. Finally, he hired the most seasoned and popular artists that the theatre could afford. If Iannone had not been able to bring Dean Jones, Carol Lawrence, and Judy Norton-Taylor to Morgantown for that first season, then, the theatre would not have survived. Iannone and the theatre—early on in its history—created a tradition of presenting family-friendly popular entertainment and that is how the company has survived throughout the years and has been able to create its educational and outreach programs. The use of “name” performers has been incredibly important to the theatre in terms of both audience appeal and national recognition and has been a common thread throughout the theatre’s history from Dean Jones in 1985 to Eddie Mekka in 2009.

There are many lessons that emerge for examining the history of West Virginia Public Theatre, lessons which burgeoning producers might find particularly useful. Like many major public ventures, the theatre has had its successes and failures. However, because of the commitment made to the community by Producer Iannone and the theatre’s Board of Trustees,
WVPT continues to present programming that is beneficial to the community in terms of entertainment. Based on this case study, I offer the following considerations for fledgling producers:

1. **Establish the need for the theatre in a particular area.** Research the already existent cultural activities and find a particular niche for the theatre. Do not establish a theatre focused on musicals if your area already contains two or three of those types of companies. Of course, this depends on the size of the community. For example, The Pittsburgh area is able to support two musical theatres (The Pittsburgh CLO and Pittsburgh Musical Theatre). Iannone, when he established Lakeview Theatre, determined a need for a professional musical theatre: no others existed within the state or within seventy miles of the area.

2. **Find corporate and public support.** Iannone was able to establish a working rapport with the Sheraton Lakeview Resort and later with several public figures in the area including local government officials, administrators from West Virginia University, and local business owners. Currently, the theatre has several major local sponsors including Consol Energy and Morgantown Printing and Binding.

3. **Hire “name” performers that potential patrons in the area would know and then publicize them.** Iannone started the theatre using well-known personalities and has continued that practice throughout the years. Not every production needs to have a “star,” but at least one per season will help to attract audience members. It is often useful to use the celebrity performer in one of your season’s early productions in order to stimulate publicity. Audience members will come to see their favorite actor and will,
potentially, come back because of the quality of entertainment provided. This trend is
evidenced throughout the history of West Virginia Public Theatre.

4. **Foster local talent; foster young talent.** One trend that emerges from the history of
West Virginia Public Theatre is the sheer number of performers that have begun their
professional careers at the theatre and, subsequently, reached the national stage in New
York or in Hollywood. Many of these young performers either began as local youths
in the theatre’s educational programs (including Future Stars or the Professional
Internship Program) or holiday productions. Without the opportunities provided by
the theatre, these performers may not have had the experience necessary to succeed
in larger venues. These examples are not only a source of great pride for the theatre
but, more importantly, attract other young performers to the theatre.

5. **Know your audience.** Simply put, do not perform material that your potential
audience base might find offensive or unattractive. Iannone has been very strict in the
type of stories told and language used in his productions. If your area is more liberal,
then some liberties can be taken. However, beware of taking risks on material, especially
early in your theatre’s history. Also know what material will attract your target audience.
While *Oklahoma!* may be wholesome and reinforce American values, it also may seem
dated to many potential patrons. Instead a production of *The Will Rogers Follies* might
serve your audience more appropriately.

6. **Do not skimp on quality.** When a theatre begins to “cut corners” and present
productions that are aesthetically less-pleasing than expected, ticket sales may diminish.
A major criticism of West Virginia Public Theatre, in past years, has been its diminished
scenery. This has come because of a cut in budget. In order to keep quality high, think
about finding a balance between large and small-scale musicals, which require smaller budgets. The size of your venue may also dictate the scale of your productions and the subsequent production budget. Furthermore, the type of venue can also affect your budget (i.e. an arena configuration requires less extensive scenery).

7. **Do communicate and collaborate; do not compete.** This is an area that West Virginia Public Theatre can improve upon. The more that theatres can complement each other rather than compete against each other, the more opportunities will arise for sharing productions, joint-sponsored educational programming, and funding. If West Virginia Public Theatre had fostered more relationships like those they have established, in the past, with Pittsburgh Musical Theatre, The State Theatre, and the Clay Center, it may have been able to save a great deal of money while promoting good public works. It is also important to cultivate existing relationships to encourage on-going alliances and growth.

These few suggestions are not meant to be a “how-to” manual for beginning producers, but rather some basic principles to consider when establishing a new theatrical venture learned through examining the trends established by West Virginia Public Theatre and analyzed in this case study. By examining the past practices of WVPT, its producer, and its audiences, budding artistic executives can envision ways in which to build upon successful practices and to avoid the pitfalls of ineffective decisions. The next chapter will focus on the second part of the theatre’s mission statement: to educate.
CHAPTER III. EDUCATION

In a 2004 study, Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson examined the importance of theatre education for young peoples’ learning and participation in community life in the United Kingdom (6). Their research led to findings that support the idea that theatre—as an educational tool—plays an important role in the development of young people. They found that “theatre can positively contribute to the transmission of their [the students’] skills development, influencing and supporting intellectual development, as well as empowering them to affect change in their own lives by opening up further education…opportunities” (2). This study looked beyond theatre as an academic endeavor by examining theatre as an educational tool in the realm outside of the traditional classroom and further reinforced the “importance of theatre as an art form and how its application outside of a formal education setting allows space for the exploration of personal experience and self-reflection” (2). Thus, theatre can become a central catalyst in the development of young minds and personalities: a central theme in the development of West Virginia Public Theatre’s educational mission.

Theatre can not only aid in the all-important maturing process for our young, but it can also aid in the creation of community. Education and the creation of community go hand in hand as the collective population seeks to improve the quality of life of its citizens through the teaching of morals, life lessons, and tradition. Jill Dolan, in her work on the “utopian performative” calls upon Victor Turner’s concept of “communitas” in order to address the interconnection between education and community. Turner posits that “Spontaneous communitas is a ‘direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities’[…] It has something ‘magical’ about it” (Turner “Variations” 47-48). I believe this “communitas” can be the creation of community through the education of its young and, according to Dolan, theatre
can help to produce this miraculous coming together (Dolan, “Performance” 455). Dolan believes that theatre can be the maker of culture and the vessel through which tradition is carried. Furthermore, her assertion is that theatre can serve as an educational tool to challenge us to think, encourage us to make the world better, and often ministers to the community in many of the same ways as does the academy. Dolan is not alone in her contention.

The question is continually asked in the academy: why study theatre? Professor Eric W. Trumbull answers this question quite succinctly on his website dedicated to exactly that query. According to Trumbull, theatre is “a social force…an influencer and reflector of social values…a personal force.” Trumbull employs the historical work of Eric Bentley to posit that “Theatre has often been used primarily as a teaching mechanism.” Using the examples of the medieval theatre teaching about Christianity and Shakespeare instructing his audience about the history of the British crown, Trumbull puts forward that theatre has always been a major player in the educational development of community. That tradition is carried forward by many modern theatres in any number of ways through various kinds of educational programs and the presentation of shows designed for young audiences.

This chapter will focus on West Virginia Public Theatre’s commitment to the education of its community as one of its primary missions, simply avowed in its mission statement as “to educate.” Through the discussion of the theatre’s many educational programs, I will examine the ways in which the theatre strives to both create community through education and educate the community in which it resides. The effectiveness of these programs will be examined specifically through the words of a cross section of community members (for example residents, educators, theatre employees) both permanent and temporary, and their thoughts concerning how the theatre does or does not meet its stated educational mission. To begin the investigation, I
will examine how the theatre’s unique relationships with several collegiate theatre programs in the tri-state area affect its ability to meet its educational goals.

Professional/Academic Theatre Relationships

In the United States today there are numerous academic theatre programs, large and small, with intimate associations with professional theatres. This integration of educational and professional theatre contributes to the advancement and expansion of theatre as a respected academic discipline and a viable commercial art form. Such partnerships are a commitment to the development and expansion of important professional theatre and training laboratories, in which advanced students and professional artists work together to encourage achievement in production and performance. This collaboration results in skilled artists trained by professionals, and enriched programming that, in many cases, serves the surrounding communities in a number of ways.

Many of these relationships are direct: meaning that the academic program feeds the professional program as part of the curriculum. There may be performance or internship requirements, including artists-in-residency clauses. In other cases the two theatrical bodies occupy the same space, but are not directly linked through any curricular or contractual bond. This latter dynamic is reflected in the relationship between the Division of Theatre and Dance at West Virginia University and the West Virginia Public Theatre. Drawing from interviews with faculty members, former employees, and students, the literature each body generates, and my own personal history over a sixteen year span with both of these institutions, I hope to bring a unique multifaceted perspective on not only the working (or, at times, dysfunctional) relationship these two bodies have, but also the connection each of these organizations has to the community in which they reside.
Before delving into my personal journey of WVU student-turned-WVPT practitioner, I think it is necessary to provide some demographical data in relation to the community in which both theatrical bodies reside. A primarily white, Christian community, Morgantown’s residents are, for the most part, middle and lower class with nearly thirty-percent\(^{48}\) of the population living under the poverty level (City-Data.com). The two primary employers in the area are the university and the dwindling, dangerous, and now divisive coal-mining industry. Located in a picturesque part of the state with a myriad of recreational activities within a short drive, tourism has become one of the fastest growing industries in Morgantown, fed by the growth of available cultural activities. The existence of two major theatrical institutions in this area provides artistic hope and sustenance for a community that was once void of theatrical outlets and whose primary entertainment focus was the university’s nationally ranked sports teams.

It is important to note my insider’s view of both of these theatrical institutions, which has given me multiple frames of references from which to analyze this unique relationship. As both a student in WVU’s Theatre Program from 1995 to 2000 and a performer for WVPT since 1999, my perspective is unique and will help to inform my analysis of this distinctive association. As one of the few to cross the boundaries between these two institutions in the past decade, it is useful to chronicle my evolving relationship with both theatricals bodies, to clarify the range of perspectives which my history provides. My journey began in 1995 when I became a freshman, B.F.A. Acting major at West Virginia University. Although the program did not have a musical theatre component (my primary area of interest), I was told that there was a professional theatre that operated in the division’s spaces during the summer. I knew OF this theatre, but being a transplant into the area, knew very little about the theatre’s structure, history, or reputation. That would change.

\(^{48}\) In 2007.
Throughout my first semester of study at the university, I heard a great deal of hearsay about West Virginia Public Theatre. This gossip came primarily from the students (most of whom had little to no experience with the theatre). The hearsay consisted of “they don’t do real theatre: they do musical theatre” or “any theatre that only rehearses one week, isn’t doing real art!” The biases demonstrated here stem from the division’s focus on classical theatre training (based in Shakespeare, Moliere, and American Psychological Realism). There were also grumblings about how the theatre relentlessly hijacked the college’s rehearsal, performance, and shop spaces during the summer (a time when the theatre division did not use them). Students, including myself, were sometimes even discouraged by both faculty and my peers from auditioning for the theatre. Thus, I became leery about it and when auditions were posted for their summer seasons over the next few years, I was hesitant about auditioning and chose not to do so. However, in 1999, the division and the theatre decided to work together on a holiday production of the musical Peter Pan. Since this was a joint production and other students were auditioning, I decided to put aside any tentativeness and try out.

Ultimately, I was cast as Starkey, the pirate, in the production and from that point on would be one of the few to successfully (at least in terms of longevity) cross the border between the university and the theatre. As I journeyed through the rehearsal process—short by most collegiate standards—my first impressions lead me to believe that much of the chitchat amongst the division’s students was, in my opinion, unfounded. The theatre’s management, production staff, and artists seemed to be dedicated to putting together a production to entertain and educate children. Furthermore, the producer was adamant, from his introductory speech to the company, about giving the children of the community—many from impoverished families—their first

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49 Primarily, the agreement was that the Division of Theatre and Dance would provide the technical elements and support for the production (i.e. the design and crew) and the theatre would provide the director and the cast. However, five division students were cast, including myself.
theatrical experience in hope of making them lifelong theatergoers. As a result of this initial experience with the theatre, I decided that, no matter how my professors and colleagues at WVU reacted, I would be willing to work for the theatre again. In subsequent years I have continued to perform at the theatre, have been an associate director since 2000, the historian and Director of Marketing and Development since 2008, and have been on the directing staff since 2009.

I did not leave my training at the university behind. Despite the cold shoulders I—and the others involved in the production—received from many of our fellow students, most of the faculty of the division supported us in our work.\(^50\) In fact, many of the division’s faculty worked for the theatre themselves as actors, directors, designers, and technicians. So, the question arises: why would such a negative perception exist between many of the students (and faculty) of the Division of Theatre and Dance and the professional theatre that had been embraced by the university, many of its faculty, and the community?

To answer that question, one must understand the similarities and differences between these two organizations. In order to effectively compare the two bodies, it is important to first take a look at the mission statements for each. First, the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance:

> We, the faculty and staff, educate students in the diverse traditions and practices of theatre and dance. We challenge each student to engage and confront—vigorously, honestly, and innovatively—the many processes of collaborative theatre and dance. We exemplify to our students the role of creative artists to develop, to explore, and to contribute meaningfully to the world they inhabit. Our productions provide practical experience for our theatre students, and serve the community audience a balance of classical, modern, and contemporary theatre. (WVU College of Creative Arts)

\(^50\) Only two of the five division students cast in the production have ever worked at the theatre since Peter Pan.
The Division also offers a minor program in Dance, which provides an overview of dance styles, history, and composition. This mission statement reflects a pedagogical approach that is both varied and experiential, focusing on the communal creation of theatrical art.

West Virginia Public Theatre’s mission does not seem to contradict the values of the Division of Theatre and Dance, nor does it appear to attempt to seize any of the division’s primary pedagogical aims as its own. Perhaps the students of the division were perpetuating viewpoints set forth at the very beginning of this turbulent relationship. The rift may also be attributed, in part, to the seeds of the theatre being planted at West Virginia University, yet not in the Division of Theatre and Dance.

West Virginia Public Theatre was founded in 1985 by Dr. Ron Iannone, a then faculty member in WVU’s Educational Psychology department. In 1989, the president of West Virginia University Neil Bucklew, a long time friend of Iannone and a patron of the theatre, saw how the professional summer productions affected the community members and insisted that the theatre find a permanent, indoor facility to continue its work. He suggested to Iannone the WVU Creative Arts Center (home to the Division of Theatre and Dance) and mandated the move. This is, perhaps, the watershed moment that inaugurated the clash between the two organizations. Associate Professor of Theatre James D. Held recalls the moment when the move occurred:

`When they came into the CAC, most of our faculty was livid about the arrangement, to the astonishment of our (then) chair, Judith Williams, who thought she was solving a problem of a summer theatre by associating with WVPT […] Part of the problem was that we really did not have a viable musical

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51 The theatre’s mission can be found in Chapter One.
52 Held was Chair of the Division of Theatre and Dance from 1989-1995.
theatre program at that time (or now), and the other problem was that most did not want to work with Professor Iannone who was perceived not to have any significant theatre background.

Even though Held remembers that most faculty members did not want to work with Iannone, many, in fact, did. Held continues to discuss that this was not a one-sided conflict. In fact, Iannone—reluctantly—came to the faculty to propose an association:

Mr. Iannone did not really want to want to have a partner, he wanted a facility. I think he needed us much more than we needed him, but…the faculty, wrongly, I believe, refused to consider a true partnership. The perception that our facilities were being used at our expense was a very bitter pill, notwithstanding that I got the President to give us about $40,000 to replace shop equipment and that WVPT donated some equipment to us in partial repayment for shop use and wear and tear.

Held (one-time scenic designer for WVPT) posits that the relationship was doomed to begin with. It seems from his recollection of the events of 1989 that neither body was looking for an artistic partnership though one would have been mutually beneficial.

From Held’s comment and my personal observation, I surmise that the ongoing conflict appears to be perpetuated in three disparate ways. First, there are students who tend to carry on the tradition of distrust and dislike of the theatre. One possible explanation is that these students, seemingly, find themselves caught in a pathway of uncertainty: in doubt of exactly what to do with their lives, unsure of the future because of the economic crisis, and scared to take a dip in the professional pool and that fear manifests itself in a distrust concerning the value of West Virginia Public Theatre. I also have found from informal conversations with many students
(both current and former) that they, at times, relish in creating and prolonging a conflict that simply has nothing to do with the actual relationship between the division and the theatre. In this way they rationalize their own lack of confidence and the fear they have of auditioning for (or applying to work for) a professional company that is literally in their own backyard. Secondly, I believe that this supposed conflict has survived all of these years because a handful of faculty and students (who later became faculty and staff), who were around during the 1989 move and felt imposed upon by the administration, continue the tradition of clashing with the theatre, despite suggestions from the administration to work together. I remember this from my own experiences as a student in the program; faculty members would continually berate the theatre and its administration, discouraging students from working there. Finally, there are those (faculty, staff, and students) who find the work that West Virginia Public Theatre does to be inferior art, if art at all.

Until recently, there has been little training in musical theatre provided by the Division of Theatre and Dance. I do not propose that this absence of training signifies that the faculty holds the musical artform as subordinate to what they teach. It is simply a fact that the mission of the division is not focused on musical theatre training. However, because of the division’s focus and long rehearsal periods, some students might construe from their training and experience that musical theatre must then be somehow a lesser artform than traditional, non-musical drama and musical theatre that is produced in a week is even more abominable.

The fractured relationship with the division has made working in the division’s spaces difficult and has forced the theatre to find a new home. The 2009 season, the theatre’s 25th anniversary summer, was its last in the Creative Arts Center of West Virginia University and the 2009 winter children’s production was the final WVPT presentation ever on WVU soil. The
division and the theatre have attempted numerous times to create a working relationship that many theatre educators and professionals believe is invaluable. Geoffrey Hitch, a former Professor of Drama at Carnegie Mellon University and a long-time WVPT director, remarked in a recent interview that “it is incredibly important that college and theatres have links [...] Those arrangements help establish the link between schools and the profession, and help to pass along the wisdom of older theatre artists to the new generation.” WVPT Associate Artistic Director Michael Licata, agrees, but does suggest a caveat: “In theory, I think it should be valuable. But, and this is only my opinion, these healthy theatre collegiate relationships are few and far between… Perhaps the problem is that the two institutions have conflicting goals. For a professional theater to succeed, it must produce professional quality productions for which the audience is willing to pay. The college's goal is to educate. So, in essence, the two organizations are at odds from the get go.” Despite the significance of such working relationships proposed by Hitch, Licata’s suggestion that such links are the exception and not the norm is, perhaps, an all-too-true reality. However, having witnessed and experienced firsthand this particular rift between WVU and WVPT, I believe that my training as a young, theatre practitioner would have been significantly more effective if the two bodies could have worked together more consistently.

There were moments during the history of the theatre that the two groups attempted to create a partnership: the very first holiday production—*A Christmas Carol* in 1995—saw a fairly positive collaboration between the two organizations that fostered future associations. However, the aforementioned production of *Peter Pan* was the most successful example, in part, because of Iannone’s willingness to accept both technical and artistic assistance with the production (i.e.}
student performers and technicians). Subsequent holiday productions of Cinderella in 2000 and A Christmas Carol in 2001 were fraught with conflict as current Division Chair, Joshua Williamson, stated “the holiday production schedule doesn’t work well for the division.” Noting final exam schedules, portfolio reviews, and other end-of-semester duties for both the faculty and the students (concerns that existed even during the successful collaboration of 1999’s Peter Pan), Williamson posited that WVPT is capable of handling the holiday, children’s programming without the assistance of the division. This has been the case for the past seven years. Michael Licata believes that a partnership does not work between the two because of a lack of a mutual language, that of musical theatre: “If WVU had a musical theatre professional training program, they could take advantage of the professionals WVPT engages for workshops and master classes […] I think the long term goals of the two institution are by nature at odds with each other.” While Licata may be right in some regards, it seems more complex than that, especially as it goes against one of the theatre’s primary missions: to educate. The performance skills mastered by the theatre’s professional actors do translate to the skills taught by the university’s faculty: the skills of musical theatre translate easily to the rigors of performing Shakespeare or Moliere. The division’s dance component also teaches skills directly related to the medium of musical theatre. Furthermore, the craft of technical theatre has very little to do with musical versus non-musical: the basic structures and techniques are the same.

Therefore, I believe that the rift goes deeper than the lack of a formal musical training program and dwells in a turbulent history between the two institutions. Professor Held agrees and believes that the odds were stacked against a partnership from the very beginning:

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53 While this was not the only time in the theatre’s history when WVU students were involved, it was the first time when the theatre relied on the students for a majority of backstage labor and ensemble performers.
The relationship *should* be able to operate on a mutually beneficial and healthy basis. Our grave mistake (not Ron's) was that we never insisted on having at least one faculty member as an associate producer and liaison with the Division of Theatre. We also did not contractually insist on what kind of shows would be produced in our facilities or plan seasons together or, really, do *anything* together [...] Because our faculty seemed so against this arrangement, and because we had a change in chairs and deans, *no one* ever re-visited the relationship to try to repair what had never been put properly in place in the beginning. I'm not sure if the relationship could be reconsidered at this point. I think it is a terrible loss to the Division of Theatre & Dance and a loss to WVPT that we could not have been mutually balanced partners in this venture. Both parties have suffered as a result.

Held’s remarks suggest that, at least, some of the faculty members—and, I posit, many of the students—would have liked to see a partnership flourish between the university and the theatre, but that negotiations seemed to break down at the very beginning. If the theatre and the university had been able to complement each other in both mission and practice, then, perhaps, the WVU-WVPT partnership would be listed among those at the beginning of this section: educational/professional associations that effectively work to both educate and entertain. Held also ascertains that a future change in chair or dean could encourage a renewed alliance between the university and the theatre: change promotes fresh perspectives and that is what this past and potential future association needs.

Burgeoning theatre producers should take heed of the rift seen here between WVU and WVPT: take advantage of existing programs, find a common-ground, and do not reject potential
and communally advantageous collaborations. Although many partnerships (i.e. Yale University and Yale Repertory Theatre) exist in a realm of paralleled interests, there is much information that can be shared between institutions that do not parallel each other in terms of training and production material. Simply because WVU focuses on non-musical dramatic literature and WVPT focuses on musical theatre, does not mean that the two bodies cannot complement each other; there are numerous similarities in performance techniques and production requirements for both distinct styles. For example any of the technical classes (i.e. stagecraft, costuming lighting) and performance-based classes such as acting and directing cover material which has applications in any form of theatre.

This failed relationship does not mean that West Virginia Public Theatre does not have strong relationships with other institutions of higher learning. In fact, there are many healthy relationships between the theatre and other colleges. The prime example is the affiliation between the theatre and Fairmont State University, located nearly twenty miles south of Morgantown. Spurred by the university’s technical director, Troy Snyder, who began to design sets and props for WVPT in 2004, this partnership, has thrived in terms of technical theatre. Primarily utilized for technical assistance on the holiday productions, Fairmont State University students have had a chance to both crew and design (chiefly, stage properties) for the productions,. These students have also had the opportunity to be a part of the Professional Internship Program in the carpentry and wardrobe departments and on stage crew. A similar affiliation with Frostburg State University in Maryland, was established with the help of Michael Licata and Frostburg Theatre Chair Mairzy Yost. Frostburg students and faculty have had the opportunity to perform on the WVPT stage, as well perform stage crew duties, set construction, and technical direction through both internships and hired staff positions. Additional
relationships have remained durable with professional actor training programs at Wright State University in Ohio, Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and Pennsylvania State University as the theatre actively recruits from these institutions. Furthermore, many of the theatre’s stage directors have also emerged from these working relationships including Geoffrey Hitch from CMU and Head of the Musical Theatre Program at Wright State, Professor Joe Deer. The key to these bonds, according to Michael Licata, is that these relationships are professional; their students audition for WVPT, if they are the strongest candidates, they get hired. Company members are not hired because they are from Wright State or CCM, they are hired because they are the best for the jobs. I don't think it's a coincidence that both of the aforementioned schools have excellent musical theatre programs. Perhaps the most important element to a good relationship is that we've never had a joint producing venture with any of these schools. The only money that changes hands is from employer to employee.

Although Licata stresses that these associations are merely employee/employer and that the best performer (or director) gets the job, it is important to realize that without a continuing, healthy relationship between these schools and the theatre, the students would not continue to audition and the theatre would not continue to hire them. Deer agrees and posits that the healthy relationship exists because it remains professional:

The informal relationship that exists now is ideal. Because students from Wright State have to audition for jobs at WVPT exactly like those from other schools and free-lancers, the level of competition is high. WVPT pays close attention to
Wright State students because many of these performers have established a reputation for reliability and well-developed talent. Any more formalized relationship could reduce the level of competition for WSU students and might obligate WVPT in ways that are not mutually advantageous. I don't advocate doing a WSU-only audition for the summer. I want my students to have to travel to the various locations and to compete on the spot with other student talent. They need to step up to the plate, so to speak, under that kind of pressure.

Each institution provides a certain skill set that complements the other and, thus, creates a working bond. Furthermore, in each case of a successful relationship, there is one central figure whose own area of expertise may help determine the kind of support that can be provided by the school (i.e. technicians or actors). The continued success of these relationships depends, primarily, on the working relationship between that central figure and the theatre. For example, if Snyder no longer worked for WVPT, more than likely, the theatre’s partnership with Fairmont State would change. Communication would be vital to keeping a healthy relationship going between the school and the theatre including, perhaps, the hiring of another Fairmont State faculty member as part of the theatre’s artistic staff. The associations also work because there is no tumultuous past between the theatre and any of the other schools: each communicated a clear need and clear boundaries and this is why the alliances work today. Furthermore, the theatre’s proximity to these other institutions supports the relationships: there is no shared space nor are they located in each other’s “backyard.”

The WVU-WVPT association began with conflict (a presidential mandate) and, as it still exists today, it creates a great communication barrier. If the two sides could open the lines of communication in order to strategize ways of working together, I believe a common ground
could be found. Moreover, Licata’s assumption that the strength of and the dedication to musical theatre training of each of the other departments is key to their students success at the theatre is also important to the understanding of why the WVU-WVPT partnership has been fraught with conflict throughout their unique and turbulent history. In order to bridge the gap here, the theatre could step up and help the WVU students, faculty and staff understand how musical theatre skills are indeed transferable to classical training. Many of the professional actors hired by WVPT also have “legitimate” theatre credits and could speak of how the various kinds of theatre can indeed feed and support each other philosophically, educationally, and financially. Select seasoned professionals could be asked to offer a masterclass to WVU students that would highlight links between classical training and musical theatre. WVPT administrators could put together a proposal for how the theatre—and its population—might be of real value to WVU, which would serve as a springboard to a brainstorming session on collaboration. The theatre could also ask the university faculty for suggestions regarding how the two might coexist and work together.

How has the community of Morgantown been affected by this conflict? Morgantown is not a traditional college town. Yes, there is clear delineation between town and campus and there are the usual college hangouts: stores, restaurants, and bars that are frequented, primarily, by college students. Student housing—for the most part—is separated from the residential areas of the town. College and local sports are the main recreational attraction: national attention is routinely focused on the university’s basketball and football teams and, as a result, places the community in a nationwide spotlight. However, this spotlight seems to be focused directly on either the campus or the sporting venue itself, hardly ever do the cameras move into the actual town. Despite these similarities with any number of other college towns, Morgantown is
radically different. Blake Gumprecht, in his article “The American College Town” describes the facets of the conventional college town as:

- Being youthful
- Having a highly-educated population
- As having a population that is not likely to work in factories or other heavy industries
- Having a population with high average family incomes and low unemployment
- And, as being comparatively cosmopolitan. (54)

In almost every case, Morgantown represents the opposite of Gumbrecht’s suppositions. In my estimation, it is this non-traditional personality of the community that makes the existence of two major theatrical bodies both viable and necessary there. By offering two theatrical options, most of the demographic groups will be satisfied in their need for live, theatrical entertainment. Furthermore, the options create the opportunity for the area to attract out-of-the-area professionals seeking an arts culture as part of their new home. This “creative class” defined by Richard Florida is vital to the area’s economic survival.

Economically, the Division of Theatre and Dance does not depend on ticket sales or donations in order to produce because the production budgets are state subsidized. However, West Virginia Public Theatre survives almost entirely on donations and box office, with a small amount of the operational budget coming from governmental support. In terms of production, each institution focuses on disparate fare: the Division presents, more often than not, theatre that is non-musical, classic, or new play development, whereas WVPT presents traditional musical theatre (only occasionally straying into “new” territory) and classic American plays such as Our
Town and The Odd Couple. When you look at the bills of fare, it appears that the two actually complement each other. The division and the theatre both stress “education” as a key part of their mission and, with this in mind, would benefit by squelching any ruminating conflict and coming together to further their individual missions. Communication will be crucial in any reconciliation and further association between the two. Currently, the administrations of both institutions seem to be at a stalemate and communication has completely broken down. Perhaps a mediator would be able to bring the two groups together in an attempt to create a mutually beneficial collaboration that will further their missions and, as a result, help to establish the area as a center for the arts and for arts education.

As both professional actor/director and theatre academician, I continually find myself bridging these two realms of theatre —academic and professional—and as both an alumnus of the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance and a longtime veteran of West Virginia Public Theatre, I have begun to realize that any insignificant differences that have come between these two bodies during their convergence in community and space has only been detrimental. Many students have missed out on the opportunity to practice their craft and to apprentice under working professionals, while the theatre has lost the opportunity to work with numerous young, talented artists. The rift has also deeply affected the community, which is ripe to become an arts center in West Virginia and in the region. If the two parties would band together for a common purpose, the region’s cultural offerings could grow with its developing technological and medical industries and make Morgantown a truly industrially and culturally viable option for new businesses and new families.

Is there a possibility for reconciliation and a future relationship between these two bodies? James D. Held believes that question only provides more questions:
I would still love to see this happen because the theatrical community of Morgantown is too small to have this obvious breach between our two organizations. It would be very interesting if we could get together a panel representing our College of Creative Arts, our Division chair, someone from the Provost's office, etc. to discuss how we could move forward in future. Could there be a real academic component run through our Division? Could we provide paid student interns that could work with WVPT and receive WVU credit hours? Could we co-produce a play that would truly benefit our educational mission? Could WVPT allow a faculty member to come aboard as an associate producer/artistic director?

Held’s questions raise some vital queries into how the theatre/division association could work and why it currently does not. An open dialogue concerning these potential ways to work together could spur a realistic agreement in the artistic governance of the theatre. If the two groups could find a way to create a curricular component that ties them together or to co-produce a production (truly co-produce in the sense that members of the faculty would have a say in many artistic decisions, the rift could be repaired. Also, Held’s suggestion for a member of the faculty serving as an associate producer would be highly beneficial and would help to address the issues that many have concerning the current management of the theatre (to be discussed in Chapter Five of this study).

It seems that there are several people involved who would like to see a positive future reconciliation. Carnegie Mellon University Professor Geoffrey Hitch finds that a partnership between the two would not only be mutually beneficial, but, perhaps, vital to the future of each institution:
The "ideal" relationship would be WVPT/WVU—but I know that their department has been uncooperative or uninterested in the past. If WVU had a strong link with WVPT, it could greatly legitimize WVU's program. There are SO MANY drama programs around the country—much more than there is future work for them—that such a link would give WVU a step up, a flag that says the program is really serious about training people for the industry.

Hitch, a professional theatre director and educator, makes a crucial point: WVU needs WVPT in order to stand out amidst numerous collegiate theatre programs across the country. Any connection with a professional theatre company makes a program more attractive to students who are serious about a career in the professional entertainment industry. In these uncertain economic times when academic departments are losing financial support (and, in turn, faculty positions are lost and production budgets are cut) and when professional theatres are filing for bankruptcy, two theatrical institutions such as these could only benefit from finding a way to ceasefire and collaborate in order to survive. Each has something to offer the other and, working together, each could help legitimize the existence of the other. Furthermore, as Hitch asserts, the two theatres need each other and a successful collaboration could be mutually beneficial in many ways (to be discussed at the end of this chapter). What will it take to make this happen? Of course, the immediate answer is communication, but it seems that it will take more than that in the form of a WVU faculty member willing to bridge the gap and WVPT’s willingness to accept advice from the university. Furthermore, it seems that it will take several commitments from both sides to: let go of the grudges of the past and start “fresh,” rethink the structure of their own organizations, healthy collaboration and co-creation, focus on the similarities in goals and ideas and utilize the difference to expand the scope of what it is possible to create together.
In the past several WVU faculty members have worked for WVPT including, but not limited to Held (scene design), Victor McQuistion (technical direction), Linda Milian (costume design), former division chair Margaret McKowen (costume design), Jerry McGonigle (performance), and Robert Klinglehoffer (scenic design). Like their counterparts at other universities (Hitch at CMU, Deer at Wright State, Yost at Frostburg, and Snyder at Fairmont State), these professors bridge the world between academia and the professional world, but because of the rift between WVU and WVPT have ceased to continue their work for this particular theatre. The faculty members of other institutions have found lasting homes at WVPT because, I believe, they are not enveloped in the political atmosphere and the history of the rift. This conflict can be avoided by promoting a working alliance with those artists closer to home and by opening the lines of communication. Furthermore and, perhaps most importantly, it will take a willingness on the part of Iannone to be open to the idea that a working alliance with the Division of Theatre and Dance would benefit both organizations. Once that happens strategies can be explored for ways the two can connect. Given the history of these two bodies, small steps could be taken as they begin to learn to trust each other and implement initiatives that they can agree are reciprocally valuable. Conversely, a radical new approach to each other and the advantages of collaboration might jump start discussion in innovative new ways of solving current economic challenges.

Despite the conflict present between the theatre and the university, Iannone remains focused on providing educational opportunities for the community. To that end he has established various programs, each with distinct goals. From artistic training to awareness of social ills, the educational programs at West Virginia Public Theatre provide a chance for young people to be involved in and affected by the arts.
Educational Programs at West Virginia Public Theatre

When Producer Iannone embarked on the journey to establish a professional musical theatre in the mountains of North-central West Virginia, he knew that the theatre had to bring more than simply entertainment to the area. With a doctorate in Education and a teaching position at West Virginia University in the Education Department, his background in teaching most certainly propelled his desire to teach theatre as an artform, but to also teach through theatrical production. Modeling his theatre on the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, at which he was an Administrative Intern for one season, Iannone proposed an educational program similar to that in Pittsburgh.

Influences of the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera

The Pittsburgh CLO offers a myriad of educational programs that help to train would-be professionals. Their “CLO Academy” is a musical theatre training program that fosters skill in singing, dancing, and acting; according to their website, the Academy “provides students with valuable training that prepares them for real-world performance opportunities and professional careers” (www.pittsburghclo.org). In conjunction with the Academy, the CLO offers a “Mini-stars” program that takes the most promising Academy students (ages 12-16) and puts them on the stage with professionals from Broadway and Hollywood. Not only does this program help to further their educational mission, but it also is a major way child and adolescent roles are cast. The New Horizons program is a unique offering that works with students and adults that have physical or mental disabilities. The philosophy of this series is “…fueled by the idea that there is no end to the skills and talents of our students” (PittsburghCLO.org) and staff members teach voice, acting, and dance in imaginative ways in order to stir the artist in those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to obtain such training. The CLO also offers internships to
aspiring theatre professionals in both administration and production, placing the students in vital roles next to seasoned veterans. Other CLO educational programs include masterclasses with Broadway professionals, summer performance camps, and The National High School Musical Theatre Awards.

The Pittsburgh CLO education department is built on the idea of teaching through theatre and does this in two distinct ways. First, the theatre company offers a Gallery of Heroes series every season. According to their website:

Through dramatic sketches and musical vignettes, Pittsburgh CLO’s Gallery of Heroes program takes its 50-minute mini-musicals to area schools to educate and enlighten students about great historical figures such as Roberto Clemente, the Wright Brothers and Harriet Tubman. Highlighting the lives and accomplishments of significant historical figures, Gallery of Heroes offers an entertaining alternative to traditional lectures and books.

Thus, students from around the Greater Pittsburgh area learn through the production of theatre, establishing theatrical art as an effective and vital pedagogical tool. In addition to this distinctive production program, the CLO also offers productions suitable for young audiences including A Christmas Carol. In conjunction with these offerings, study guides are produced for students, teachers, and families and specially priced tickets are offered for any student who receives an “A” in a Humanities class (art, drama, music, etc.) at their respective school.

With the majority of these programs in place during the period of time when Iannone was apprentice to CLO Artistic Director Bill Thunhurst, the seeds were planted for Iannone to include an educational agenda as part of his own theatre in West Virginia. In fact, upon examination, the history of WVPT reveals obvious parallels to the CLO in many aspects of the
development of the organization, especially in its educational programming. These programs include the Professional Internship Program, the Equity Membership Candidacy program, Future Stars, T.A.R.G.E.T., and the Holiday/Children’s Theatre productions.

**Professional Internship Program**

First and foremost on the educational front at WVPT is the Professional Internship Program. Instituted from the first season in 1985, this program could be considered the heart and soul of production at the theatre. From early on in the theatre’s history, finances have been a major concern, which is not unusual for a not-for-profit arts organization. To meet the mission “to educate,” set for WVPT by Iannone, and to satisfy some key needs in the production departments of the theatre, the internship program was established.

The West Virginia Public Theatre internship is, according to Board member and former WVU President Neil Bucklew, “an intense, high quality experience.” High school and college students compete for positions in several different organizational departments: Marketing, Company Management, Stage Management, Carpentry, Lighting, Sound, Costumes, and Performance. Once selected, based on both prior experience and an essay discussing their passion for both learning and the theatre, the interns are thrust into the high-paced environment of professional summer-stock theatre. These young, impressionable artists become the work horses of the theatre, working the longest hours and getting paid less than any other employees at the theatre. However, despite the low pay and the grueling amount of work, the interns are rewarded with an experience that rivals no other: these students learn from seasoned professionals from the Broadway stage, film, and television.

James McCaffrey, a Performance/Carpentry intern during the summers of 2006 thru 2008, concluded his time at the theatre with new insight:
I think that the internship program at WVPT, above all, helped me learn exactly how a professional theatre is run from a production standpoint. Up until that summer I didn't know how a stage manager called shows or ran rehearsal, so that was a big learning experience for me. I did get to do everything that summer, from run crew, to construction, to acting, and I think being an intern at WVPT was great because it gave me the big picture to look at: it gave me a goal to build towards.

The skills sets learned in both performance and non-performance related experiences will, no doubt, aid McCaffrey and young artists like him in surviving day-to-day in the excruciatingly difficult world of the professional theatre. His exposure to many aspects of production will give him a much broader view of the industry and ways he might interface with it.

Like McCaffrey, many WVPT interns come back for more than one season and many graduate from their intern status to become major players in the WVPT production staff. Deborah Raulerson began as a Stage Management intern with WVPT during the summer of 1994 fresh out of her theatre training program at Florida Atlantic University. Since that summer Raulerson has gone on to stage manage several major national tours and has returned to act as Production Stage Manager at WVPT for ten seasons. Raulerson believes strongly in the educational mission of the theatre, especially the internship program: “I think they (WVPT) have given invaluable education with the internship programs […] it is one of the quickest ways that a young college student can gain useful, hands on experience. You can’t buy this from a college.” Though Raulerson continues to return to WVPT most summers to stage manage, her principal position is one of education: she is the drama teacher at Okeechobee High School in Florida.
Mairzy Yost, Chair of the Department of Theatre at Frostburg State University and 2009 summer company member, believes that the internships offer “wonderful ‘hands-on’ learning opportunities” and encourages her students to apply for the program. Professional actor Scott Evans, who played the lead role of Leo Bloom in 2008’s *The Producers*, found the internship program quite valuable even though he was in residence for a mere two weeks: “I found the interns I came into contact with to be well trained and quite capable, giving them a leg up when they compete for jobs in the future.” Matthew Ancarrow, Yost’s student and a 2007 winter company members agrees:

I believe that intensive and practical internships in the professional theatre world are an invaluable benefit to young artists. Interns are dipped right into the mix with working professionals, as well as given the opportunity to establish working contacts and begin to get the hang of the art of networking (an art all on its own!).

Ancarrow highlights an extremely important aspect of the internship program: networking. A young artist in this position has the opportunity to build friendships and working relationships with professionals that work across the globe. He continues:

I believe internships serve as wonderful transitions for recent graduates from school to the professional workplace, in that there is still a sense of learning but they are treated like professionals…WVPT's internship program has served as an immense benefit for the Morgantown community, especially for young artists who honestly may not be able to afford to "kick it to the city" just yet, but at the same time they're given the opportunity to learn and grow at an up-and-running professional theatre right around the corner from them.
The point that the theatre is “right around the corner” is vital in the success of the program: WVPT provides a safe environment for the area’s students to explore the intense world of professional theatre production before they make the choice to move to a much more intimidating arena such as New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. Since his time at WVPT, Ancarrow has graduated with his Bachelor’s degree, worked for a professional children’s theatre in Kentucky, and is currently on a regional tour that focuses on educating young audiences.

Some people intimately familiar with the theatre’s internship program do not share Ancarrow’s enthusiasm. Peter McCumber, the Facility Manager at West Virginia University’s Lyell B. Clay Concert Theatre (the primary venue for WVPT), feels that the interns do not receive enough training prior to tackling the physical work of theatrical production. When asked in an October 2009 interview if he believed the educational programs were a benefit, McCumber replied:

Not to any great extent. I feel this is due to the fact that summer stock theatre runs at a breakneck pace and so there is little time to be able to devote to proper education and training of the interns. Many are left to figure it out on their own or try to get the time to ask the right questions to the right people.

Former intern McCaffrey agrees there is too little prior training for the interns and also feels that, perhaps, the ratio of interns to supervisors is unbalanced:

The only real complaint I had from being an intern at WVPT was that I felt that there were a lot of us, and we were all just as inexperienced as everyone else, yet we seemed to make up the bulk of the workforce, which was fine from an educational perspective, but I always felt the shows could be stronger in quality
had their been a higher ratio of experienced pros to the mass of us lost and confused young’ins [Sic].

Obviously, McCumber and McCaffrey do not feel that West Virginia Public Theatre focuses enough attention on the appropriate preparation of its interns. Although, the primary focus of many professional theatres is the final product, in an educational situation such as this internship program, attention must be paid to the preparatory step in order to orient the theatre’s students to both their learning objectives and their proposed outcomes. To simply jump into process without orientation is a notable limitation of this particular program. One possible solution might be that the theatre institute an intern orientation period of a few days prior to the beginning of the season; this week could focus on training in several different areas of production and would bring all interns to the same level, as well as help them to bond and feel supported in their learning process. As most interns enter the program with varying degrees of experience, it is important to ensure that all participants have a similar knowledge and skill set before work begins. Additionally, I believe that an hour or so of instruction every subsequent week would be beneficial by providing an opportunity for supervisors to “check-in” with the interns and vice versa: questions can be raised that will be, potentially, helpful to others. With this added aspect of the program, the potential result will be more effective work from the intern company, higher morale, a more objective-based curriculum, and a safer working environment, especially in the technical areas, in addition to raising the educational level of the program. Furthermore, the lack of evaluation and assessment—the key to education—diminishes the value of this experience.

Joshua Williamson, Chair of the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance, believes that, as it stands, the WVPT internship program does not serve the community as it potentially could. With the bulk of the internship positions going to students from outside the immediate area and
the state, Williamson sees an opportunity for his students being lost in the avalanche of interns coming from Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, and New York: “The internship program has a minor impact on the local community because there are not enough opportunities in a given season for WVU students.” Williamson also posits that the local high school students that are hired as interns apply not because of a vocational reason, but simply because they are lured in by the opportunity of working on a big-scale Broadway musical. Hoping that the internship program might be a way to bring the two theatrical institutions together, Williamson feels distressed by what he calls “a lack of coming together on the part of both administrations.”

This is the crux of the rift between WVPT and WVU caused, primarily, by a lack of communication and is a further example of how the two institutions have failed to work together as effectively as they could. Very little has been done on either side to encourage participation in the internship program. In fact, according to James D. Held: “I think most of our faculty discourages students from working with WVPT because they would rather see the students work in theaters where they would make more significant professional contacts.” Faculty members are likely split over their support for WVPT.” With this split support and discouragement from the faculty, any student who applies for an internship with the theatre is doing so on their own volition and is placed in competition with students from across the country. Because of this competition (and, perhaps, the WVU students’ lack of significant training for the position), many of the university’s students lose positions to more qualified candidates.

Open communication is the key to closing the schism: ending any misperceptions the groups have about each other, which have to be addressed before any solutions can be developed. Opening the lines of communication could start with a dialogue between Iannone

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54 I disagree with Held’s assertion that significant contacts cannot be made at the theatre and posit that the theatre’s company rivals many similar theatres in terms of size and budget.
and Williamson and, perhaps, could include an arbiter trusted by both parties. In order for any progress to occur, common goals need to be discussed, as well as strategies through which to achieve them. Each institution should look at the vital question: “What can we do to help theatre in Morgantown thrive by working together?” This is a new threshold that, if crossed together, can help to establish the area as an artistic center. If the administrators can get onboard for a whole new agenda of collaboration, with some specific goals and strategies in mind, they will see what kind so questions/concerns/suggestions arise. Thus, the dynamic would be completely different and, perhaps, would lead to fruitful collaboration. Williamson could then present the ideas to the faculty and staff (with, perhaps, a student representative involved as well) and get feedback. Conversely, Iannone could present those same ideas to his staff for feedback. Finally, representatives of the theatre (including Iannone) and the university could sit down and talk about possibilities. A second conversation could occur focusing on what each institution is able to offer the other right away including, but not limited to masterclasses conducted by the theatre’s professional artists discussed previously in this chapter. Thirdly, West Virginia Public Theatre and its administration could make a concerted effort to include WVU students in its company rather than overlooking them for students applying from out-of-state schools. In order to foster this process, the masterclass idea comes into play once again. These classes could focus on audition techniques, resume updating, building a resume, bridging into the professional world, or moving to New York, and could be invaluable bridge-building tools. Even panel discussion or masterclasses that are co-taught by faculty from WVU and staff form WVPT could help forge some new ties and prepare the students for the audition and/or interview process. This will not only help to repair the rift between the two organizations, but will also create a healthy competition for the positions. If proposals such as these are considered, both sides benefit. It is
important to note that the theatre has, consistently, hired WVU students in non-artistic intern positions such as Marketing and Box Office, primarily because of the strength of the marketing and public relations programs at the university and the fact that the theatre does not need to house these local students. The theatre could also offer a slightly higher stipend to interns from WVU making the program more attractive since the theatre does not have to house them. Correspondingly, if an association develops between the university and theatre, the faculty and the artistic staff could prepare the students throughout the year for the rigors of the summer internship program making WVU students even more attractive to the theatre, further fostering the working partnership between the two institutions.

Built on the philosophy instilled upon Iannone by his own internship experience with the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, the West Virginia Public Theatre Professional Internship Program continues to thrive over a nearly twenty-six year history. Although the program has not been in existence as long as its counterpart in Pittsburgh and does not offer the breadth of experiences (in terms of focus options), the WVPT program is growing and has the potential to rival the PCLO’s curriculum. WVPT already offers a larger stipend than the PCLO, as well as housing. Despite the program’s limitations in terms of lack of sufficient training and positions for local artists, the theatre continues to address and, in many cases, fulfills the educational mission of the theatre through offering practical experience for young, passionate artists. However, with some improvements—such as those proposed above—this program could rival those established by larger theatre companies across the country including the PCLO. Furthermore, with some adjustments to the structure of the program (such as expanding the opportunities available), the theatre could be more competitive in its intern offerings by presenting opportunities in choreography, musical direction, and stage direction similar to those offered at the PCLO. West
Virginia Public Theatre would benefit from a closer study of the program offered by the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera on which so many of its programs are modeled.

The WVPT Professional Internship Program has an added bonus for those serving as Performance or Stage Management interns. These students have the opportunity to join a unique program offered by Actor’s Equity Association: the Equity Membership Candidacy program. If the intern chooses to join, they have the chance to begin a journey toward earning their union card, a benefit that many internship programs do not offer.

_Equity Membership Candidacy_

Due to the distinctiveness of the “Letter of Agreement” CORST (Council of Resident Stock Theatres) contract that the theatre negotiated with AEA in 1985, the theatre was not required to offer its non-union performers and stage managers “candidacy” in Actors Equity. However, in an effort to both attract young artists to the theatre and to further the educational mission, Iannone insisted that his company offer membership into the program.

According to the Actor’s Equity Association website, the EMC program:

- permits actors and stage managers in training to credit theatrical work in certain Equity theatres towards eventual membership in Equity. Candidates must complete 50 creditable weeks of work at any of the participating theatres. The weeks do not have to be consecutive, and may be accumulated over any length of time. (_Actor’s Equity.org_)

Consequently, the non-union actors and stage managers (including interns) could join the EMC program at WVPT and earn weeks over several summers in Morgantown or at other union theatres offering EMC week/points. Upon completion of the fifty required weeks, the candidates’ eligibility to join Equity lasts for five years.
Numerous performers and stage managers have been able to join Actor’s Equity because of WVPT’s standing in the EMC program. Some notable examples include Tony Award nominee Christian Borle (Legally Blonde: the Musical), Broadway’s Marja Harmon (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof), Wicked star Megan Hilty, and the stage manager Raulerson, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Over the theatre’s twenty-five year history, over three hundred actors and stage managers have joined the EMC program at WVPT and have gone on to successful, professional careers. I have direct knowledge of the benefits of this program having joined the EMC program in 1999. Without WVPT’s membership in this program, many professionals would not have gotten their start in the EMC program until much later in their careers or would have not had the chance to finish their required weeks. This program makes the theatre particularly attractive to young artists searching for a theatre that will help to start their professional careers.

**Future Stars**

The Future Stars program, established in 1992, was fashioned to combine several facets of the Pittsburgh CLO educational program (Mini Stars, CLO Academy, and Summer Camp) on a smaller-scale. Focusing on talented, young dancers, actors, and singers from the greater Morgantown community (stretching roughly to a thirty-mile radius), the Future Stars program auditioned and cast students aged twelve to sixteen to be a part of an intense summer training and performing program.

Taught by members of the theatre’s summer company, including Broadway veteran directors, choreographers, musical directors, and performers, the Future Stars participants were taught several styles of dance, voice lessons, acting lessons, and audition techniques. Additionally, the students had the opportunity to perform for the theatre’s audiences (both on the stage prior to performances and in the lobby prior to performances) and across the community.
including, but not limited to festivals, fairs, celebrations, daycares, schools (during the short-lived winter version of Future Stars), and numerous additional venues.

Unlike the Pittsburgh CLO version, the WVPT Future Stars paid to be a part of the group. The tuition covered the cost of both instruction and travel to and from performances, in addition to costumes and props. Furthermore, it was rare for any Future Stars participant to perform in the theatre’s mainstage productions (in Pittsburgh the participants perform often alongside Broadway professionals). The Future Stars program fostered numerous professional careers including Kristen Graeber, who starred opposite Chita Rivera in the short-lived *Casper the Musical* national tour and Tamar Frumpkin, a professional actress in Israel. In a recent *Jerusalem Post* article, Frumpkin recalls her time at WVPT: “There's an amazing Equity theater there, in Morgantown, West Virginia, that a lot of Broadway actors and actress go to in the summer—it's a beautiful place—and do summer stock theater there. I had a lot of experience there as a child” (Hoffman). These are just a couple of the young students who found a love for theatre through this program.

This program, which was in existence from 1992 through 2001, was terminated because of lack of funding and waning interest. Despite the paid tuition, the Future Stars program was partially funded by grants, ticket sales (for the regular season), and donor contributions. When those funds were allocated to other budgets (such as production) and with the emergence of the Morgantown Theatre Company (MTC)\(^{55}\) in 1998, the Board of Trustees made the decision to end the program. Iannone hopes to rebuild this program as part of the WVPT Musical Theatre Academy (to be discussed later in this chapter). If the program is rekindled, my suggestion is that the theatre designs the reestablished program more closely after that of the Pittsburgh CLO

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\(^{55}\) An amateur theatre company founded by Hillary Phillips (a graduate of WVU’s Theatre program with an emphasis in Creative Dramatics), which focused on training for and production by young theatre artists of the greater Morgantown area.
by including the Future Star participants in the theatre’s company, rather than as a separate entity. The opportunity to learn from and perform with seasoned stage and screen professionals is one of the primary draws for the PCLO program and will, most certainly, be more attractive to students as they choose between WVPT and the Morgantown Theatre Company. To this date there have been no discussions between the two companies concerning working together and there do not seem to be any potential for that in the future. However, if both sides would begin a discourse on the potentialities for both combined productions and for instruction for young artists, the community benefit would be extraordinary. The problem lies, in my estimation, in each theatre’s desire to remain independent. Similar to the schism that separates WVPT from the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance, this conflict lies in an unwillingness to talk openly about how each institution could complement the other in order to build a program benefitting the community as a whole. Since MTC is housed in the Metropolitan Theatre (a space that will be used by WVPT in the future), the situation is full of possibilities including producing regular children’s performances directed and/or designed by WVPT staff, masterclasses taught by WVPT artists, and combined grant searches for arts funding. However, the issue of autonomy remains. In order to survive in a world where theatres are closing more rapidly than ever, a producer, when faced with the unique opportunity of partnering with another theatre, should examine the potential benefits. In this case both Iannone and MTC producer Phillips have the chance to create a partnership, under the same roof, that will provide the possibility of sharing production costs, talent, and new revenue sources. If clear boundaries are laid out in a written agreement and those boundaries are respected, the issues of autonomy should fade as the partnership develops.
In 1997, Producer Iannone discovered that the theatre could truly make an impact on the community beyond financial stimulus, entertainment, and training young theatre audiences. Forever a student engrossed in reading and learning about historical and contemporary theatrical approaches, Iannone was introduced to the theories of Augusto Boal (among others) that focus on both theatre-as-education and theatre as a means of facilitating social change. After several discussions with the Monongalia County Schools and the Mon Health Systems, Inc. (the governing body of one of the largest health organizations in the area), Iannone and his Board of Trustees established the “Tobacco and Alcohol Resistance Gets Everyone Together” (T.A.R.G.E.T.) program. This program, one of the few true attempts by the theatre to reach theatrical utopia, sought to create a dialogue between educators, students, and performers in order to heighten awareness of a major concern in the greater Morgantown community: tobacco and alcohol abuse.

While T.A.R.G.E.T. was not presented in the traditional sense (i.e. during the theatre’s regular season and on its mainstage), it was a major component of the theatre’s programming for ten years. Geared toward promoting social change, the program used entertainment to encourage its audiences to think about the world differently, to debate the issues, and to change their habits or the habits of their friends or family. Audience members were encouraged to imagine a better world free of substance abuse and, as a result, were engaging in the utopian performative.

Iannone released the following statement upon the announcement of this new theatrical endeavor:

The youth of our nation are consistently bombarded with images that portray the use of tobacco and alcohol as cool. We want the youth of our community to
understand the dangers that the misuse and abuse of these substances pose to themselves and their loved ones. We hope that through our unique educational approach that these students will make the right choices as a student and as an adult. (*WVPublicTheatre.com*)

At the beginning of the program, WVPT hired the services of the Saltworks Theatre Company of Pittsburgh to present *I Am the Brother of Dragons* at each of the county’s middle schools in the fall semester of each year. This agreement was open-ended and began as soon as funding was secured. According to the Saltworks Theatre Company’s website, the play focuses on:

Sonny [who] is facing the "dragon" of drug and alcohol abuse and the whole family suffers. This intense drama, based on real life stories, shatters the walls of denial surrounding this disease and illuminates the path to recovery. This classic play is updated annually to remain pertinent to the youth culture. (*Saltworks.org*)

Given the serious nature of the performance subject and as part of the protocol set forth by Saltworks, WVPT worked closely with teachers, school psychologists and counselors to insure that the students were receiving the correct information through a means that was both conducive to their learning abilities and ethical in its portrayal of particular situations. The T.A.R.G.E.T. Program also provided classroom teachers with study guides to reinforce the lessons learned through the theatrical representation and to encourage further discussion about tools that the students could use to combat tobacco and alcohol abuse. Furthermore, students participated in pre and post production activities implemented to elicit conversation about the topics presented. Once again the performances and associated activities encouraged dialogue and thought.

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50 An original work written by the Saltworks Theatre Company already in the repertoire of the company.
This tobacco and alcohol awareness program, sponsored by WVPT, Mon Health Systems, Inc., and the Monongalia County Schools, was made possible through a collaborative effort with corporate partners. Over its eleven years in existence, T.A.R.G.E.T. used theatrical tools to teach well over seven hundred students every year about tobacco and alcohol use and its negative effect on life. With nearly eight-thousand students impacted by this program between 1997 and 2007, WVPT’s mission to educate was quite successful in breaking the commonly-held views that theatre, especially commercial theatre, was meant to merely entertain. West Virginia Public Theatre had, to some extent, striven toward that elusive theatrical utopia. In order to examine to what extent the performances impacted the lives of the students, Iannone and Sally D. Stephenson, an educator at Frostburg State University, developed a study to determine the effectiveness and feasibility of the T.A.R.G.E.T. program. This study included a questionnaire delivered to both teachers and parents, shortly after the performances, questioning the efficacy of the performance message and the knowledge attained by the students. They concluded “that Monongalia County students have an increased knowledge of the negative affects of alcohol and tobacco use, and use of alcohol and tobacco has lessened among T.A.R.G.E.T. Program participants” (WVPublicTheatre.com). According to the published study, “A Drug Evaluation Curriculum with Drama at its Base: The Target Project,” in the College Student Journal:

Through a series of workshops from the schools, Monongalia County Health System and West Virginia Public Theatre planned a year long series of curriculum activities, beginning with health screening and survey of students for knowledge and self-reported involvement with tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. In addition, several random student and teacher interviews took place the following year to see how much was recalled and also to see whether or not the
Although the number of interviewees is not published in this article, the study provided numerous qualitative responses focused on recollections of the play presented, emotional responses, and reactions to characters’ behaviors. Stephenson and Iannone concluded that “three-fourths of the students interviewed felt that watching the play would be helpful, to some degree, in deterring their peers from using drugs, alcohol, or tobacco” (638). The majority of teachers had similar responses. Furthermore, they concluded that “…we know that one of the major reasons TARGET [sic] is effective is because of the drama activities that elicit more of an emotional reaction from students than a cognitive one” (639). Despite the recorded usefulness of this particular educational program, it was terminated in 2008 due to lack of corporate sponsorship.

Although successful in reaching many students and encouraging them to think and to change, the program did not reach the larger WVPT audience. In fact, after interviewing several patrons, theatre employees, and community members, I was surprised to find that the majority of the participants of my study were not aware of this program: the product was not in the forefront of the theatre’s publicity and marketing of its educational mission. Perhaps, if the program had wider public exposure (such as performances in the community outside of the schools or short teaser performances prior to a regular season production), then the theatre would be able to find a corporate sponsor willing to take on the funding of the program. The theatre could also have a benefit performance where a percentage of the proceeds went toward restarting the program or could dedicate a page in the season program as a tribute to the program (and other community enrichment projects) as a way to both increase awareness and to call for potential sponsors. By
strengthening the public’s knowledge of the theatre’s community engagement, it could continue to strive toward presenting theatre meant to inspire change in the world.

Those interviewed who were familiar with the program, expressed a desire to have it return to Monongalia County as one of the principal educational components of the theatre.

Peter McCumber, who was quoted earlier asserting that the internship program is ineffective in training young theatre artists, celebrates the T.A.R.G.E.T. program as “a benefit in its message to the kids” and believes that the program more closely served the theatre’s educational mission than any other program. Neil Bucklew agrees that “the most dramatic impact that the theatre has had educationally have been those programs where the theatre offers experience as an audience (rather than an experience in performing), including the successful T.A.R.G.E.T. program and its tackling of issues facing young people.” As for now the program is and will remain dark.

However, Iannone has noted that if funding becomes available, then the program could find new life in future years, though he is not actively pursuing funding as the focus of fundraising has shifted to securing operational budget support. Conceivably, the theatre might even set aside a performance or two of its regular season as a benefit to raise funds to reinstate the program or, perhaps, look for a donor to contribute specifically to this program.

The T.A.R.G.E.T. program had an immense power in affecting the community through its lessons conveyed about the evils that face children. Not only does the community benefit from these performances, but the theatre also benefits through positive press and community exposure: it had become an educational and public relations boon for the theatre. It seems that finding an alternate form of funding and reinstating this program would help rather than hinder the community’s embrace of the theatre as a major cultural and educational tool and, as a further
result, spur positive publicity for the theatre’s other programs. Clearly, more than any other WVPT program, the T.A.R.G.E.T. program fulfilled the criteria for Dolan’s utopic performance.

**Holiday Programming**

The most prominently publicized aspect of the theatre’s educational program is its’ holiday programming. Established in 1995, the holiday children’s production has played to over one hundred and twenty-five thousand school students in the quad-state area (West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio). The holiday programming is not simply another production offered during the season, it is mandated by the by-laws of the organization. The theatre’s charter requires that school children be offered educational theatrical productions at reduced ticket rates or, based on need, free of charge. The reason for this mandate is simply explained by Bucklew: “Our December show is the first and, maybe, only experience these children will have with live theatre.” Iannone, in an interview in 2008 with Broadwaytovegas.com, remarked: “‘I remember last year at *Peter Pan* - after it was over, one kid walked out and said: 'That was best TV show I ever saw!' That is how some of these kids are. They've never seen a live production - only television” (Deni).

Toni Morris, the Artistic Director of M.T. Pockets Theatre (a semi-professional producing company in Morgantown) believes that the holiday programming is extremely beneficial to the greater community: “If we expose our youth to theatre then they are more likely to continue their traditions throughout their lifespan. Theatre can be used in many ways, but to educate the young is to educate the community.” Thus, even other theatrical producers in the community believe that WVPT’s holiday programming encourages the establishment of what might be a new tradition of theatergoing. That tradition will create a new community of audience members, which will help live theatre to survive in the technological age.
When the program first began, Iannone and his board decided to offer one of the most frequently produced and successful holiday plays: a staged version of Charles Dickens’ novella *A Christmas Carol*. This first production was a combined effort between the theatre and the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance. Faculty designers and technicians worked next to the theatre’s hired hands and the cast was an amalgamation of students, faculty, and professionals. After the success of this production—having played to over five thousand students and netted thirty thousand dollars to be split between the two groups—WVPT and WVU decided to continue their association the following year with a production of the musical *Peter Pan* (1996). In the following year (1997), Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Cinderella* was produced as a separate entity, though in the same space, and without the help of the WVU division. These three titles were rotated over the next several seasons until 2002 when *The Wizard of Oz* was added to the holiday repertoire (and ended the holiday association between the two institutions as was reported earlier), followed by *Seussical* in 2005 and *The Sound of Music* in 2006. The choice of titles, always approved by the Board of Trustees, came after careful scrutiny of a few important criteria: educational value, ease of production, effectiveness of study guides and other supplemental material, and—of course—marketability. That final piece of the puzzle is important because the theatre relies on ticket sales to not only supplement operational expenses during the summer, but also to allow for reduced ticket prices for the thousands of students who come to see the holiday offering.

Michael Licata, a Broadway veteran and WVPT’s Associate Artistic Director, has directed the holiday productions since 2002 and feels that

The community benefits greatly by being provided with affordable live theatre for young audiences. Often, these presentations are the first experience these
young audiences will have with live theatre thereby instilling an appreciation of the arts at an early age.

In fact, ninety percent of this study’s sixty-five participants agree that the holiday programming is invaluable to the community and is, perhaps, the reason many support the theatre throughout the remainder of the year. This reputation is based in the theatre’s commitment to providing live theatrical experiences to the children of the area, without question, and not based on their ability to pay. Iannone, in his interview with Broadwaytovegas.com, states that:

We’ve always been very committed to the educational side…We send out educational packets to help teachers get students really interested in the story. We have close to 10,000 students that come yearly, who would probably never get to see a professional theater production. So, it is a thrill. Many of them are from rural areas, and they just don't get a chance. (Deni)

Numerous others agree. James Butcher, a local educator and some-time actor with the theatre, when asked about the benefits of the holiday programming, remarked: “In particular, I believe the community has benefitted educationally through the December performances dedicated to area schools. There performances provide opportunities for a large, and socioeconomically diverse, number of children to see live theatre.” Local patron, Denise Myers, goes further in indicating the need for this program: “I am positive that there are many, many children, and yes adults, too, who would never have the opportunity to attend a professional theatrical production, were it not to be offered to them locally.” It is evident from this small sample that the holiday program is both effective in supporting the theatre’s educational mission and a welcome curricular addition to the community’s educational offerings.
However, there are some that believe West Virginia Public Theatre is not as effective in meeting its mission—with regard to holiday programming—as it could. WVU Division Chair, Joshua Williamson, is one of those people. Although Williamson states that WVPT is providing a valuable service—offering live theatre to a section of the population that would not otherwise have the chance to experience such an event—and is impressed by how well the theatre produces and markets its holiday programming, he believes that there is more than can be done.

Williamson, who worked on two holiday productions early in his teaching career at WVU (Cinderella in 2000 and A Christmas Carol in 2001), declares that the Division of Theatre and Dance could never produce a holiday production given the time frame of the production schedule coinciding with the end of the academic semester and is “relieved that WVPT does it so well,” but he urges Iannone and the theatre staff to go above and beyond simply opening the doors. Williamson asserts that these productions are too often not “pointed toward young students” and that, in many cases, the performances are pitched at a maturity level above and beyond the students to whom the productions are marketed. He proposes that the productions be shorter and focus on styles that are aimed toward a particular audience instead of trying to reach such a wide range of ages. Furthermore, Williamson thinks that it is “sexy and cool” for the theatre to talk about the training that they are providing to the young audiences, but does not believe that the programming is wholly effective for the majority of its audience. Joseph McFall, a Assistant Professor of Psychology at Syracuse University and former House Manager with WVPT, agrees that, on the surface, the theatre’s work looks phenomenal, but he, too, is unsure of the true benefit. In a 2009 interview, McFall stated:

I believe that the holiday shows have enhanced the cultural experiences of children throughout the state of West Virginia. From working in the box office, I
have been aware of bus groups of students from many different school districts attending the theatre, an experience that many of them would not be able to acquire otherwise (either due to remote living locations or living in low-income households. Therefore, school-aged children have the opportunity to become aware of the theatre experience. I can’t really say whether the types of shows performed (with a target audience of children in mind) are likely to enhance the educational or cultural experiences of the children or are simply entertaining enough to draw in crowds…It seems that educational opportunities are a secondary goal to bringing in ticket sales.

McFall is correct in his assumption that the choices of holiday productions are meant, in some part, to boost ticket sales. A large percentage of the year-round operating budget for the theatre comes from the ticket sales during the holiday performances. Without a marketable production in December, the theatre would face a potential permanent closure of its doors. This challenge of balancing education and finances is commonplace at many theatres across the country. West Virginia Public Theatre has been able to supplement its summer season because of the holiday programming, but at what cost? Does the educational value of the holiday production suffer because it is used as a money-maker? Perhaps the holiday production could be more beneficial to wider audiences through a reexamination of its structure, but it remains a viable option for engaging students in a medium that is, most likely, foreign to them. That, in itself, is part of an educational journey.

Though the holiday programming does have its unique challenges, the productions do help to foster the idea of “communitas”: the communities (both A and B) are brought together in a theatrical “classroom” in order to share ideas about common problems: racism (The Sound of
Music), socio-economic depression (A Christmas Carol), or literacy (Seussical). Thus, community is created, educated, and maintained by these programs. However, despite the proven efficacy of this programming, the participants of this study have raised concerns that, once addressed, could further solidify the theatre’s place as a chief community educator.

Having now worked on seven holiday productions at West Virginia Public Theatre, I have a unique perspective on how they work to serve the community and how they work to serve the theatre. The programs provide a forum where students learn life lessons and, hopefully, take away a better understanding and respect for the arts. This is incredibly important, especially for a community such as Morgantown with many low-income families and those without the means for cultural advancement.

In my experience the productions attempt to reach the median age of the student matinee audience (from pre-school to high school) and those above or below the midline of students around the age of twelve are not exactly left out, but rather may be frustrated either by the simplicity or complexity of the offering. During the school matinees, the theatre attempts to fill each performance with as many school children as possible without regard to age or ability. Therefore, there is the distinct possibility that in one performance the audience could range in age from four to eighteen. My first suggestion for this theatre and any other with similar programming begins in the box office: when booking schools, attempt to book groups of similar grade levels. Audiences tend to fuel each other in their state of “communitas” and conflicting grade levels could potentially result in a diminished experience for all concerned. Secondly, no matter what the production title (as trying to present several different titles becomes incredibly difficult both financially and technically), create two or three different versions: a full version for the older students (currently, the “full” version runs at approximately one hour and twenty
minutes) and reduced versions for the younger students (perhaps, between forty-five minutes and one-hour long). These reduced versions will help to keep the students more fully engaged because the various productions would be geared to more specific age levels. Thirdly, the theatre’s study guides need to be rethought and revamped. Currently, they are developed as a combined effort between different departments (marketing, artistic, and box office) and consist of games, coloring pages, and other similar activities. Although I do not propose scrapping these pastimes, I do suggest that the guides include dramaturgical material that connects what the student is learning in the classroom with what they witness on the stage. In this way the guides could support critical thinking criteria that is set forth by the school system. Furthermore, the guides should encourage the students to think about morals and lessons brought forth in the productions, which will foster awareness and, perhaps, incite debate and social change. The lack of a true education department forces the theatre to use what staff is available to create the study guides (one created for all age groups) and, in many cases, those staff members do not have the proper training or instruction to create fully-functional materials. In this case Iannone could call upon the expertise of his colleagues or students in the Education Department at WVU to help create more appropriate study guides that will, more effectively, help the theatre satisfy its mission. Local school teachers could also be an invaluable resource in the creation of these materials. Finally, and most importantly, I propose a “talk-back” session with the students after each performance. Currently, because of bus schedules and technical requirements, the performances are booked so tightly that there is just enough time for the first group of students to exit and for the second group to take their seats. However, if the performances were scheduled to target specific grade levels, then there could be sufficient time for the students to ask questions of the actors, technicians, director, musicians, and other members of the company, as well as to
discuss issues raised by the performance. For example, the Lexington Children’s Theatre in Kentucky\(^5\) provides programming suited to the ages of the audience (each production is geared towards a specific age range) and, as a result, has performances lasting from thirty minutes to one hour. At the end of the performance, the theatre allows adequate time for the children to converse with the actors and production staff. This would be an invaluable educational opportunity for the students to learn about theatre, the making of art, and to learn more about the subjects presented in the production. In order to survive in today’s challenging economic environment, any theatre must be flexible in its attempts to meet its mission and build its audience. These suggestions are offered as initial ideas which might encourage any fledgling regional theatre to explore various ways it might meet its educational goals and become a more integral and effective member of the community.

It seems as if the holiday programming at WVPT, on the surface, strives toward changing the world through the education of its young audiences, but like Williamson and McFall, I am unsure of the true benefit beyond bringing together a community of students to see live theatre and the financial boost it provides for the theatre. The titles presented and the style in which they are performed (except for 2001’s *A Christmas Carol*) do not help to shake the audiences’ consciousness nor do they provide an opportunity for debate. Without a forum for discussion concerning the issues raised, the student audiences are not encouraged to look toward a better world or to change it.

**Educational Programming in the Future**

As the West Virginia Public Theatre begins its next twenty-five years of production and transitions into a new performance venue, the future of its educational programs is unclear. Iannone and the Board of Trustees have made a commitment to the community to sustain the

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theatre’s didactic mission by continuing its most fruitful educational programs: the Professional Internship Program and the holiday children’s productions. To further the educational mission and to further connect the theatre to the community, Iannone looks to the future with one major educational goal: the West Virginia Public Theatre Academy for Musical Theatre, which will—in theory—create a new home for all of the theatre’s instructive curricula under one department.

The WVPT Academy for Musical Theatre is Iannone’s dream for a musical theatre training program in the greater Morgantown area. West Virginia University does not offer musical theatre as a discipline and the closest training programs are in Pittsburgh (Carnegie Mellon University, Point Park University, Pittsburgh Music Theatre, and the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera). Iannone commented in the “Building on a Dream” proposal that:

> The region’s talented young men and women must look far from home to prepare for careers in musical theatre. There’s no formal training program available, except in Pittsburgh, no direct connection with Broadway performers and directors, no on-going instruction in the musical theatre arts, no chance to ‘get up there and do it’ over and over until its right. (“Building” 8)

While seventy miles may not seem so far in this age of reliable transportation, for some in the area who see Pittsburgh as a bustling metropolis and foreign, seventy miles (and the state line) remain psychological boundaries that many are not able to cross. Thus, having a training program closer to home will, theoretically, encourage a greater interest in the arts. Iannone believes that there are great, untapped resources in the community and he wants to foster their talents and to give the young people of the region a chance to build skills that might propel them to the professional arenas: “their forefathers brought a rich tradition of music, song, story telling, a love of dance and craft, a love so deep they created their own music and instruments to
perform. We cannot allow these traditions and the talents of our children to wither” (“Building” 8). To pursue that goal, Iannone proposed the academy during the “Building on a Dream” capital campaign in 2001 as part of the theatre’s drive towards a stand-alone facility, operated solely by the theatre.

Based primarily on Iannone’s dream of a comprehensive training center and fashioned after Pittsburgh CLO’s Academy, the projected program would be “an intensive, two-year theatre arts course in acting, directing, music, voice, dance, set design, lighting and sound” and WVPT would “through satellite extension centers, work with several colleges and universities to ensure that our students get college credit for their WVPT Academy work” (“Building” 8). Additionally, the proposal allows for the training of younger students, high schools students, and community adults in a multitude of different courses preparing them for future arts careers or simply to promote an interest in the performing arts. The CLO Academy that influenced Iannone’s proposal focuses on students aged five through eighteen and training in singing, acting, and dancing. The CLO does not offer courses for older students, nor does it provide training in the technical arenas. Although Iannone’s vision is built upon many potential strengths, it also has many limitations. The theatre does not currently have the staff or the facility to encompass all of these aspects of theatre, nor are there resources available to include so many different fields for so many different types of students. If the WVPT Academy becomes a reality, the key for its success with be in limiting the offerings and focusing on the potential target audience.

In focusing the target audience, a decision will need to be made about the age groups Iannone wishes to reach. One particular course for the community adults—Theatrical Criticism—is proposed to help further train audiences in the intricacies of theatrical production
from dramaturgical analysis to performance techniques and technical theatre methods. This proposal for class for older audience members is intriguing and would be useful in educating the older population about theatrical production; perhaps, this class could be offered as part of WVU’s Lifelong Learners Series, which seeks to encourage continued learning after retirement and would shift the teaching load from theatre staff to WVU faculty.

Despite the passion that Iannone has shown for this project, there are others in the community that do not share his enthusiasm. WVU Theatre Chair, Joshua Williamson, believes that WVPT is being “ludicrous” by proposing such an academy and calls for Iannone to join with West Virginia University in this particular training venture. As WVU examines the logistics of beginning a musical theatre program, Williamson believes that WVPT can “fill in the specialty niches” that the current faculty can not handle such as offering specialty dance instruction by staff choreographers or masterclasses with professional artists that have unique specialties (i.e. belting for the singer). Williamson posited this partnership during his interview and believes that “guest artists” contracts can be offered while the students receive academic credit. This is one way Williamson believes that the two organizations can find a working relationship and his suggestions are viable and mutually beneficial. Williamson’s suggestions allow for the possibility of an alliance if the theatre is open to that possibility. Some participants in this study have suggested that the communication could be improved if Iannone would accept help from the university, James D. Held remarks:

I feel that WVPT could be a wonderful permanent addition to the arts culture of our region. Ron Iannone has put a great deal of his blood, sweat and tears into this venture and I respect deeply his dream to make this a reality. However, he can't go it alone forever. It does neither WVPT nor WVU Theatre any good to
stand aloof from one another. I \textit{know} people of importance in the community know about this breach and hold it against us.

It seems that many in the community, such as Williamson and Held, would like to see a compromise and an end to the rift, but many believe that it will take a change in administration at the theatre in order for that to happen. First and foremost, the change needs to come in the form of open communication between the university and the theatre. Perhaps, mediation between the two bodies is necessary in order to commence discussion led by a selected member of the Board of Trustees from each institution or, perhaps, a trusted local official such as the mayor or a county commissioner. An arts (or theatre) advisory committee could be established to maintain communication between the theatre, the university, and even the smaller theatre companies in the area. A fresh outlook on the situation could, potentially, foster stronger collaborations between these organizations, which would be beneficial to all involved, especially members of the greater community. For West Virginia University:

- The program could supplement its current performance curriculum with musical theatre training provided by working professional artists.
- Performance students could gain professional experience and EMC points while earning college credit and a small stipend.
- The program could attract more students interested in a professional musical theatre career and make it a more competitive and legitimized program in the country.
- Technical and design students would have the opportunity to work alongside working professionals creating relationships. Networking is crucial in the theatre business and this would create connections for future employment elsewhere.
• Faculty and staff would have the opportunity to secure professional jobs in the summer without leaving their home. This not only adds to the professional development required by the university, but also allows them to remain with their families for the summer and for the potential to teach summer courses while still practicing their craft.

For West Virginia Public Theatre the benefits are equally advantageous:

• Hiring WVU students, faculty, and staff allows the theatre to further their educational mission while saving money on housing and transportation.

• With students, faculty, and staff as part of the company, less time will be spent on training them to learn the area, the facilities, or any machinery used in the completion of their jobs.

• The theatre would not need to seek alternate rehearsal spaces, shops, storage spaces, or performance venues for the summer season. Though, during the school year, alternate spaces would still be needed.

• Corporate and private sponsors who support the university would more likely donate to the theatre than if there was not an association.

• The association would open the doors for more governmental funding.

• The theatre’s audience base would grow to include faculty, staff, students, and families that typically would only attend WVU productions.

Even the theatre’s Board of Trustees does not fully back the Academy plan. Bucklew stated, in a telephone interview, that the board has “tolerated the discussion because of Ron’s [Iannone] passion,” but that it is viewed as “negative by Platinum Properties \(^{58}\) and other local businesses” because it makes the theatre look like “one-armed paper hangers” and it is a

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\(^{58}\) Developers of the new Morgantown Event Center.
“distraction from other involvements.” Bucklew proposes that WVPT focus on what it does the best in the educational department: providing hands-on experience and holiday programming. Bucklew concluded his discussion of the educational mission by saying that the theatre offers “too many promises and dreams more than delivery.” It seems that as proposed, the plan for the Academy tends to isolate the theatre as its sole producing entity and hence cuts it off from major arteries that might serve as support systems in the community. If it were a project created in collaboration with the other arts-oriented organization in the region, the community would, in theory, be more supportive of the plan and would reap the benefits such as a centralized community arts education center, managed by the theatre, but not artistically controlled by the theatre’s administration. The staff of the theatre could offer classes focused on what is not offered locally (tap dance classes, classes in acting songs), the Morgantown Theatre Company could offer children’s theatre courses, the university could offer classes in acting, scene painting, and stage properties. The arts center need not focus on solely theatrical pursuits; classes in portraiture, sculpting, and other visual arts could be offered as well.

As the theatre’s facility project fell through and WVPT was forced to accept an agreement with the facility management to share the new Morgantown Event Center, it had to rethink its future in regard to all aspects of its mission, including education. This is strong evidence that the theatre cannot exist in isolation and that it will need to collaborate or, at least, share space. The Academy was placed on the back-burner for an undetermined length of time. Unsure of the Academy’s future, the theatre has turned its focus to the transition to the new space and on finding space nearby for shops and rehearsal spaces. A proposed renovation of the Cohen Furniture building in the Wharf District awaits funding and approval by the City of Morgantown.

59 Such as the transition to a new space, the search for additional funding, and the successful educational programming already in place.
60 This process will be discussed in Chapter Four.
If this permanent space for the theatre is approved, then the Academy proposal may be revived. Until then, the educational program at West Virginia Public Theatre will, for now, take Bucklew’s advice and focus on training young professionals through its Internship and EMC programs and on inspiring young audience members through its holiday programming.

The education component of West Virginia Public Theatre is not only vital to its stated mission, but also an important part of its contribution to the larger Morgantown community. Without its educational programming (specifically, the holiday productions), the theatre would not be able to sustain its production component and would, as a result, be forced to close. However, the theatre cannot think of its educational mission as being subordinate to its productions and merely a means of support for its summer season. If that happens, the educational value of its programs diminishes and the mission is not met. My research has shown that the theatre’s reliance on its interns to serve as “cheap” labor and its holiday programming to function as funding for the summer comes with some stringent limitations (in terms of both educational value and dependence upon educational programs to provide significant support for the theatre’s primary season) which are potentially harmful to WVPT’s future. In the best of all possible worlds, the educational department at the theatre would be staffed full-time and year-round, but this does not seem feasible in our hard economic times. However, that does not mean that the theatre cannot place education at the forefront of its mission.

The theatre (Iannone and the Board of Trustees) must be willing to communicate with the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance and its students, faculty, and staff and vice versa. While this is widely known, it has not happened and may not happen until someone is able to mediate a forum between the two organizations. As James D. Held recounted, the rift between these two institutions has existed from the theatre’s move into the Creative Arts Center in 1989 and,
despite some collaborative efforts, has worsened over the past twenty-one years. Both sides seem to have their own set of grievances; however, in order for both to survive and be contributing members of the geographical community and larger theatrical community, communication must be opened and encouraged.

Perhaps, the change could also come through a modification of the theatre’s governance. According to Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco’s *Summer Stock! An American Theatrical Phenomenon*, the most effective theatres have strong boards. With regard to the Westport Country Playhouse in Connecticut, LoMonaco quotes Anna Keefe, the theatre’s associate artistic director: “There was a really strong board, a committed board, that wanted to take that next step…and it was very appealing. We weren’t just playing at it. I don’t think any other summer theatre has as strong a board as we do” (213-14). The Westport worked to secure new funding sources and to promote the theatre as an entertainment destination. The WVPT Board of Trustees is aging and has several members who have served since nearly the beginning. To be effective and “take the next step,” the board must be a working one and, currently, many of the members are primarily utilized as advisors only. However, the composition of the board is changing as senior members are beginning to step down and new members are being asked to join. This is an opportunity for the board to be more active in all aspects of the theatre, specifically fundraising and public relations.

In my opinion the key to the theatre’s continued existence lies in its training program. LoMonaco writes “one of the most enduring reasons for keeping summer stock not only alive but a vital part of professional American theatre is its continuing role as a training ground for young theatre artists” (227). Through a partnership with WVU (and/or other theatre institutions in the area), the WVPT Academy could potentially become a reality by using the best of what WVU
has to offer (faculty, staff, and space) and the best of what the theatre has to offer (experienced professionals in all realms of the entertainment industry). The internship program could thrive through initial instruction being given by the university’s faculty and staff prior to the beginning of the summer season. One reason that the summer interns do not receive enough instruction is time (and, of course, money). With instructors already in place, the intern company could arrive a week early for training in their special area; this would not only provide a more comprehensive educational experience for the students, but would also save time (and money) on mistakes made in the process of “learning-by-doing.”

The Future Stars and T.A.R.G.E.T. programs could also benefit by this new association and could be revived. With WVU technicians, directors, actors, and others on site, the WVPT staff would have extra time to dedicate to the training of the Future Stars company; furthermore, this company could thrive throughout the year with WVU students and faculty as staff once the summer-only staff leaves in August. For this to work, some new source of funding would need to be found to support the extra man power needed to keep the program running. Similarly, WVU students could comprise the traveling T.A.R.G.E.T. troupe as part of a class requirement similar to Bowling Green State University’s Humanities Troupe61. Without staff salaries as a concern, the troupe could travel and promote awareness across the region and, perhaps, expand its repertoire beyond plays concerning tobacco and alcohol abuse; however, new funding structures would need to be implemented in order to support the troupe’s travel and operational expenditures, including staff/faculty members who serve as a major conduit between WVU and WVPT. It might be feasible to broach corporate sponsors once again with a new funding

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61 Established in 2005, this troupe travels across the BGSU campus and the greater Bowling Green/Toledo, Ohio community. Its mission: “We use theatrical tools to stimulate thought, provoke dialogue and promote change by examining values, differences and human experience in ways that are supportive and conducive to learning” (http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/humanitiestroupe) focuses on raising awareness of social issues similar to and beyond those raised by T.A.R.G.E.T.
structure that might potentially be tax-deductible through WVU. In addition, if the program is more highly publicized, the corporate sponsor would get more community exposure making them much more willing to donate annually to keep the program running.

Finally, the WVU/WVPT connection could make the holiday programming more effective in numerous ways. WVU students are already on site when the holiday show is being rehearsed, built, and publicized. The students could receive class credit for their participation in the production, which would defray costs for the theatre, and could begin their work early in the semester. If the holiday programming is a joint production—as it once was—then it becomes part of the WVU season, not an added production at the end of the semester. This provides additional funding and time for the production to be mounted. Even if the students are unable to crew the production or even perform, due to final exam schedules, they will be able to be involved in the process even if that means double-casting or doubling up on crew, so there is some flexibility during finals week as well as the opportunity for the students to be paid once the “classroom” responsibilities to the production are met. The students, faculty, staff, and WVPT’s professional artists could work side-by-side to both entertain and educate. My analysis has led me to conclude that this is the most efficient way for West Virginia Public Theatre to thrive in the current economic and political times and for West Virginia University’s Division of Theatre to remain competitive in a sea of drama programs across the country. If the two sides are able to move past separatism and conflict in order to co-create, then I believe both will flourish for many years to come and will foster growth in the other theatre companies in the region creating a collaborative arts community.
CHAPTER IV. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense […] Utopian performatives, in their doings, make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better. (Dolan “Utopia” 5-6)

Dolan’s assertion here has stimulated my own conjecture: live theatre has the potential to inspire change in the world through the coming together of audiences for moments of awareness. This powerful gathering provides an opportunity for individuals to be stimulated by both the action on the stage and the communion created with other audience members to strive towards an ideal. The result is a group, brought together for a common goal, motivated to find ways to better its community through social change and action, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. Moreover, this gathering fosters a new outlook on life and a newfound appreciation for one’s community: coming together in this “communitas” helps to improve the quality of life for all concerned.

Victor Turner defined “communitas” as “a relational quality of full, unmediated communication, even communion, between people of definite and determinate identity, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances” (Turner “Image” 250). Applied to the ritualistic nature of theatre, “communitas” can be seen when an audience (a definite and determinate identity) comes to see a play and, because of that common goal, communicate as one or, commune; they share an experience that has an effectual change on
them. While this phenomenon could be seen at other similar events (concerts, rallies), it is much different than a group of passengers waiting at the airport for a flight: the latter experience tends not to create a cohesive community, but rather maintains a group of individuals. It is through “communitas” that theatres have the power to foster genuine change and to improve the well-being of its community members by providing an arena that invites camaraderie and promotes the possibility of a better future.

Throughout its twenty-six year history, West Virginia Public Theatre’s Executive Producer, Ron Iannone, has striven to provide more than mere entertainment. One of the principal goals of the theatre has been to “improve the quality of life” through the use of theatrical tools, economic stimulus, and contributions to the cultural landscape of the region. In this chapter I will investigate the theatre’s perceived and actual effect on the quality of life of members of both communities A (those involved directly with the theatre) and B (those somehow affected by the work of the theatre). Through the exploration of its financial contributions, political controversies, and feedback from members of the theatre’s community, I will illuminate the efficacy of the theatre’s third and final mission point and examine what insights might be gleaned from this exploration that could be useful to fledgling companies striving to establish a similar objective.

Defining “Quality of Life”

According to the Quality of Life Research Unit at the University of Toronto in Ontario, quality of life is defined as “the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life” (University of Toronto.ca). While this is a fairly simple definition, it provides an effective departure point from which to determine a definition of the phrase most appropriate for West Virginia Public Theatre’s community impact. The Research Unit states that
Possibilities result from the opportunities and limitations each person has in his/her life and reflect the interaction of personal and environmental factors. Enjoyment has two components: the experience of satisfaction or the possession or achievement of some characteristic, as illustrated by the expression: "She enjoys good health.

Furthermore, the research unit provides a conceptual model for the determination of quality of life. This conceptual framework is split into three domains (“Being, Belonging, and Becoming”) and then divided further into sub-domains. “Being” is described as “who one is” and is separated into the subcategories “physical,” “psychological,” and “spiritual.” All of these categories have the potential to be impacted by either participating in or observing a theatrical event. Certainly, the “being” aspect is in effect with the theatre’s company members (community A), some of whom also come from community B; the content of the productions performed might also impact personal values of community audience members and even provide stress relief, physically and psychologically. Thus, escapist musicals might have a powerful impact on the audience’s sense of well-being. While this is undoubtedly an important aspect of an individual’s quality of life, the effect of the arts, especially theatre, may not be immediate or convincingly felt as much as they are in the final two domains.

“Belonging,” defined as “connections with one’s environment,” focuses on three different sub-categories: physical (an individual’s connection to their home, school, workplace, neighborhood, or community), social (one’s place in a group of friends, their family, or their community), and community. All three of these sub-categories connect the individual to some aspect of their environment. Theatre can take an individual and unite them with some organized group and, in the case of WVPT, these groups are classified by community A and community B.
The category most applicable to this study, community “belonging,” focuses on the impact of an individual’s involvement in the work force, education, community events, and recreation (such as theatre). This last sub-domain is incredibly important to the definition of “quality of life” in regard to the determination of West Virginia Public Theatre’s impact on its community as it concentrates on aspects of life that are meant to bring people together (which is, according to my understanding of Dolan’s theory, one of the key principles of theatre and, in turn, “communitas”).

The third and final domain set forth by the Quality of Life Research Unit is defined as “achieving personal goals, hopes, and aspirations” and labeled “becoming,” which is split into the sub-domains of “practical, “leisure,” and “growth. The “practical” domain centers on what a person must do to keep themselves healthy, employed, and in a social-circle, while “growth” is motivated by change and acquiring knowledge and skill. “Becoming” focuses on an individual’s agency in life and how one might attain a better future. “Leisure Becoming” is classified as “activities that promote relaxation and stress reduction” and this, on the most basic level, is the type of theatre mostly produced by West Virginia Public Theatre.

For the purpose of this study, “quality of life” can be explored—through a focus on the terms described above—as “the efficacy of an activity that promotes social and community being,’ ‘belonging,’ and ‘becoming,’ as well as an escape from the stresses of everyday life, through a pursuit focused on entertainment, education, or change.” Although on the surface this description describes many artistic or theatrical contributions to a community, a series of questions surface here: how does professional theatre exemplified here by West Virginia Public Theatre improve the quality of life for the residents of its community? How effective is the theatre in providing an outlet for social and community “being,” “belonging,” and “becoming?”
Having established definitions and criteria for assessing “quality of life,” it is useful to clarify the arenas to which that criterion will be applied. Three key areas emerge as cogent to this exploration: the first area concerns contributions to the economic life of the community at large. The other two areas for examination concern contributions to the quality of life of the two communities I defined earlier: A (direct participants in the development of productions) and B (those affected by the theatre’s practices including, but not limited to audience members).

Economic Stimulus

The West Virginia Industry of Culture Consortium conducted a study in 2005 titled “The West Virginia Arts Study: The Economic Impact of Arts Institutions, Their Employees, and Self-Employed Artists on the State Economy.” In a September 2009 interview, former WVU President, Neil Bucklew, referenced this study that noted: “The total economic impact of the arts institutions represented in this survey, their employees, and the self-employed within the same employment classifications is $60.5 million annually” (8). That number placed the arts as the seventh largest industry in the state: just seven million dollars shy of the number six industry: fuel oil and coal (26). For a state that is known, primarily, for producing coal and other energy sources, it is illuminating to see how much the arts have an economic impact.

Producer Ron Iannone has touted that West Virginia Public Theatre is a major source of financial stimulus in the greater Morgantown region, especially during the summer portion of its programming. Iannone has publicized the theatre’s contribution stating: “West Virginia Public Theatre is estimated to generate $3.5 million annually in its community ($5.00 generated for every dollar spent on tickets)” (WVPublicTheatre.com). However, the extent of the theatre’s financial role in the region does not end there; Iannone also advertizes the theatre’s use of local resources for its operating budget and states: “West Virginia Public Theatre's total budget is over
$1.5 million, most of which is spent with West Virginia vendors” (*WVPublicTheatre.com*).

In a recent interview, Morgantown City Manager, Dan Boroff, reinforced Iannone’s declaration that West Virginia Public Theatre has made a “significant financial impact” on the Morgantown region. “Primarily,” Boroff said, “the theatre’s economic contributions have been secondary and tertiary in the forms of ticket sales, dinners sold at local restaurants, gasoline purchased at local pumps, and monies spent at local hotels.” Boroff is not the only one to see the theatre’s financial impact. Associate Artistic Director Michael Licata reiterates Boroff’s statement: “The theatre’s presence…stimulates the local economy through the guest employees it hosts, jobs [it] creates, and residual patronage to local businesses.” The impact through tourist dollars is obvious. Salisbury University professor and scenic designer for the theatre, David Shuhy, put it best: “…the average theatre member does not simply get home, shower, and go to the theatre. Theatre is an event for many people and many will have, at the very least, a meal either before or after the performance.” Frostburg University professor and former performer for the theatre, Mairzy Yost, provides a prime example of this phenomenon: “I personally knew eight people from Maryland who drove up to see *My Fair Lady*…stayed in a hotel, ate three meals in local restaurants, and shopped in downtown Morgantown.” In fact, nearly eighty-percent of my sixty-five interviews resulted in some similar response, confirming the theatre stimulates Morgantown’s economy through tourism. This is certainly not a major revelation, nor is it to be taken lightly; it is simply one of the chief means through which the theatre contributes to the economic vitality of the region and, consequently, its quality of life.

A second aspect of the theatre’s published economic commitment is the purchase of local goods and services through its production budgets. In order to fully understand how WVPT contributes to the financial vibrancy of the region, it is important to examine the theatre’s
economic viability. Although a large percentage of the theatre’s payroll expenses goes to out-of-town talent, the theatre is dedicated to supporting local businesses as much as possible: lumber yards and construction houses for scenic supplies, local automotive rental companies for its rental vehicles, Morgantown studio spaces for rehearsals and auditions, and local apartment complexes/hotels for its housing needs. The list of local business supported is long, but also contains businesses that have had a difficult relationship with the theatre. Technical Director Jonathan Allender-Zivic found that the theatre’s local “debts […] cause many problems.” Like many businesses, especially non-profits, the theatre has fallen behind on payments on several bills and loans, which makes it difficult, at times, for the organization to obtain credit. This is not a recent development: the theatre has, routinely, had this difficulty, but it has gotten worse during the current economic downturn. As a result, the technical staff of the theatre has to look outside of the local area for some supplies. However, Iannone and the Board have vowed to correct their financial situation through a renewed fundraising campaign focusing on high-level donors and sponsorships.

Where does the theatre’s operating budget come from? The sources of the theatre’s income are as diverse as the community it serves. The following chart (figure 4.1) shows the breakdown of income sources for the theatre for the 2008-2009 fiscal year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVENUE</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box Office</td>
<td>330,000</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Foundation</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov't Support</td>
<td>340,000</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Grant</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Kind</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc</td>
<td>5,138</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Ads</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Figure 4.1)
The donations category listed includes corporate sponsorships and individual donors.

“Government support” includes grants from the federal government, the state of West Virginia, and from Monongalia County. According to the most recent report from The Foundation Center, West Virginia Public Theatre was the only theatre in the top fifty of grant recipients in the state (number forty-two) to receive major funding. An additional tourism grant is awarded from the West Virginia Bureau of Tourism and the fundraising percentage reflects funds contributed through the theatre’s annual fundraising concert performance.

An article in The Charleston Gazette positions state funding for WVPT as part of a larger movement in support of the arts in West Virginia:

The trend accelerated in the late 1990s after Morgantown-based West Virginia Public Theater [sic] got $100,000 from the legislature. The then-new Morgantown group was following the lead of Beckley-based Theater West Virginia, which had been getting funding for years and by then was getting $300,000. West Virginia Public Theater [sic] has since bumped up to $200,000 and Theater West Virginia to $400,000. (Schwarz)

Since then, Theater West Virginia’s funding has been cut, leaving West Virginia Public Theatre as the top grant recipient in the state. However, in 2009, the State of West Virginia grant, which in the budget example above amounted to $340,000 was reduced to nearly $80,000 due to the financial crisis hitting our nation. The reduction firmly establishes box office sales as the primary source of income for the theatre. Thus, the theatre relies a great deal on the influx of tourists into the area.

City Manager Boroff believes that the theatre contributes much more, economically, than mere tourist dollars. In fact, Boroff calls the theatre “catalytic in nature.” Boroff is referring to
the development of Morgantown’s burgeoning Wharf District. For the past five years, West Virginia Public Theatre’s administrative offices have been housed at the Waterfront Place Hotel in the Wharf District and have been the driving force behind the new Morgantown Event Center, which is physically connected to the hotel. The Event Center, which will house the theatre’s summer performances, will open in April 2010 with the theatre’s annual fundraising event. Originally meant to be a stand-alone space for West Virginia Public Theatre, the facility has morphed in its intent due to the inability of the theatre to raise the capital to complete the project by itself. However, the theatre’s capital campaign and awarded capital grants provided one-third of the twenty-four million dollars needed to complete construction of the facility. Boroff insists that without the theatre, “the event center would not have become a reality” and that its (WVPT) existence has “a vital impact on the region, both culturally and economically.”

Boroff sees the theatre as a cultural bridge in the community and finds “the most remarkable thing is the way everyone is coming together…reinforcing community partnership.” Although one of Ron Iannone’s dreams was to have a stand-alone facility for the theatre, his acceptance of this community partnership strengthens the theatre’s ties with the residents of the area and reinforces its place as an integral part of the cultural fabric of the area. Thus, Iannone and West Virginia Public Theatre are making a place for both the “belonging” and “becoming” domains of quality of life by bringing together members of the community in partnership (belonging, with literally a place to belong) and by providing a forum through which these community members can seek a better future (becoming). In many ways this is also an example of the utopic vision of Jill Dolan: performance creating community for a common goal.

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62 The theatre’s contribution was the first major source of funding for the project. The remaining funds came from the City of Morgantown (1.5 million dollars), governmental and private grants (8 million dollars), and private donors (5.7 million dollars).
Boroff also envisions a future when the major artistic venues of the area (the WVU Creative Arts Center, the Metropolitan Theatre, the Morgantown Event Center, and the Ruby Hazel McQuain Amphitheatre\textsuperscript{63}) can come together to make Morgantown a cultural destination not simply for West Virginia, but for the larger region. He says that “West Virginia Public Theatre bridges them all” (as an arts presenter that has, potentially, the resources and artistic expertise to utilize each of the venues) and can make that dream a reality for the community. This dream, which would certainly be the culmination of a life’s work for Iannone, does not seem to be completely possible, at least not with the current state of communication between the theatre and West Virginia University. Furthermore, the uncertainty of management at the event center (and WVPT’s place within that facility, to be discussed in Chapter Five), makes this dream a bit far-fetched.

Not everyone views the move to the Morgantown Event Center as a major step in bridging the arts in the community. In fact, many believe that the theatre is acting irresponsibly by making the move and, consequently, not fulfilling its stated goal of “enhancing the quality of life” of the community as much as it could. West Virginia University Division of Theatre and Dance Chair Joshua Williamson believes that the theatre needs to think more about their financial obligation to the region. Williamson is not opposed to the theatre’s existence: “I support all artistic organizations: the more theatre the better.” However, he does believe that the most beneficial move (economically for the community and politically for the theatre) would have been for West Virginia Public Theatre to move into The Metropolitan Theatre as a permanent and year-round resident. He believes that the government officials that agreed to both funding the theatre’s move to the Event Center and funding the facility itself “overlooked the

\textsuperscript{63} An open-air amphitheatre, owned by the City of Morgantown, which sits on the banks of the Monongahela river near the Wharf District.
financial destination” and that the “Metropolitan offers tourists more” than the Event Center can, including a variety of shopping and dining opportunities. Williamson believes that with the theatre’s twenty-five plus year history in the area, a move to the downtown business district would be beneficial to all involved: “Local businesses really support events at the Met.” He goes on to detail that “all downtown bars and restaurants are within walking distance. Patrons can have a high end dinner before the show and then drinks or dessert afterwards.” Williamson finds it “difficult to see the city spending money on the event center when the Met is there.”

Williamson understands Iannone’s primary concerns with the Metropolitan Theatre: the stage is small, the pit is non-existent, the dressing rooms are less-than-adequate, and the fly-system is insufficient. However, the new Event Center has no pit (the musicians are housed in an area at the back of the stage), limited dressing room space, and no fly-system. Williamson believes that the Metropolitan’s small stage (approximately two-thirds the size of the Event Center’s portable stage) would “provide the opportunity to create lavish scenery” not seen at the West Virginia Public Theatre’s performances for the last few years. Williamson also feels that the theater’s publicized economic contributions to the community are “grossly overstated.” Having seen the theatre’s patron activity over the past decade, he believes that the numbers are “not exactly right” and that they “need further study.” The assertion made by Williamson is that West Virginia Public Theatre needs to be a better community member. He does not doubt that the theatre is a necessary institution or that any other arts organization can match the quality and quantity of artistic opportunities provided, but that the theatre’s governors should look beyond their own needs to what would be beneficial to the greater good of the community. Thus, Williamson believes in the theatre’s potential for improving the quality of life (becoming), but

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64 Once the theatre lost sole control of the space, its administration had little to say in the design of the facility.
does not see evidence that the theatre truly focuses on that attempt. Rather, Williamson sees the theatre promoting inflated numbers so that the theatre appears to be doing “good.”

WVU theatre professor, James D. Held, contends that “WVPT needs to look to its future in terms of leadership and facilities. I think a move to the Wharf District facility will be a disaster. As an audience member, I simply would not pay to sit in a ballroom on hotel seats and watch a big musical on a temporary platform.” Held’s contention parallels Williamson’s comments and echoes similar voices in the community pointing toward Iannone and the theatre creating more efficient and mutually beneficial working relationships within the community. This seems to be key—at least to these two qualified respondents—in the success of the theatre and its growth in the community.

Held and Williamson are adamant about the theatre moving into the Metropolitan space. However, until recently, Iannone has not been keen to the idea due to the age of the facility and its spatial constraints, but the space seems ideal considering the newly discovered constraints at the MEC (similar conditions in a new facility not specifically designed to be a theatre). The points presented by Williamson concerning the Metropolitan as a tourist destination are acute and show a broader opportunity to support the local Morgantown businesses. Furthermore, both men insist that the stage at the Metropolitan would serve the theatre’s dwindling scenic design budgets by providing a smaller canvas upon which the theatres designers can create. In my estimation Williamson and Held are discriminating in their opinions and their suggestions make the most sense for both the theatre and the greater community as the Metropolitan serves as a place for community members to be and for the theatre to become a more contributing member of its community fostering economic stimulus of downtown businesses.
Despite the strong criticisms of both Williamson and Held, the theatre has its champions, many of whom believe that the move to the Wharf District is the next step in solidifying the theatre and the arts as a major cultural and economic aspect of the greater Morgantown area. Former WVU President Neil Bucklew is one of those advocates. He believes that West Virginia Public Theatre is an important part of the 60.5 million dollar impact that the arts have on the state.

Beyond the economic study (cited at the beginning of this section), Bucklew sees a future where the theatre (now among the largest arts presenters in the state, but not at the top of the list), once year-round, can have a tremendous influence on the region’s economy. Bucklew remarked:

> The impact is impressive…the largest “arts” contributors in the states are fairs and festivals, but these are not year-round. Additionally, West Virginia Public Theatre has the ability to help both private and public ventures. For example, the Event Center will generate a great deal of money and we will be a part of that. We gave them a running start; we helped them sell their case to the state for an economic investment.”

Here Bucklew reviews just a few of the ways that the theatre positively engages the area’s economy beyond the surface spending publicized by the theatre: WVPT has encouraged new ventures that have the potential to be great money-makers (i.e. the Morgantown Event Center). When the theatre fell short of its capital campaign quota, the bond was transferred to the city to be used to construct the MEC with an agreement that West Virginia Public Theatre would use the facility rent-free. Without the governmental backing of the theatre, the Event Center would

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65 Bucklew is alluding to the approval of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) bond in June 2002 and then reaffirmed in July 2003.
never have been built and without the Event Center, the theatre would not have a home. This is a prime example of how the theatre and the community work together for the better good of the region.

West Virginia Public Theatre’s economic impact on the state and community is unquestionable. Although its operating budget may be diminutive in comparison to the largest arts organizations across the state, its influence is vital in the growth and development of the greater Morgantown area. Furthermore, the theatre has the ability to continue its growth in years to come and to become an integral part of the financial structure of the community. However, it is the theatre’s current financial state combined with past financial decisions that have caused major controversy in regard to its economic viability. Financially, the theater is in trouble: even with a combination of private and public funding, as well as ticket sales, WVPT—like many other not-for-profit theatres—is in severe debt and, most recently, has had chronic trouble meeting its fiscal responsibilities, causing problems in the community (as noted above by Allender-Zivic).

If the arts continue to play an important role in the life of West Virginians and help to improve their quality of life through not only entertainment, education, and social consciousness, but also economic stimulus, funding will more likely be available. However, if the arts become stagnant and disconnected to the region’s residents, then the probability of a sustained and supported arts culture will be less likely. In order for West Virginia Public Theatre to continue to have significant impact on the well-being of its communities’ residents, it must maintain its ability to provide a place for community making (“belonging”) and a forum for residents to aspire to a better life (“becoming”). In order to continue to provide beneficial programming, the
theatre must find a way to return to fiscal health. Without a strong financial foundation, the theatre’s past impact will not matter.

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed the ways in which the theatre uses both entertainment and education to positively affect the community. Nevertheless, I feel that it is important to investigate exactly how the theatre goes beyond merely presenting shows and offering educational opportunities to help improve the quality of life. Before looking at WVPT’s direct impact, it is important to examine the ways in which theatre can affect an individual or community in terms of quality of life.

The Arts Impact Lives

In 2008, a study was conducted by educators Elizabeth Thomas and Anne Mulvey and published as “Using the Arts in Teaching and Learning Building Student Capacity for Community-based Work in Health Psychology” in the *Journal of Health Psychology*. Thomas and Mulvey’s research focuses on the ways in which the arts can both improve the quality of life for students and improve the capacity for students to engage in community building and social change (and, as a consequence, improve the quality of life). Thomas and Mulvey argue that “the arts promote student understandings of the values, goals, and practices of culturally competent work and enable constructive partnerships with diverse community groups” (240). Not only can the arts help to educate students, they can foster a relationship between student (or community member) and the larger, more diverse community in which they live. These relationships get forged in many ways within the framework of WVPT and its communities. It takes a great deal of constructive partnership to mount a production (community A). A different kind of constructive partnership is forged between the presenters of a show and the audience (community B) in live theatre, thus building “communitas.”
The researchers found that “most students are willing to participate in arts-related activities when they feel it is safe to do so, when the activities relate to their lived experiences, and when the activities are clearly and meaningfully connected to learning objectives” (248). The assertion here is that students (or community members), once they find a pathway to involvement in the arts, may eventually find the arts necessary and effective in improving their quality of life. This happens, for the most part, when the arts are connected to some important part of their everyday life or to some zeitgeist moment in their past. For community A, the theatre plays a central role in their day to day lives (at least for the summer). This affords young theatre artists and interns of all kinds to “test out” whether full immersion in a theatrical lifestyle really enhances their sense of “being,” “belonging,” and/or “becoming.” West Virginia Public Theatre’s summer season productions provide entertainment, a chance for escapism, and the opportunity for laughter, which on the surface may not seem “connected to learning objectives,” but they do offer a release and even empathy for human experience. Witnessing this type of theatre may help an audience member relate a character’s fears, ambitions or desire for love to their own lived experiences, thus enhancing their sense of “belonging” (both as part of the audience and with the recognition that others share those fears, ambitions and desires).

However, the most logical example of this type of program offered by WVPT is T.A.R.G.E.T. This program meets and exceeds the artistic obligations defined by Thomas and Mulvey by providing a safe forum for students to relate the arts activities to their own lives, hence providing a sense of community “belonging” and a opportunity to change their lives (through changing their habits). This social change, a moment of “becoming,” also reinforces Dolan’s theories of utopic performance by bringing together a community for a common goal: to
help its young audience to become more aware of the ills of substance abuse and, hopefully, inspire change, which could directly affect their physical well-being.

Lastly, Thomas and Mulvey concluded that

students’ encounters with the arts facilitate active learning, risk taking, and greater capacity in approaching difficult concepts and problems…that student engagement in creative work in community settings and campus–community partnerships enables meaningful learning beyond the classroom for students with community members. The use of visual arts, creative writing, and performance has helped us to create unique learning experiences and has afforded deeper investment and understanding of questions and concerns encountered in the classroom and in our students’ and our own community work. (248)

Theatre can have a vital impact on the community through education, community building, and the endeavor to improve the quality of life as proposed above. Ongoing research and the conclusions of this particular study help to further establish the necessity of the arts in our society and the ways in which it can promote “belonging” and “becoming” among the diverse residents of a community and even a sense of well-being. At a time when funding for the arts is being cut and when many schools are exploring the possibility of cutting arts programs altogether to handle budget cuts, it is important to note West Virginia Public Theatre’s commitment to providing some continuing arts education despite its’ own financial hardship. In this way the theatre’s dedication to improving the quality of life in the area is alive and well as it hopes to reinstate the T.A.R.G.E.T. program. The theatre is, currently, looking for potential sponsors for that program. The theatre’s dedication to this mission is most publicly seen in a
commitment to presenting an annual holiday production specifically targeted to the children of
the region.

Shea-Mikal Green, a native West Virginian and aspiring actor who has performed in two
of the theatre’s holiday productions, believes that the theatre’s work absolutely inspires a sense
of “becoming” for the children: “If you see the looks on the children’s faces, you’d understand.
It has given the children the opportunity to experience something that may change their lives
forever.” Green’s insistence is that the productions have the ability to change lives, to affect the
children’s “becoming” (being able to dream of a better life), and to promote the students well-
“being”: this is crucial to the theatre’s mission.

Frances J. Alvino, in his “Art Improves the Quality of Life: A Look at Art in Early
Childhood Settings,” posits that simply exposing children to art at an early age will help their
development and will improve their quality of life. Although Alvino focuses on the inclusion of
the visual arts in the early childhood setting, I speculate that any artistic endeavor—be it visual
or performance—can aid in a child’s growth and ability to, according to Alvino, “make sense of
their world” (1). Moreover, a child’s viewing of live actors onstage experiencing human
emotion can help the child bridge the gap between “real” life and technology. In an era where
technology is central to the rearing of young people, making this connection helps a child to
understand the complexities and importance of human relationships. This can be seen in the
theatre’s many educational programs, primarily those focused on younger children such as the
holiday programming where the children experience art through viewing and more hands-on,
creative encounters such as the Future Stars program, where children learn the art of creating
theatre. In fact, Alvino places creativity at the apex of his study and conjectures that everyone is
capable of being creative and that “creativity is one of the earliest stages of a child’s
development” (4). He continues to discuss the role of creativity and the artistic process in the vital stages of a child’s growth and education. His conclusion is that art, indeed, improves the quality of life when a child is allowed to experience it: “children will learn to appreciate the beauty in their surroundings […] will learn that choices in life will be offered to them […] will learn that it is acceptable to express an alternate opinion of different topics” (16). The life skills learned here through the addition of art to a child’s rearing can last them a lifetime and has the potential to put them ahead of their peers who were not exposed to art. In the same way that the visual arts can aid in a child’s growth and development, theatre can—depending upon the type of theatre and agenda of each event—provide valuable social and problem solving skills in addition to fostering an appreciation for beauty, knowledge, and grace. While this is true of the theatre’s educational programs, children can also be affected by the beauty, knowledge, and grace provided by the many different worlds presented during the summer season: those who attend theatre witness choices made by characters and their resulting consequences, which can instill lifelong lessons about positive decisions versus negative choices. As WVPT continues (or attempts to continue) to provide opportunities through which local area children are exposed to both the creation and the observation of theatre, they offer the children a journey to “becoming” contributing members of the greater community and, as a result, their quality of life is, potentially, improved.

Several of my research respondents focused their discussion of quality of life on the theatre’s educational programming. Professional performer and educator from the Pittsburgh area, David Crawford, spoke of the training young professionals receive at the theatre:

The theatre is a substantial educational resource for the community and, in turn, helps to improve the quality of life. For those who work in the local theatre, and
especially for students, it serves as a master class in acting. Actors can learn the basics of their craft in formal classes, but to become a competent professional it’s necessary to work in actual productions with accomplished colleagues.

Here Crawford reiterates the necessity for the training programs at the theatre and the ways in which young, aspiring professionals can find agency in their chosen career. Through this experience, they begin their road to “becoming” a contributing member of the artistic community. In addition, the study of acting in and of itself is an investigation of “being” as an actor explores different ways of looking at and interfacing with the world.

Perhaps, the most important research into the artistic involvement in quality of life is that of Richard Florida. Florida, an Economist and Professor of Management at Carnegie Mellon University created the theories of the “Creative Class” and in his study *The Rise of the Creative Class…and How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life*, describes how people choose where they live and where they work based on criteria radically different from fifty years ago. It is within these theories that the ideals of the creative culture are seen to have more prominence in decision making. Although Florida’s theories do not focus specifically on theatre, his concepts are important in the understanding of how the arts can affect and add value to one’s life. Florida posits that young professionals are attracted to certain areas because of what those areas offer and, for the younger generations, those possibilities include tolerance of diverse populations, social interaction, and the chance to live a lifestyle of their choosing. Three important factors, Florida posits, help young generations choose their future homes:

- *What’s there*: the combination of the built environment and the natural environment; a proper setting for pursuit of creative lives
- *Who’s there:* the diverse kinds of people, interacting and providing cues that anyone can plug into and make a life in that community

- *What’s going on:* the vibrancy of street life, café culture, arts, music and people engaging in outdoor activities—altogether a lot of active, exciting, creative endeavors. (232)

Without the liveliness of an arts scene (including theatre), most youthful workers will bypass a certain area. That is why, according to Florida’s study, cities such as Austin, Texas and Boston, Massachusetts are more popular among this new “creative class” (244). Although Morgantown is not one of the larger areas studied by Florida, it is similar to those areas in many ways including being an ever-growing center for scientific research (with foci in energy, engineering, and medicine) and his creative criteria do apply there. The population of Morgantown is expanding (according to City-data.com the population has increased by 10.6% since 2000) and its average age is getting younger. In order to continue to be an attractive home for the younger generations and diverse populations, including gay individuals and families, according to Florida, Morgantown must cater to the “creative class” including providing artistic outlets such as theatre. This new class expects a certain quality of life and the arts are part of that expectation.

Salisbury University Theatre professor David Shuhy concurs that the theatre offers the potential for this type of ambitious “becoming,” but that it also presents an opportunity for social “belonging”:

> I believe that theatre, more than other art forms, connects deeply with people from a wide range of backgrounds. I feel that it allows people to engage in social, aesthetic, and psychological thought by bringing to life the human condition. I also believe that WVPT is providing this opportunity for many
people who would not normally have it, making it perhaps more accessible than an academic theatre might (simply because the goal of WVPT…is to reach out to the community).

Shuhy reinforces the power of “communitas” within the work done by West Virginia Public Theatre and its potential to attract the creative class. Even under the most severe budget restrictions, the art of the theatre has the capability to bring community together and to enrich its well-being.

David Crawford agrees that WVPT has begun to appeal to this new class posited by Florida: “It’s a truism that cultural activities are essential to attracting a well-educated, high earning populace to a community. WVPT plays a major role in making Morgantown an inviting place to live.” Joseph McFall, a Psychologist at Syracuse University and former House Manager with WVPT, concurs that the theatre “enriches the cultural experiences of the community members and helps emphasize the community on the cultural map.” McFall believes that, due to the theatre’s existence, Morgantown has become known as a “center for the arts” in the immediate region. Furthermore, West Virginia Public Theatre, being the largest arts presenter in the region and the only professional theatre, must adjust its practices and programs, to some extent, to cater to the new and influential demographic. Currently, the majority of the theatre’s patrons are senior citizens; these are the faithful supporters of the theatre’s various programs. However, as those patrons continue to grow older and pass on, the theatre must be willing to adapt and be a contributing member of the community that attracts the younger age bracket as well. In this way the theatre offers the artistic and cultural destination desired by the community and the community, in turn, thrives by continuing to attract young professional families to the
area. Thus, the region has the potential of becoming an artistic center and a new home for the “creative class.”

WVU College of Creative Arts Laboratory Manager, Peter McCumber, believes that the theatre makes a vital connection to its audience, which speaks directly to the power of “communitas”:

They [WVPT] provide a positive place where community leadership, families, and citizens of all types can meet, share, and be involved. Not only are the arts important for our economic well-being, but they are also vitally important for social and mental well-being. Theatre, in general, acts as a bridge between cultures and heritages, which is important here due to the wide range of peoples brought here by WVU and in turn helps build relationships amongst those people in the community.

In the building of community, emphasized here by McCumber, the theatre strives toward the utopic vision of performance posited by Dolan. Strangers meet in an audience, make a connection for a common goal, and leave with either a new-found relationship or an inspired desire to improve the community: even if that is only feeling a bit lighter for having been part of a group of people escaping the concerns of their own lives for a couple of hours. Taking it a step further, professional actor (and member of the Actor’s Equity Association National Council) Scott Evans believes that the arts (including the work produced at WVPT) are fundamental to the growth and development of the community:

From a cultural perspective, the arts not only provide entertainment, escape, joy, and beauty—a necessary release for any community—but also catalog historical and societal trends, both reflecting and influencing the ‘times.’ They have the
power to enlighten, revealing truth about human interaction, and in turn can….
inspire both personal reflection and societal progress […] the arts foster creativity
that is further reflected in almost every single industry […] the effect of the arts
on a community extends well beyond cultural enrichment. The arts provide jobs
[…] not only for artists […] the industry employs millions of people in
communities throughout the country […] especially in smaller communities—like
Morgantown—the arts serve to bring people together, giving them a sense of
participation in the community through a shared experience.

Evans highlights the ways in which the arts have a great capacity to foster “being” a part of a
community through employment in the arts, “belonging” to a group that is brought together
through the arts, and, ultimately, the chance of “becoming” what they aspire to be through
“enlightenment.” In the number of ways outlined here from cultural enrichment to more tangible
ways such as employment, theatre can improve the quality of life of a community.

Perceived Contributions

Noticeably, West Virginia Public Theatre has committed itself to creating outlets through
which the arts can reach a percentage of the population and, in turn, improve their lives in many
ways. The theatre’s objectives to teach and foster growth through its various production and
educational programs mark the organization as more than purely an entertainment destination:
the theatre is seen by its community as much more. Neil Bucklew believes that: “the educational
programs show potential for invaluable growth. In the future we can have a deeper, more
advanced involvement with local teachers and provide opportunities and training for students
with promise.” Here Bucklew posits a future program where the theatre can provide drama
training—perhaps even theatre for social change training—for the community’s teachers, which
will allow them to use innovative teaching practices in their classrooms. Additionally, theatrical training can be offered to students who show great capability in the arts, thus providing them an opportunity to “belong” to a group of artists and to “become” the artist they aspire to be through the development of their inherent skills. Thus, potentially, they improve their quality of life through the possibility of a career in the arts.

The theatre has already experimented with aspects of theatre for social change, striving toward utopic performance, in the long-running T.A.R.G.E.T. program. However, if the theatre is able to secure funding for future versions of this program, the benefits to the community could go above and beyond the first (and to an extent, quite successful) installment of the program. Professional actor Michael Edward Hodge agrees that the program was “absolutely beneficial to the community” and posited that it was “one of the major educational achievements” of the theatre. The theatre could also explore future collaborations with the Saltworks Theatre Company (STC). Due to the loss of funding, the collaboration between STC and WVPT ended; however, brainstorming with STC about future collaborations and the search for corporate funding could prove useful for both companies.

Furthermore, the theatre could investigate the effectiveness of different versions of this program such as a touring troupe that explores, through theatrical methods, other issues facing young (and, potentially, adult) members of the community beyond substance abuse. This troupe could also promote an interest in the arts for students who would not otherwise be exposed to them. Perhaps, this troupe could be utilized in facilities beyond the classrooms (correctional facilities, school administrations, police and other municipal departments requiring diversity

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66 This is the company discussed in Chapter Three that performed the play that was the centerpiece of the T.A.R.G.E.T. program.
67 Either staffed by Saltworks or another troupe staffed by WVPT.
training), further cultivating a sense of “being” challenged to think about social issues that impact them and “becoming” more enlightened and engaged members of society.

In addition to providing educational opportunities and the potential for more beneficial use of its talent and resources, the theatre offers a unique opportunity for its patrons: the chance to see high quality, Broadway-caliber productions with many of their favorite personalities from the stage and screen. When asked if the theatre improves the quality of life through entertainment, Neil Bucklew responded: “Obviously! The theatre attracts a high number of top-caliber professionals to the town and the patrons appreciate good quality regional theatre. In a university town where athletics are the primary ‘cultural’ event, WVPT is central in providing an alternative, artistic outlet.” City Manager Dan Boroff remarked: “cultural leisure time enriches the quality of life and West Virginia Public Theatre offers the best in town.” Monongalia County Assessor Rodney Pyles agrees that the theatre is vital to the cultural growth of the area: “WVPT has filled an entertainment void in Morgantown […] by offering big-stage Broadway-quality shows, WVPT has definitely enhanced the quality of life in Morgantown and the surrounding area. It offers a form of entertainment that is not available anywhere else in the area outside of bigger cities such as Pittsburgh.”

These public figures find the theatre vital to the cultural make-up of the area as do the theatre’s patrons. Seven representative voices agree that the theatre has raised cultural expectations and the level of artistic sophistication in the area. Karen Sekora, in a recent interview, observed that “they have brought professional quality theatre to North Central West Virginia. I grew up in North Central West Virginia and exposure to various kinds of culture, especially the arts, is hard to find.” Unfortunately, this is a common theme for past generations of West Virginians: little exposure to the arts. West Virginia Public Theatre has filled a
necessary hole in the community by offering a cultural outlet for its communities. Louise Caruso, who has been a patron since the first season in 1985, passionately stated that “the theatre is a *vital* part of our community […] it brings more and more people to Morgantown.” Caruso, reinforcing the idea that the theatre is an integral institution in the region, forefronts the theatre’s financial impact of bringing tourists to the area and alludes to the attractiveness of the arts scene to potential new residents.

There were also some responses that went a step further and insisted that the theatre helps to positively change the perception and reputation of the state. Beau Bowden, a professional actor in Los Angeles, grew up in West Virginia and remarked that the theatre “helps West Virginia rid itself of that redneck, uneducated stigma.” Katrina Milnes, another native of the area, agrees: “Growing up in the area, it was exciting to see a professional show! It brings an artistic flair to West Virginia that would be heavily lacking if it was not existent.” Chair of the Department of Theatre at West Virginia Wesleyan College, Greg Mach, is a bit more desperate in his response to the question: “Yes! We need all the arts we can get in this artistic desert called ‘West Virginia.’” The fact that many see the theatre as a vital contributor to the arts in West Virginia and a catalyst for change is vital to the theatre’s sustainability and West Virginia Public Theatre must capitalize on this perception.

Megan Massie, a patron and current WVU Theatre student, emphasizes the value of the escapist element of theatre that WVPT supplies:

> Anytime theatre is involved in a community, it improves that community!...

> I believe giving people a chance to vicariously live through the characters on stage, their points of view broaden and they have a little more empathy and appreciation for the human race. It also causes the audience to think,
which many other forms of entertainment don’t ask the public to do.

Massie believes in the duality of theatre: education and entertainment, which are cornerstones of the theatre’s mission. The ability to provide an escape from the life’s everyday turmoil or monotony is an important community service which WVPT fulfills. Denise Myers agrees that the theatre provides both education and therapeutic relief for its patrons: “It [WVPT] offers an alternative form of entertainment, which provides some relaxation and stress relief with its singing, dancing, and fun. I believe that for some, it is an ‘escape’ to other places and people, and they find it an enjoyable pastime in which to participate, albeit as an observer to the story line.”

This idea of “escapism” is not an aspect of West Virginia Public Theatre’s entertainment mission to be taken lightly. Deborah Raulerson, a long-time stage manager for WVPT and a high school drama teacher in the State of Florida, agrees with Myers: “I do think that for two hours people are able to forget their troubles and travel to places through the show that they can’t in real life. I think it does allow for escape…On this level, it improves the quality of life.”

Raulerson’s escapist philosophy is quite common among the theatre’s patrons and employees. Professional actor Scott Sambuco concurs: “laughter is the key to happiness, especially in these hard times. People can see a show and forget their troubles and problems for a reasonable fee and a few hours.” These ideas serve to reinforce the fact that WVPT productions—through escapism—encourage their audience to be more relaxed and free from their troubles. In this way, what many would deem frivolous escapism actually adds to the well being of those individuals and, hence, the community, enhancing their sense of “being,” “belonging,” and even “becoming” free of their problems for a short while.
Myers also had the chance to perform, as a local performer, in two of the theatre’s productions. She found these experiences to be equally beneficial to her well-being:

having the chance to perform in professional theatre has added deeply to my quality of life in that I have realized a dream held for all of my life to do so and I know that for my family and friends, it has been a thrill for them to see me onstage! I can only imagine that for other local talent chosen for roles, that this has added the same joy to their lives as well.

Thus, Myers (and many like her) have had the chance to experience a “belonging” to community A (theatre employees) and community B (those impacted by the works of the theatre), as well as an opportunity for “becoming” a creative artist at the theatre, thus living out a life-long dream.

The policy to hire local talent is another way the theatre fosters improvement in the well-being of its community members. In addition to presenting the highest quality productions possible, beginning producers should not overlook the importance of hiring local talent. Not only does it save money, but—more importantly—it helps the organization establish deep roots into the community, providing an essential service and unique opportunity for the local residents. Without this aspect of West Virginia Public Theatre and its potential to upgrade the quality of life of the area’s residents, I do not believe the theatre would exist today.

West Virginia Public Theatre has the unique opportunity to be a place of learning where individuals can connect to their past. The theatre also provides an escape from the emotional and mental turmoil of their everyday lives, enhancing the psychological well-being of the community. Perhaps most importantly, it brings together people of all races, creeds, and genders to create a community held together by a yearning for culture and art, which creates “communitas” and boosts the potential for both “belonging” to a community of artists or art

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68 Our Town in 2004 and The Sound of Music in 2006.
lovers and “becoming” a community focused on the arts. However, sometimes, controversies arise that inhibit this creation of “communitas” and, subsequently, hinder the theatre’s attempt at improving the residents’ well-being.

Controversy: Interrupting the Mission

West Virginia Public Theatre has been on the forefront of arts activity in the region since it was first established in 1985. However, the theatre really did not cause any significant community controversy until later in its existence. Two major activities helped to secure the theatre’s place at the vanguard of political discussion and gossip in the Morgantown area, both regarding the creation of the theatre’s new facility (now the Morgantown Event Center).

In October, November, and December of 2001, the theatre’s Board of Trustees hired the Chicago firm Jerold Panas, Linzy, and Partners to conduct a Feasibility/Developmental Analysis for the theatre in order to determine if the building of a new theatre facility would be supported by community residents. At that time the analysis sought to verify that there would be enough support to raise ten million dollars for construction. The firm interviewed a representative sample of forty community members (including community leaders) to determine the efficacy of five specific factors:

- How strong is the case for the proposed program?
- The overall economic climate in the area.
- Is leadership willing to accept major roles in a campaign?
- What level of financial support can you expect for the project?
- The proper strategy and timing for the campaign. (Lobanov 3)
The resulting forty-one page report confirmed strong support for both the theatre and the project with some major suggestions for proceeding including “stay close to WVU. There are many ways that you can cooperate in the future” (Lobanov C-2).

While the feasibility study propelled the theatre toward applying for grants and beginning its capital campaign to raise the six to fifteen million dollars needed, the relationship with West Virginia University, especially the College of Creative Arts and the Division of Theatre and Dance began to grow sour. Current Theatre chair Joshua believes that many community members have concerns about the theatre company and that has resulted in a tarnished reputation in the eyes of many. Williamson believes that this negative reputation possibly stems from the management or the board, but definitely feels that “the theatre is not well-respected in the community or the industry” and that “the theatre would be better stewards in the community if the administration was revamped.” The biggest problem Williamson sees is financial: the theatre, he believes, has a questionable accounts payable history and that, in turn, has caused “trouble with local vendors” for the Division of Theatre. The local businesses do not see a separation between the two institutions and, thus, fail to provide credit to WVU’s Division of Theatre and Dance.

The other major controversy faced by the theatre was also financial in nature. In 2003, once the theatre had received approval for TIF (Tax Increment Financing) funds and had also received a grant from the City of Morgantown in the sum of $500,000 (for the construction of the new theatre facility), the theatre had not yet secured enough monies to begin construction. The city had agreed to provide $100,000 installments to the theatre every year for five years. In Fall of 2006, an article appeared in the local newspaper, The Dominion Post, charging West Virginia Public Theatre with misuse of funds. Plans for the new facility were scaled back and
construction had not begun, which caused concern in the community about where the city’s funds had gone. In January of 2007, accusations were made that the theatre had been using the city’s funds for operating expenses and not for construction costs. Iannone and the board were called in front of the Morgantown City Council on January 30, 2007, but according to a January 16, 2007 article by WBOY-TV reporter Amanda McCall, “representatives […] came to Tuesday night’s meeting to set the record straight. They say construction on the new theatre will begin as soon as they get word from Platinum Properties and West Virginia Development.” The theatre’s representatives went to the earlier meeting to “reassure council that the non-profit group has not spent the city’s money on anything other than the construction of a new theatre” (McCall).

Despite this reassurance, a subsequent investigative article found that a “mysterious” donor had donated enough monies to cover any missing funds.

Never before was there such an outcry of both support for and criticism of Iannone and the theatre. After Iannone called the missing funds a “misunderstanding,” Peter Giordano, an outspoken community member and journalist for the online news magazine The SOP wrote in April of 2007: “A top secret meeting was called to discuss the explanation of the missing funds, but it was then canceled. This was an obvious PR ploy from the WVPT and probably designed by Mary Beth Sickles (WVPT’s managing director) to improve their temporarily shattered reputation.” The money was restored to the capital campaign account by an unknown source. Later, President of the Board, Tom Rogers, noted “that it may have been “ill-advised to borrow funds from the future construction fund account” (Giordano). Despite the restored funds, the explanations by Rogers, and Morgantown City Manager Dan Boroff’s estimation that this was a “non-issue,” some outraged citizens like Giordano would not let the issue rest. He continued to write: “Citizens of this community should be outraged at both their representatives and at the
WVPT. There is no reason why funds of this amount of money should go missing. The new procedures for grants issued by the council should have already been set in stone. The city fell behind the times and it almost cost them.” This incident prompted the current arrangement between the city and West Virginia Public Theatre: combined funding of the Morgantown Event Center, which would be managed by the city and private developers with West Virginia Public Theatre as a permanent tenant.

City Manager Dan Boroff believed that the entire affair was “generated rather than built on substance.” Iannone and the Board members refuse to comment on the issue. This decision to remain silent has ramifications in terms of public relations. Instead of trying to repair any negative reputation issues created by the controversy, the theatre moved forward with business-as-usual. Patrons who were taken aback by the issue and who have decided not to return to the theatre have been lost without any acknowledgement of either the theatre’s wrongdoing or any clarification of the misunderstanding created by the confusion surrounding the missing monies. Budding producers can learn about some effective communication and public relations practices from this example: face your public, be willing to explain practices that have been called into question, and keep lines of communication open so that the community feels both informed and involved in the process. This helps to create another form of “communitas” where audience members are brought together not to sit together but to communicate together. This is also a prime example of how a particular perception of the theatre can lead to a changed reception of it and its place within the larger community. With a tarnished reputation, the theatre cannot attempt to meet its mission as effectively as before and, as a result, there is a diminished sense of connection and “belonging” for the community. Thus, the quality of life of the area suffers.
Lessons Learned

This chapter began with a search for a succinct definition of “quality of life,” in regard to the arts, especially theatre and specifically West Virginia Public Theatre. Through a deconstruction of three principal areas delineated by the University of Toronto Quality of Life Research Unit, the working definition utilized here was “the efficacy of an activity that promotes social and community “being,” “belonging,” and, “becoming,” as well as an escape from the stresses of everyday life, through a leisurely pursuit focused on entertainment, education, or change.” In my exploration of West Virginia Public Theatre’s financial, artistic, and political contributions to its community and the ways in which the arts can help to improve the quality of life, the data show that in many ways the theatre is effective in improving the quality of life of the community and that it provides an outlet in which community members can improve their sense of “being,” “belonging,” and “becoming.” If the theatre is willing to adjust to the changing cultural, economic, and political landscape, it can be an even more effective steward in the community by transcending past practices and offering a venue for performance that entertains, educates, and fosters community growth.

There are many valuable lessons for would be theatrical producers to glean from this investigation of West Virginia Public Theatre. It is not simply enough to “put on a show” if you want to impact the well-being of your residential community: there must be a significant commitment to providing opportunities where the community can grow, develop, and meet its potential. The arts, including theatre, can have a major impact on how communities grow together and create identity as is clear by the example of West Virginia Public Theatre. A producer cannot lose sight of his mission to serve the community if he wants to remain an integral part of that community and continue to produce for many years: the community is the
theatre’s lifeblood in terms of audience, sponsors, and political supporters and cannot be ignored. The primary lessons, concerning the attempt to improve the quality of life, learned through this case study are:

1. **Be financially responsible.** The popular phrase “you’ve got to spend money to make money” comes to mind here. It is a fact that you must be willing to take a financial risk in order to produce professional theatre, but once that theatre is established, the producer must be resourceful in the ways that it handles its finances. This does not mean “creative accounting,” but rather being prepared to adjust to potential financial hardships. West Virginia Public Theatre has done this by applying for grants from the state and national governments, as well as by seeking corporate sponsorships with major, local corporations. A respected steward of the community cannot afford to be financially irresponsible and WVPT has shown that there are many ways to potentially handle downturns in the economy. If the organization is unable to support its own well-being, then it will be unable to help improve the quality of life of its communities’ members. Specific strategies will be discussed in Chapter Five.

2. **Present the highest quality art possible.** Once again, a theatrical producer must offer what his patrons desire in terms of artistic value, but not at the expense of debt. Artistic quality does not necessarily mean hiring high-paid, “name” performers. Many times a theatre, including West Virginia Public Theatre, will sign a performer to a lucrative contract simply based on name recognition. Sometimes this pays off in the case of 2009’s Eddie Mekka as Tevye, but sometimes it does not, such as Herman Sebek as *Miss Saigon*’s Engineer in 2005. In the case of West Virginia Public Theatre, television personalities seem to attract larger audiences than do bona fide Broadway “stars.”
Furthermore, high quality is not indicated by expensive sets or elaborate costumes either; effective storytelling can rely on the actors more than stage spectacle. High artistic quality provides a place for “becoming” for both the artists creating the theatre and for the audience members offering a chance to escape from the turmoil of their everyday life. This allows members of both communities to dream, hope, and aspire for a better life.

3. **Communicate and collaborate.** Keep the lines of communication open with all members of the theatre’s communities. Patrons will provide useful feedback, as will others affected by the theatre, including members of the tourism industry, local educators, and public officials. This communication is key in learning the actual effect your work has on the community. In addition, collaboration must be central to the theatre’s operational philosophy. A new producer may think that, like Iannone, he has to do it all on his own. While this may be true at the beginning, it is in the relationships established as the theatre grows where true collaboration lies. Those relationships built, and fostered within the community, provide the opportunity for growth in three distinct ways: economically, educationally, and artistically. By allying with community partners, the theatre both “becomes” more connected to its neighbors and offers a place where those partners can “belong” to an organization geared toward the new creative class.

4. **Repair burned bridges.** In many instances relationships may sour and connections may be lost. This case study provides many of those instances highlighted by the theatre’s tempestuous past with West Virginia University. Although it seems, at times, that these bridges are completely burned and there is no hope in sight for a reconciliation, that is not always the case. Once again, open communication and collaboration come into play here. As the largest arts presenter in the area, West Virginia
Public Theatre has the opportunity to be the cultural leader in the area. By repairing the bridges burned with the university and creating ties with the Morgantown Theatre Company, M.T. Pockets Theatre, and other arts organizations in the area, the region could grow into an even more arts-centered district attracting younger professionals to make homes in the community and, as a result, improving the well-being of all citizens.

5. **Keep exploring opportunities for “communitas.”** If burned bridges can be repaired and differences are set aside, the individual arts organizations have the chance to come together to provide, for their community, a place for “communitas” and an opportunity for social change. This can only be provided, in part, by the theatre alone. It is vital, in an attempt to improve the quality of life, that the theatre fosters a sense of “belonging” (providing an arena where community members can come together for a common goal, whether that is to be entertained, to be educated, or to develop skill) and “becoming” (a place where an individual can dream, aspire to be something else, or wish for a better world). If the theatre can be a center for the community to explore these possibilities, then it will have helped to create a community with purpose and, thus, improve the quality of life.

By examining the ways in which West Virginia Public Theatre endeavors to improve the quality of life of the greater Morgantown community and its residents, it becomes clear that the theatre certainly has an effect on the quality of life in the region, but that it could make adjustments to be a more contributing and positive member of the community. By providing a place of theatrical “communitas” for the area and offering chances for community members to “belong” to a goal-centered group and to “become” what they most desire, the theatre strives toward its mission.
Furthermore, by continuing to present artistic programming and by inspiring the creation of other arts organizations\textsuperscript{69}, the theatre has contributed to making Morgantown an attractive home for members of Richard Florida’s “creative class,” which, indirectly, advances the well-being of the area. However, WVPT and its management have had many challenges throughout its history, mostly concerning finances and networking as is evidenced by the theatre’s ever-growing debt and its storied history with West Virginia University. By learning from these mistakes, future producers (and even the current WVPT administration) can adapt their philosophies and production methods to more effectively meet the needs of both theatre and community. Only then, through flexibility and change, can the theatrical arts make a difference in the lives of its neighbors and truly enhance the quality of life in the community.

\textsuperscript{69} Discussed in Chapter Five of this study.
CHAPTER V. LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Like emotion and affect, utopian performatives can’t be predicted; they exist as wishes, as desire, crystallizing from our labor to construct a temporary public that constitutes a multiplicity of presence, hoping to be recognized, extended, and shared. A utopian performative gives us a mode of thinking and seeing: it can’t be confined in a set of stable, immobile criteria, because it relies on the magic of performance practice, on our belief in social justice and a better future, on the impact and import of a wish, and on love for human commonality despite the vagaries of difference. (Dolan “Utopia” 170-1)

Dolan’s conjecture of a utopia in performance is an ideal that many theatrical producers strive for, but few actually reach due to the constraints—such as time, budget, staffing, politics, interpersonal dynamics—of the stark reality of producing commercial theatre. Within these few lines, Dolan asserts primary principles of creating art and theatre that is both important and community-building. By combining the concepts of theatrical magic, social change, and the creation of an audience community, she has provided a formula for theatre that transcends simple entertainment to a level that is not only important, but integral to our social structure. Theatre can sometimes be viewed as an elitist entertainment produced on Broadway and in Las Vegas primarily for those fiscally able to afford the ticket price. However, if commercial theatre can reach the heights set forth here by Dolan, then the question of its necessity to the community is confirmed and the art form transcends the exclusivity often associated with it.

When I first began working for West Virginia Public Theatre, I did not anticipate a future in which I would be chronicling its history and Iannone’s journey as a producer. However, my personal experiences with the theatre on many different levels provided a unique multiplicity of
perspectives from which to tell the story. Furthermore, as an alumnus of the West Virginia University theatre program, I am one of the few students (or faculty for that matter) to cross the boundaries of these two institutions and to have successful careers within each, including an ongoing working relationship with the theatre and enduring communication with the university faculty. Despite having to negotiate my loyalties to each and the tricky negotiation of theatre artist and theatre scholar, my goal has been to present (as much as possible) an unbiased, informative, and viable research study that will serve as valuable fodder for scholars and young theatre professionals alike. My personal journey from undergraduate student through levels of association with the theatre (performer, graduate/alumnus, associate director, marketing director, director) to doctoral student has provided a unique opportunity to conduct this study. In turn, my research has provided me with an even more expansive perspective as scholar and researcher, revisiting personal experiences within a framework of a researcher’s eye and a much larger context.

Throughout this study I have examined ways in which the West Virginia Public Theatre impacts its community through the effectiveness of the pursuit of its mission. I have deconstructed that mission into its three primary components, provided historical contexts for the theatre’s structure and operational methods, and have recorded the voices of those directly and indirectly affected by the theatre’s practices (communities A and B). In a hope to investigate where and when the theatre reaches points of utopic performance, I have explored the effects on the theatre’s greater community: where the theatre actually met its mission and was a helpful member of the community and where the theatre fell short in accomplishing its mission. In this final chapter, I will synthesize the research reported in the previous chapters to examine what the theatre brings to the community. Furthermore, I hope to utilize the analysis of my research to
provide suggestions for would-be producers of effective methods of starting and running a theatre, as well as pitfalls to avoid.

A Changed Cultural Landscape

As Iannone and the West Virginia Public Theatre look towards opening the theatre’s twenty-sixth season with its annual fundraising event (a celebrity tribute concert entitled “An Evening with the Superstars” in April of 2010), one can look back throughout its history and clearly see that the theatre has changed the cultural and artistic landscape of Morgantown and the surrounding areas. Before the 1985 inaugural season, Morgantown’s residents had very little choice in terms of professional musical theatre, not to mention little diversity in its population and no attraction for the growing “creative class.”70 Theatre patrons had to travel to Pittsburgh, Washington D.C., or New York (centers of diversity and cultural offerings). In fact their theatrical options were limited to the offerings of the Theatre program at West Virginia University and a few sporadic offerings by the community theatre at the Monongalia Arts Center. For the past twenty-six years, the Morgantown community has grown to expect a professional musical theatre in their back yard and the cultural landscape of the area would most certainly be negatively impacted if the theatre closed its doors. Furthermore, the theatre, both directly and indirectly, has helped to make Morgantown a center for the arts, stimulating an interest in musical theatre and other artistic endeavors. The theatre has also inspired two other (amateur) theatre companies: the Morgantown Theatre Company and M.T. Pockets Theatre to take root, both created by former WVPT employees.71

As I have examined throughout this study, the theatre has had some impact on how Morgantown is perceived, especially in terms of Florida’s “creative class.” Not only does the

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70 Defined in Chapter Four.
71 Hillary Phillips and Toni Morris, respectively.
theatre provide entertainment and educational opportunities not seen prior to 1985, but as the community continues to grow as both a technological center and a region of diverse ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles, the artistic landscape that it has stimulated is more likely to attract the younger generations of professionals who value the arts as part of their community. Younger audiences are beginning to attend the theatre thanks, in part, to the theatre’s willingness to adapt programming to changing tastes. This fact alone makes the theatre an important part of the community’s future as fresh perspectives will, undoubtedly, inspire positive changes geared toward the younger demographic. The theatre’s board is also following this movement by inviting younger members with new perspectives to join. The trends that Florida examines in emergent urban centers such as developing technological areas, an increase in arts awareness, a move toward regions where there are significant cultural opportunities, and tolerance of minority populations, are also evident in smaller cities such as Morgantown and this study confirms that West Virginia Public Theatre adds to the growing cultural landscape of the region. In fact, Florida notes growing suburban centers based on exactly the criteria listed above including, but not limited to Northern Virginia and “Silicon Valley” in California (233-234). As the prospects for an increasing focus on the arts continues, it seems plausible that the “creative class” will be attracted to the area and, subsequently, the region will continue to prosper in areas beyond the coal-mining industry for which it is known. It is vital for Morgantown to attract this new class of resident in order for it to be a national competitor for other types of businesses, which will allow it to continue to grow into a major metropolitan area; it also important that the theatre involve this growing population in its endeavors.
Over the years the theatre became more than a place where local residents could go see performers that they saw on television or heard on a recording; it became a place for both community members and young artists from around the country to learn about theatre, practice the craft, and start their own careers. When, early on, Iannone decided to use local talent, the theatre planted its roots deeply into the community and offered a unique service never before seen in the area. There was little opportunity for the region’s citizens to be involved in theatre until Lakeview was established: the university did not allow for community members to be included in their productions and the community theatre scene was inhabited by one company at the Monongalia Arts Center\textsuperscript{72} that produced infrequently. As the young theatre artists of the area went away to study for professional careers in the theatre, they had no place to practice when they came home for summers and, thus, they would either sit dormant for those months or find a summer home elsewhere. Iannone’s theatre changed that pattern, providing a means of both professional practice and networking close to home. Additionally, as evidenced throughout this study, the theatre has been an inspiration for the young people in the community and served as a springboard to help propel the careers of several community members including Broadway’s Kirsten Wyatt and Rebecca Timms.

Beyond its primary season offerings, the theatre has been a significant source of education for the community’s children. First and foremost, the theatre’s holiday programming has provided a unique experience for school children from around the quad-state area introducing them to live theatrical performance, which—for most of them—may be the first time they will have ever seen actors performing live. This is no small feat: in an area surrounded by smaller, rural communities where the entertainment focus lies in either sports or television,

\textsuperscript{72} The Monongalia Arts Center housed the area’s only community theatre at that time. The company was underfunded, understaffed, and—as a result—did not produce on a regular basis.
establishing an alternative entertainment choice is important. Not only does this, potentially, inspire these children to attend the theatre in their future lives, but it has the capability to encourage an interest in the other arts more readily available to them such as music or painting. Furthermore, these performances help to stir the children’s imaginations and, at times, teach them moral and social lessons. Through this artistic education, the cultural landscape of the community has been forever changed.

The theatre’s other educational programs have provided more immediate and “hands-on” involvement for the children. The T.A.R.G.E.T. program used performance to create awareness of social problems and included a talk-back session that encouraged a conversation about the ills of alcohol and substance abuse. Although this program may have inspired an interest in theatre for some of the children, the primary goal was to raise social awareness; the theatre was successful in achieving this goal. Programs such as “Future Stars” and the internship program have provided invaluable, hands-on education in the theatre arts. This cultural education has everyday applications: here the young artists learn from professionals and continue to use their skills (including transferable skills such as carpentry, electrics, sewing, design, and marketing) in either professional theatre practice, education, or—in many cases—as a way to further help their community through practical applications such as supporting local amateur theatres or even helping to build a home for Habitat for Humanity.

Finally, the theatre has helped to stimulate two important and culturally significant projects in the Morgantown area in addition to the aforementioned amateur theatre companies. First, the renovation of the downtown Metropolitan Theatre may not have been directly prompted by WVPT, but the renewed interest in the theatrical arts inspired by WVPT, undoubtedly, sparked some interest in the project. According to Professor James D. Held, the
Met Theatre Commission had some hopes of enticing Iannone and the theatre to become the permanent residents of the facility and many (including Held and WVU Theatre Chair Joshua Williamson) believe that this is still a viable and communally important move for both the town and the theatre. Second, rejuvenation of the Morgantown Wharf District and, especially, the building of the Morgantown Event Center is owed—in part—to West Virginia Public Theatre. The district, meant to be an entertainment destination with restaurants, hotels, bars, and concerts/theatre, found its permanent attraction in WVPT and, as was discussed in Chapter Four of this study, the Event Center would not have been built without the governmental funding secured by the theatre’s Board of Trustees. Two cultural facilities in one, rather small, mountain town is a great achievement and the theatre could be considered a major player in both. In 2010 the theatre will be utilizing both venues: presenting its annual spring fundraiser and 2010 summer season at the Morgantown Event Center and its 2010 holiday production at the Metropolitan Theatre.

West Virginia Public Theatre’s many supporters and detractors agree that the theatre has had an overwhelming impact on the cultural landscape of Morgantown and the surrounding areas. By inspiring new arts organizations, young artists, and major capital construction, the theatre is at the heart of the arts movement in the community. As a result—combined with numerous growing businesses—the area will be, potentially, more attractive to what Florida terms the “creative class” and the theatre can serve as a principal player in the cultural growth of the area. Monongalia County Assessor and long-time patron Rodney Pyles agrees that WVPT is a major participant in making the area attractive to new residents. In a recent interview, Pyles stated:

Museums and theatres are an attraction for persons considering relocation to the
area. A strong offering of performing and visual arts are also an attraction for businesses considering relocation in the area. The strong growth of Morgantown and Monongalia County can be attributed, in part, to the strong arts presence provided by WVPT, the university, MAC, and smaller theatre companies.

Pyles reinforces Florida’s theories that the arts are vital to an area’s quality of life and its appeal to potential new neighbors. If the theatre can continue to appeal to the new face of its potential audience, participate in creating a “creative community,” and remain viable in all facets of its mission, then the theatre can, potentially, flourish as a contributing member of the community. Its continued existence depends on finding new ways of effectively navigating the shifting currents and flourishing in the changing landscape of the Morgantown area.

The Turning Point: Adjusting and Responding to Change

West Virginia Public Theatre’s twenty-fifth season was a turning point in the history of the theatre and its place within the community. After a successful celebration of twenty-five years of history in the form of a performance gala featuring WVPT veterans, the regular season commenced with a collection of the old and the new. Wanting to honor the theatre’s past successes, Iannone and the theatre presented *My Fair Lady, Little Shop of Horrors, Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Cats*. To propel the theatre forward and to appeal to the younger patrons, the season included *Doubt* (building on the success of the motion picture), *The Wedding Singer*, and *Disney’s High School Musical*. While the other productions were relatively successful, it was *High School Musical* that paved the way for the future of the theatre. Aside from the theatre’s holiday programming and an occasional musicalized children’s story presented in the regular season (such as *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast* or *The Secret Garden*), the theatre’s summer offerings of the past did not typically attract the middle and high school age brackets. However,
hoping to capitalize on the success of the *High School Musical* franchise and to appeal to the changing face of the theatre’s potential audience base, Iannone decided to stage the Disney musical for a two week performance run. The decision proved to be successful as the first week sold-out and the second week showed strong sales as well. Although some might question the literary and cultural value of this hip-hop *Romeo and Juliet* story, the musical brought entire families of patrons to the theatre never before seen during the summer season. This strategic move to appeal to younger audiences is one that will, potentially, grow the theatre’s audience base, which, in turn, will help to secure the theatre’s place as a necessary and popular institution in the community.

The twenty-fifth season ended with a holiday production of *A Christmas Carol*, which was—once again—lucrative. At the end of 2009, the theatre showed strong attendance numbers and an increase in the younger demographic. Although not financially successful (due, primarily, to the loss of a major state grant), the theatre had begun to adjust and to make changes to ensure its future existence including a change in marketing with specific advertising aimed at potential younger audience members and a new ticket plan steered directly toward families.

If the theatre’s twenty-fifth season can be viewed as a turning point, the twenty-sixth season could be noted as a transition year for the theatre. As the era at the Creative Arts Center came to a close at the end of 2009 and the theatre began the move into its two new homes in 2010 (the Event Center for the summer and the Metropolitan for the winter), Iannone—with the support of his Board of Trustees—decided to, once again, blend the old and the new to both appeal to the theatre’s loyal patrons and to attract younger crowds. Beginning with the annual fundraiser, scheduled for April 16, 2010, Iannone continued his concerted effort to appeal to the

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73 Although this was not the first time the theatre has produced a singular summer show for more than one week, this was the first time in nearly a decade.
changing face of his audience. The Las Vegas-style celebrity tribute revue entitled “An Evening with the Superstars” is a new entertainment approach for the theatre. Most fundraising events in the past have focused on a nationally recognized entertainer such as Tony Orlando or Bobby Vinton or even a staged production of *Love Letters* (starring the Hayes), but never before has the theatre produced an impersonator show. This risky venture, in theory, appeals to all generations in two specific ways: style and performances. First, the style of the production is inspired by the Las Vegas impersonation shows that are popular for the tourist crowds in the Nevada gambling town. Las Vegas is, arguably, a popular destination for both the young and the old and, theoretically, this style of entertainment will please a cross-section of the community. Secondly, the range of performers will also interest a range of patrons with impersonators of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin for the older crowd, Shania Twain for the younger crowd, and Michael Jackson to bridge the generations. In this way the theatre is expanding its potential audience whereas past fundraisers have appealed to, primarily, older patrons. The success of this potential gamble will be determined once the performance is over and all of the pledged donations have been collected. This is also the first performance in the Morgantown Event center, which will provide a great deal of technical information for the 2010 regular season, as well as a lesson in managerial dynamics between the theatre and the venue.

The mainstage season is also built upon the logic of appealing to a wider audience. The season boasts the regional premiere of the hit Broadway show *Hairspray*, which also spurred a hit motion picture. The production will feature a lot of high-energy dancing by high school students (building off of the success of the *High School Musical* formula) as an appeal to a younger demographic. Furthermore, the script focuses on a theme of tolerance and overcoming bigotry designed to reach out to a broad spectrum of the population. Traditional patrons will be
entertained by Always...Patsy Cline, 42nd Street, The Will Rogers Follies, and Carousel, all shows produced previously by the theatre with a great deal of box office success. Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat and The Full Monty, two productions that routinely come close to filling the theatre to capacity, will play to a wide range of ages and incomes. As the theatre fights for existence among the closings of numerous regional and summer stock theatres, this approach has the potential to prove fruitful, helping to attract a newer and wider patron base. If the theatre can continue to keep the audience it has drawn in the past and provide entertainment to this new-found and younger demographic, its chances of survival are much better. However, with the closing of popular and long-running theatres such as the Carousel Dinner Theatre in Ohio, North Shore Music Theatre in Massachusetts,74 and the American Musical Theater in California, the threat of closure is always imminent.

Considerations for Burgeoning Producers

There are many lessons that can be learned from the journey of Ron Iannone and West Virginia Public Theatre by would-be theatrical producers. In 1984, Ron Iannone, an Assistant Professor of Education at West Virginia University, had a dream to start his own professional musical theatre in his newly adopted home of Morgantown, West Virginia and, twenty-six years later the theatre is moving into its new home and looking toward the future. The journey over the years has not been an easy one for Iannone and his theatre, but, despite much adversity, the theatre continues to present professional theatre programming and to have a significant impact on its community; this is no small feat.

Iannone’s journey as a producer began with his internship at the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera. Iannone knew that he needed to study the organizational and managerial practices of a

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74 North Shore announced in March 2010 that the theatre will reopen for the 2010 season under new management. The theatre closed its doors and sold off its possessions in 2009.
successful regional theatre and securing an internship with Bill Thunhurst, the Executive Producer, was the first important step towards making his dream a reality. The lessons learned from his mentor in Pittsburgh were invaluable as he sought to create a theatrical tradition based on many of the same principles already established at the CLO. This is an important step in the process of establishing a new theatrical company: finding a model. The CLO model played a significant part in the structure—artistically (season configuration, casting procedures, the use of “name” performers), financially (methods of obtaining private and governmental funding), and educationally (programs modeled after many of the CLO’s programs including the Mini-stars and annual holiday productions)—of Lakeview Theatre/West Virginia Public Theatre. Without the time-tested mission and organization of the Pittsburgh CLO serving as a basis from which Iannone created his own, workable configuration, the theatre may not have grown to its current status in the community and the professional arena.

Iannone took the model and adapted it to the limitations and needs of the greater Morgantown area. Iannone saw a need and desire for culture in his new home and, as a tribute to the artistic vision instilled in him by his parents, decided to take a risk and create a theatre. The adaptations to the PCLO model necessary to make the theatre viable in the Morgantown area were not considerable; in fact, the necessary changes dealt more with size and scale than with any specific artistic philosophies. Iannone knew that he could not fill a theatre the size of the Benedum Center in Pittsburgh, so he decided that a smaller venue would be more beneficial and efficient for his new theatre. Subsequently, with a smaller venue came smaller production requirements and fewer employees. The scale was small, but Iannone vowed that the quality would remain high and, from the very beginning, this was a promise Iannone made to his patrons. His mentor, Thunhurst, told Iannone that in order for his theatre to succeed he had to

75 The mainstage home for the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera. The theatre has a 2,800 seat auditorium.
“always be involved with professionals” (Iannone). That stuck with Iannone and, from the theatre’s inception in 1985, the theatre has been associated with the Actor’s Equity Association, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, and the American Federation of Musicians. Iannone’s commitment to “professionalism” has paid off and has helped to create a respected reputation among community members and has attracted theatre professionals from across the country to practice their craft at the theatre. Seemingly, as the years pass, the theatre became a more desirable place to work. The theatre’s casting and hiring pools increase every year with auditions in Pittsburgh, New York, and Morgantown filled to capacity (including a very long waitlist) and scores of technical resumes submitted to the office via electronic and postal mail.

**Staffing**

In order to raise awareness of his new venture and to attract patrons to the theatre, Iannone established his own “star” system by hiring headlining “name” acts to perform in the theatre’s productions. This is something learned from Thunhurst, but is also a strategy employed at professional theatres, especially summer stocks, nationwide. For his first season, Iannone signed Jones, Lawrence, and Norton-Taylor to contracts that paid them salaries of eight thousand dollars per week, which was typical for the stars of CLO productions (Iannone, “Mar.”). However, Iannone soon learned that professional actors with name recognition could be hired for much less money. The lesson here is vital: know your market and your limitations. Iannone knew that he could not fill a large venue, but did not realize that salaries could be relative to size of venue and market. He would not make that mistake again: the “stars” hired for the second season, including the Hayeses, made significantly less and, as a result, the theatre was able to break even for the season. The tradition of hiring stars has been successful over the years in attracting new patrons, but Iannone has also made the realization—after the theatre’s first
season—that he cannot hire a name performer for each production: this is not an economically efficient practice. As a result he has tended to cast name performers in one (maybe two) productions per season. This seems to bring in larger audiences to that particular production, but it also raises awareness of the rest of the season and ticket sales increase: if the “stars” are featured early in the season, patrons will attend these productions and are more likely to purchase tickets for shows later in the season.

This practice leads to a viable option for producers: bringing in guests artists that excite your particular community. Perhaps, a question could be added to an audience survey: “what stars would you like to see on our stage?” Or, “What guest artist of the past would you like to see us bring back?” In this way the producer could get an idea of audience response to “stars” while circumventing the unreasonable suggestions such as “we want to see Johnny Depp on the stage!”

Another important staffing concern is the employment of local artists. As a theatre deeply rooted in its community, West Virginia Public Theatre is expected to encourage the training of local talent. However, many in the community believe that the theatre could do more to ensure that local talent is being cultivated. Local patron Christian Cox would like to see the theatre use more local talent in order to further connect theatre and community: “It not only shows community support, allowing local performers to showcase their talents, but it is also an economic advantage to the theatre not having to pay travel and boarding expenses.” Cox’s assertions are true: local performers and technicians are not paid travel expenses nor are they offered housing for either the summer season or the holiday production. While this is certainly a cost-saving practice, Iannone has attempted to limit the number of “locals” hired for two primary reasons: most locals do not have name recognition and most do not have significant training. In
a typical season, ten to fifteen local performers are hired (depending on the season’s demand for child performers); this is roughly less than ten percent of the entire acting company. Despite this rationale, community members still insist that Iannone use the area’s artists at the theatre. West Virginia University’s Peter McCumber believes as the theatre grows, the need for local talent will increase and Iannone will begin to see the untapped native resources:

I certainly want them to grow until [they are] a truly strong professional theatre company that, in turn, will then employ local talent and professional local labor, keeping the money and growth at home and, once again, truly be a West Virginia (not New York or Pittsburgh) Public Theatre.

McCumber’s contention raises an interesting point: can WVPT truly be West Virginia’s Public Theatre without making the nurturing of the state’s talent a primary mission? Iannone has insisted that the theatre is focused on bringing quality musical theatre entertainment to the state, but has not made a claim that the theatre aids in the maturation of its community’s own performers, designers, and technicians. If the theatre makes this a primary goal, the community will become more invested in the theatre’s work, its reputation, and—potentially—the theatre will attract more local and state investors. The disadvantages of such ambition would lie in the theatre’s national reputation and the possibility of lower-quality productions. If the theatre hired more of its performers from the local area, the theatre might be seen as an amateur “community” theatre rather than a professional public theatre; this is a constant worry for Iannone.

Furthermore, with local performers having less training, the quality is bound to suffer.

As West Virginia Public Theatre fights to survive during the current financial crisis and among numerous other theatre closings across the country, one way to both save money and to further its significance in the community is to hire native talent and to foster the region’s young
artists. Through the expansion of this practice the theatre will be able to truly call itself a public theatre of the State of West Virginia. This is another important consideration for up-and-coming producers: do not underestimate or take for granted the talent available to you from your own community. By cultivating it your company will become an essential element of the region’s cultural and social landscape and, as a result, will have more opportunity for philanthropic and patron support. In order to cultivate and train more local talent and, thus, find a solution to the issue of decreased quality mentioned above, the theatre could hire local performers as understudies or apprentices to the professional performers, which would give the locals a chance to both be involved and to learn about craft. There is also an opportunity for professional performers to teach classes in musical theatre techniques, especially if a particular production is running for two weeks: the performers will have much more time available to serve as instructors and mentors. In addition, this practice encourages professionals to be more invested in the people of the region through the direct contact that this teaching opportunity provides and, conversely, this practice will give local talent a more vested interest in the theatre and its’ staff.

Facilities

The theatre has spent time in three different primary venues during its existence: two stints in a temporary, outdoor structure and the majority of its time within the walls of the West Virginia University Creative Arts Center. As it prepares for the 2010 season, the theatre is also transitioning into a new space for the summer season: the Morgantown Event Center. Since its inception Iannone has hoped for a stand-alone, permanent home for the theatre and the “Building a Dream” campaign, begun in 2001, was instituted to raise the funds for such a venture. However, the campaign did not secure enough support for the theatre’s own facility, forcing a partnership with the city.
Many of my interview respondents noted the move into the new venue as inspiration for future hope. For example, long-time patron Louise Caruso believes that the new move will prompt many of the projects Iannone has touted during the capital campaign such as a musical theatre academy and hopes that “the new home for the theatre will get even more people involved.” Rodney Pyles believes that

as the new facility for WVPT nears completion, the future looks considerably brighter…year-round operations will become possible. Having more shows will earn more money, help reduce the debt, and lessen the dependence on public contributions. Of course fundraising will still be necessary. The ability to book traveling shows will earn additional revenue.

Of course that is yet to be seen and Iannone and his board do not know how much control they will have over the new venue and if they will, indeed, be able to begin year-round operations. In fact, as the facility nears its April opening, many questions have risen as to the governance of the space. Iannone reported in a recent interview that the theatre will have to schedule its events far in advance as the event center managers are attempting to book trade shows, concerts, and sporting events into the same space meant, primarily, for the theatre’s productions. Additionally, Iannone noted that the space will not be available for its annual holiday productions. These types of issues keep the theatre from moving forward toward year-round operation and

“regional” theatre status and membership in the League of Resident Theatres (L.O.R.T.).

Despite the celebration of the new venue by many (exemplified by Caruso and Pyles), some do not see the advantages of the new space. James D. Held believes that the theatre has taken a step back by moving from a “real” theatre at the Creative Arts Center into a “hotel ballroom.” Jonathan Allender-Zivic, the theatre’s technical director, sees no benefit of moving
into the Event Center and insists that for the theatre to continue operations, it must find another venue: “obtaining a new space that is not a multi-event center—a real theatre—would allow for the company to aid the community so much better with their own facilities to teach and workshop at anytime.” Peter McCumber uses the new venue to challenge Iannone and WVPT to live up to the expectations set forth by the capital campaign:

I hope that they can continue to grow in the new space where they are now going to have to perform. They have been pushing the community for the last several years on how great they will be if they could just have this new space. Now I hope they can live up to their hype.

McCumber wants the theatre to be a truly contributing member of the community within the confines of their new home, something Iannone has been publicizing for years. Yet, this will not be easy for the theatre company to do with the constraints put upon them by the management of the event center. It seems that for the theatre to truly do the work that Iannone wants them to do, the company will need to either work within the confines of the event center or to find yet another home.

The new venue offers several other challenges to the theatre. The theatre’s shop spaces will be housed off-site at the Monongalia County Technical Education Center located two miles from the performance space. These shops have little space to store newly constructed sets, which will have to be transported ten miles away to the theatre’s primary storage space prior to being loaded-in at the performance venue. Additionally, the theatre’s rehearsals will be held at a small, off-site dance studio. With the theatre’s employees working in, at least, four different facilities, the production of the summer season will be cumbersome at best and apt for communication breakdowns. Furthermore, patrons of the theatre will need to pay up to five
dollars per automobile for parking, something the WVPT audiences have never had to do before. While Iannone is working with the event center management to reduce that parking fee for season subscribers and donors, the everyday patron will still be required to pay and that fact alone may dissuade many from attending the theatre. If an agreement with the parking management cannot be reached, Iannone and his staff will have to strategize ways in which to either offset the cost of parking for the theatre’s patrons or offer additional benefits for being a ticket holder: communication to his patrons, skillful marketing, and the willingness to appease displeased patrons will be essential in retaining an audience.

If the new venue at the MEC is unsuccessful, the remaining viable option for the theatre’s regular season is the Metropolitan Theatre. For years the City of Morgantown, patrons, and members of the community have urged West Virginia Public Theatre to utilize the downtown space available at the Metropolitan. Iannone has been against the use of that theatre for many reasons, but it seems that now, faced with similar challenges at the new venue, the disadvantages are nearly equal. One decided advantage of the Metropolitan Theatre is that the space was built for theatrical performances, which is something that cannot be said for the Morgantown Event Center.

A theatre’s venue is, potentially, the most important feature of the company and is, without a doubt, its most public aspect. When starting a theatre company, a producer must look at the way in which its venue will affect all facets of its operation from aesthetic choices to audience comfort. For West Virginia Public Theatre, the most effective venue in all regards was the Creative Arts Center. Built specifically for performance with shop and rehearsal space on-site, as well as with comfortable seating and free parking for its audience, the CAC was ideal for West Virginia Public Theatre with one exception: the lack of communication and a mutually
beneficial partnership between the theatre and the university. For many the move to the Morgantown Event Center is a step back and it has the potential to be a detriment to the theatre’s financial bottom-line.

In the best of all possible situations, a theatre will have its performance space, rehearsal rooms, and shops all in one area and will allow for both extensive artistic expression (i.e. the ability to create scenic elements or lighting effects as are required by the script) and for the utmost audience comfort. Of course, this is easier said than done. There are many times when a theatre, at the outset, must be creative in establishing its primary venues. In larger cities some theatres appear in vacant storefronts, while some companies perform in outside amphitheatres, tents, or “found” spaces. However, most successful and sustainable professional theatres eventually must find a permanent performance venue. If it is impossible to build a new stand-alone facility, a producer should be open to all possibilities: partnering with a college or university is an exemplary idea as long as the lines of communications remain open between the two institutions and the partnership remains mutually beneficial. A company could also team with other professional theatres (with a facility intact) that produce only during the school year, making a complementary partnership. Creativity and communication remain the key in a fledgling company’s search for a primary venue.

_Education_

Iannone also adapted the PCLO educational model for his theatre in West Virginia. Having a strong educational background (and teaching in the Education department at West Virginia University), Iannone made educational programming a cornerstone of his new theatre from its onset. At the university, prior to his development of the theatre, Iannone developed a creative drama unit within the Education department and separate from the Theatre program.
His purpose was to instruct would-be teachers to use “the theatrical process in order to be more effective in their particular areas of expertise including English, Math, and Science” (Iannone). Utilizing the theories of British teacher Brian Way and the improvisational methods of Viola Spolin in his workshops, Iannone was able to unite the realms of theatre and education for a common purpose. As he further determined the curriculum for the theatre’s educational programs, he continued to refer to these teachers’ principles as inspiration for his own pedagogical approaches.

Believing that “there is no better way to understand professional theatre than through working alongside professionals,” Iannone instituted the Professional Internship Program (modeled on a similar program at the PCLO) and offered Equity Membership Candidate points to his young performers as a way to provide hands-on experiences while working with seasoned theatre artists. At the early stages of the program, Iannone emphasized discipline and offered a pre-training session prior to the start of each season focusing on basic skills that the interns needed to fulfill their duties. However, this practice—as is highlighted in Chapter Three—has gone almost completely by the wayside (due to time and budget constraints) leaving interns with little instruction before commencing their work. In this arena the theatre’s priorities have shifted from the stated mission: financial survival has surpassed the intention to educate and, as a result, the necessary pre-training practices have disappeared due to the unwieldy restrictions placed upon the program by the theatre’s schedule and limited financial resources. The internship program could be more effective in meeting the educational mission if the learning objectives were more clearly delineated at the outset and then measures were taken to ensure they were met. If there were periodic evaluations of interns’ work and short, weekly meetings to discuss the progress of the interns’ work, many mistakes could be avoided. Basically, quality control is
necessary here: without a specific staff member in charge of the program and oversight of the interns’ progress, there is no way to gauge the effectiveness of their work or training. Furthermore, no exit interview is conducted with the interns; I believe that this is crucial in the development of both the young artists’ theatrical skills and the program itself. If measures such as these are instituted then, and only then, can the program match the model provided by the CLO and be considered equal to some of the other top programs in the country.

Two of the theatre’s primary educational programs, Future Stars and T.A.R.G.E.T., were once considered integral to the theatre’s mission and beneficial to the community. Iannone established Future Stars in the early 1990s in order “to get young people who have a talent for musical theatre involved in activities related to performance and to prepare them for the mainstage at WVPT” (Iannone, “Mar.”). T.A.R.G.E.T. was instituted in 1995 as a way to “use the arts to deal with substance abuse problems in the community” (Iannone, “Mar.”). Both of these programs ran for nearly ten years, but both have since been terminated due to lack of funding and leadership. Although Iannone still has a passion for these programs, the educational unit of the theatre has turned its focus to its mainstage productions, primarily the holiday presentations. Budding producers should take a important lesson from the now non-operational programs: although a ten-year run contributing valuable lessons to the community is worthy of note, the programs also provide an example of how the theatre was unable to sustain certain programs due to lack of resources both human and financial.

When both of these programs began, the theatre was at the height of its popularity and financial success (the mid-1990s) and Iannone laid out a new set of goals for the theatre including a more extensive list of educational priorities. However, as the programs continued and the theatre was affected by financial crises, it could no longer support the programs’ staffing
requirements (as a result, Future Stars was terminated) and when the Monongalia Healthcare System decided to pull its funding for T.A.R.G.E.T., the theatre had no other choice but to end that program as well. Beyond the issues of staffing, the structure of these programs seemed effective and sustainable, but could not withstand the loss of funding. Perhaps, before completely cutting the programs—specifically T.A.R.G.E.T.—a search for other potential investors or sponsors could have been initiated: some companies may be highly interested in supporting a specific part of the educational program (i.e. re-instituting T.A.R.G.E.T.). While the Monongalia Health System found that its funding may have been more useful or, perhaps, more publicized elsewhere, the study conducted by Stephenson and Iannone proved that the program was a valuable educational tool. In order to keep funding for such a program, the program itself must be more visible. Potentially, this is why the funding was pulled from the program: lack of visibility of its sponsorship. While the program was valuable in the schools, it did not appear to make a mark on the community as a whole. Season production sponsors see their names and logos on all advertisements and marketing materials produced by the theatre including, but not limited to brochures, signage, and advertisements in newspapers, on television and radio, and online. However, the sponsor of T.A.R.G.E.T. was mentioned only on materials delivered to the schools and, later, on the theatre’s website, but had little additional exposure. In addition to securing a corporate sponsor to help revive the program, a separate fundraiser could be held focusing on raising funds to support, specifically, the educational mission of the theatre. In this way potential donors who, perhaps, may not see the benefit in giving money to a theatre’s production budget may see the value in supporting the education of its community.

Although Iannone’s initial thoughts and follow-through were worthwhile and effective, he was forced to reprioritize the educational goals for the theatre and refocus the target

76 Highlighted in Chapter Three.
populations. The viability of most educational programs lies in the broad audience they can reach. I fear that, through the absence of these two programs, certain audiences (i.e. young local artists and students with potential substance issues) will be left out with little to gain from the internships (unavailable for those under eighteen) and holiday productions (not specifically geared toward social issues). Potential producers can learn from West Virginia Public Theatre’s example: while it is important and, perhaps, necessary to have an educational component as a part of a professional theatre, clear goals must be set including target populations, learning objectives, and educational priorities. Starting small and building as staffing and financial resources allow will help to avoid outgrowing resources and the need to cut programs later on. Support, both financially and in personnel, must be established before attempting to introduce new programs to the community. Furthermore, it is vital that any theatre with educational aspirations have a working education department. Whether that department consists of one staff person or several, leadership is necessary. West Virginia Public Theatre, admirable in its educational goals, does not have a staff person whose focus is educational programming and, as a result, relies on many different staff members (some full-time and some seasonal) to further the mission. In this way the theatre has strayed from the PCLO model (six staff members alone focus on the educational programming there) and this has led to both insufficient training and a loss of focus.

The theatre has already made a successful adjustment in its educational programming when it decided to present a stripped-down version (in terms of playing time and budget) of *Cinderella* in December of 2004 to the area’s school children. This production was met with equal success as previously presented holiday productions while saving on construction and staffing costs. Furthermore, the theatre itself was able to schedule more school groups into the
productions due to the reduced playing times, thereby increasing revenue as well as the audience base. Since this successful experiment, all holiday productions have followed suit.

A commendable suggestion for expanding the theatre’s educational programming comes from long-time patron Denise Myers: “I would love to see year-round (once a month at least) programming, classes, and speakers available to talk about their role and how the theatre operates.” This type of community programming would be included in the curriculum proposed for the new Musical Theatre Academy, but could be instituted before the funding becomes available for the large-scale venture. In fact this would be one way that the theatre could further its educational mission without increasing its financial burden while at the same time increasing the public awareness of the theatre and repairing its reputation from the 2006-2007 budget controversy.77 By having a monthly forum on the theatre headlined by members of the administrative and artistic staff or from the performance company, community members could learn about various topics from the creation of a production to the theatre’s history. This discussion could also provide a venue where community members could express their needs and, as a result, feel more invested in the theatre and more a part of its process. This could materialize in many forms: a regular lecture during the business day, as a pre-show talk, or as a post-show discussion. The forum is something that could be instituted right away and that would be immediately beneficial; never before has the theatre offered the chance for audience members to voice their opinions in such a public forum.

One theatre does not need to and cannot meet all of the educational needs of an area by itself: producers must focus on a few specific areas (i.e. training young artists) and then grow from there. Once programming is established and a department is staffed, then the company can attempt different types of outreach, otherwise resources can become stretched, which sets the

77 Discussed in-depth in Chapter Four of this study.
program up for potential failure. Moreover, it seems that the loss of particularly successful and beneficial programs can have a long-term negative effect: there is a definite detriment in having such programming taken away. However, sometimes the loss of programming is completely unavoidable as financial concerns outweigh potential benefits. In addition, there are constant fluctuations of government and corporate solvency and funding, which add to the difficulty of sustaining certain programs. At best, theatres with educational programs will need to be flexible and creative with their approach to keeping programming going and WVPT has done this to a certain extent with the most effective example being the shift in production strategy for the holiday productions.

*Finances, Politics, and Public Relations*

Another key consideration to take away from Iannone’s journey as a producer and through the history of West Virginia Public Theatre lies in its financial, political, and public relations practices. The theatre is now well-known in its community as much for controversy as for its productions or educational pursuits. When the theatre made headlines because of a supposed misappropriation of funds, the community was enraged. Once the issue was resolved and the headlines disappeared, the tarnished reputation remained. To this day people still speak of the missing four hundred thousand dollars, but many of those same people cannot tell you what shows are in the season.

The following spring the theatre finally broke ground on the new facility on the waterfront with a major publicity event including an appearance by Bill and Susan Seaforth Hayes. The theatre pressed on for its “2008 Groundbreaking Season” and prepared for its eventual move to that waterfront facility in 2010. However, there was never a public apology or explanation from Iannone or any representative of the theatre for the controversial missing funds
incident. This is a prime example of when communication is a key tool to running a professional theatre: not only must a producer communicate well to his board, staff, and community partners; he must also be willing to communicate, during hard times, to the larger community of patrons and tax-payers. Perhaps, with a clear explanatory message from the theatre after this episode, the theatre’s reputation would not be in question to this day.

West Virginia Public Theatre has been tremendously successful in creating effective collaborations in the community. By including local business leaders and public officials on its board, as well as by partnering with major community businesses as corporate sponsors, the theatre has been able to continue to connect to its communities despite any major controversies impelled from the misappropriation allegations. Through these connections the theatre has a unique opportunity to help itself and the community grow. As part of a community that has a growing industrial center (and, as a result, a growing “creative class”), the theatre has the chance to find new corporate partners. With companies establishing new branches (or expanding operations) in the greater Morgantown area, the theatre could approach these companies with proposals for corporate sponsorships of individual productions, capital expenditures, or advertising campaigns. For example, partnerships can be created with local businesses that supply construction materials, which will greatly reduce operational costs in the long run (of course, for advertising trade and/or complimentary tickets). The theatre could also offer special corporate rates to these companies’ employees in an attempt to attract new patrons to the theatre. The theatre has had ongoing corporate sponsorship from Consol Energy and Morgantown Printing and Binding (MPB) for several years, which serve as prime examples of the ways a theatre can create lasting community partnerships. These two companies also have a deeper connection to the theatre as Consol’s former vice-president, Ronald G. Stovash, and the owner of

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78 In addition to specific educational programs as proposed earlier.
MPB, Andrew Walls, both sit on the theatre’s Board of Trustees. A third corporate sponsorship was established for the 2010 season with one of West Virginia’s largest law firms: Jackson and Kelly (Stephen LaCaginin, secretary of WVPT’s Board of Trustees, is one of the firm’s principal litigators). In return for their sponsorship, these corporations receive publicity in all of the theatre’s marketing and promotional materials.

Networking with public officials, and offering them advisory positions on the board, can reap long-time benefits as the theatre becomes central to the cultural landscape of the area. Furthermore, creating partnerships with other theatres and arts institutions could help to reduce operational costs (by sharing scenic elements or costumes as evidenced by WVPT’s many partnerships with other theatres in the region) and can help to establish an arts culture in the area, making it a viable residential option for the “creative class.” It also remains vital to build on these connections once they are established and continue to brainstorm with other organizations on how they might work more effectively together for their mutual benefit. At the root of any collaboration is looking beyond any small differences in order to reach a common goal, something at which West Virginia Public Theatre has not always been effective.

The theatre also has the distinctive chance to change its marketing philosophy and practice. With new companies attracting new patrons in search of artistic outlets, the theatre could adjust its approach in advertising. Although it has begun to target younger audiences through specials such as the “family” ticket package and through more contemporary offerings, in order to attain and sustain a new audience base, a plan needs to be established focused on both its loyal audience members and any untapped demographic groups new to the area. The theatre could also publicize its history more efficiently by profiling the “success stories” of both people from the area who have gone on to professional careers and young people from other places who
went from WVPT’s stage onto the national stage. This could demonstrate to potential audience members and investors that the theatre is, indeed, part of the national theatre scene fostering young talent that eventually establish sustainable careers on stage and screen. More importantly, these stories further connect the theatre and the community by encouraging the community to feel a sense of ownership and pride in the theatre as well as helping inspire young artists to pursue their dreams. The theatre has, in the past, noted prominent alumni in its Encore newsletter and, in 2008, by creating a “Wall of Fame” in the lobby of the Creative Arts Center, but these practices have a limited audience. In order to fully utilize the accomplishments of its past employees, the theatre could publicize notable alumni on its website and in its promotional/donation materials. This type of publicity has the potential of leading to new funding streams including an “Adopt an Artist” program wherein, with the possibility of promoting a budding Broadway performer, a sponsor pays for a student’s internship with the theatre, thus helping the student practice his craft while bolstering the theatre’s limited budget and further connecting the theatre and community through an investment in the theatre as a place for “being,” “belonging,” and, potentially, “becoming.”

An additional consideration for theatres wishing to increase their audience base lies in the quality of their productions. If I had to make one recommendation for WVPT or any other theatre with a similar structure, it would be to extend rehearsal periods by a day or two to allow for more solid preparation: sometimes speed is not necessarily a good thing. Since, in the case of WVPT, most productions are not sold out, audiences who would typically come to the Tuesday opening night performances could attend the opening night on Wednesday. Theoretically, with more rehearsal time come more focused and prepared performances and as the quality of
productions increases, the theatre’s artistic reputation may improve, thus increasing the audience base.

Theatres are already on the periphery in communities such as Morgantown: they are not the “center stage” leisure option that sports are and, as a result, they are among the first to have their funding cut. It becomes dangerous for an arts organization to become “controversial,” especially in such a region. The theatre has never been financially sound: from the first season where performers’ salaries rivaled those on Broadway to the many times when Iannone, himself, has had to supplement the budget by mortgaging his home, the theatre struggles to stay buoyant in the fiscal ocean. Iannone once purchased a restaurant\(^7\) in hopes of augmenting the operational budget, but that risky venture—lasting only a couple of years—did not prove a success. It is praiseworthy when producers are willing to take risks and to be financially responsible for their dreams, but there need to be limitations. Iannone was so passionate and determined to pursue his dream that he allowed the venture to grow too quickly and beyond what funding he had in place. Consequently, the theatre outgrew any governmental or corporate funding Iannone had secured and he had to then rely on his own finances to augment the budget. It is important for producers to find a delicate balance between trying to reach their ultimate goal and what is financially possible. Furthermore, gradual growth is vital to the sustainability of any new theatre: many successful young businesses encounter difficulties if they grow too fast, too soon.

This is a valuable lesson to be learned through this narrative of the theatre’s history: secure corporate, governmental, or private funding before venturing into such a risky business. The biggest challenge is sustainability. However, this can be problematic: trying to establish an ongoing sustainable budget when grants need to be completely used or risk not getting reinstated.

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7\(^7\) The Stone Crab Inn located on the edge of the Lakeview Resort property.
for example. The theatre has been successful, in the past, at obtaining this type of funding. For instance, despite the recent cuts in state funding, the theatre has received renewed support from the West Virginia State Government for most of its existence and received a sizable NEA grant\textsuperscript{80} for its 2006 holiday production. In these cases the theatre was able to show both a need for funding and a fundamental contribution to the greater community.

Up-and-coming producers should take note of West Virginia Public Theatre’s financial history. Many solid business decisions have been made to secure financing for the theatre’s programming. Iannone and his board have been proactive in seeking out both governmental grants and private sponsorships (not to mention an annual operating campaign seeking donations). On the other hand, the theatre has lived beyond its means for several years by borrowing capital, promising to make payments that it could not make, and extending credit outside of the potential income it could receive through its funding and box office sales. The theatre is certainly not-for-profit, but as it continues to fall further into debt, its continued existence is at stake. This misstep could have been avoided, possibly, by adjusting its typical practices in several ways presented here as considerations for would-be producers:

1. **Present smaller, less technically demanding productions.** Examine your season offerings. If your theatre produces a season of six or seven large-scale musicals, the operational costs may balloon beyond your box office receipts. Try mixing in a few low-budget productions including non-musical plays (the cost of royalties is much lower than musicals) and small-scale musicals such as *Forever Plaid* and *The Fantasticks*. For example, during the 2008 season, the theatre’s productions of *Forever Plaid* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* had technical budgets of eight hundred and twelve hundred dollars, respectively. Those figures are nearly, on average, one-sixth the budget of the

\textsuperscript{80} Discussed in Chapter Three of this study.
season’s other productions. While *Forever Plaid* was as profitable as the larger shows in the season, *Streetcar* was not. However, by continuing to present smaller musicals (such as *The Fantasticks*), the theatre could begin to save money, but only if the profit margins prove positive.

2. **Partnering with other nearby theatres (both professional and amateur).** This has proven to be a legitimate and successful practice in the past. In 2005, WVPT partnered with the Pittsburgh Musical Theatre on technical costs for *Miss Saigon* and with the Clay Center for the Arts (in Charleston, West Virginia) for the technical costs of *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast*. A similar arrangement was made with the Clay Center for *The Producers* in 2008. Unfortunately, these partnerships have not been ongoing as these opportunities only exist when productions coincide (careful planning and scheduling could help in the promotion of future partnerships). WVPT and Fairmont State University have shared costs for several productions including 2005’s *Seussical* and 2006’s *The Sound of Music*. The theatre also teamed with Salisbury University in Maryland for *A Christmas Carol* in 2009. Sharing costs helps both institutions to save funds and when combined with box office sales, aids the reduction in debt. The theatre could build on these established and successful partnerships by proposing a cycle, or rotation of collaboration (i.e. every three years the theatre will team with Fairmont State for a holiday production).

3. **Negotiating with professional unions.** This is a common practice for WVPT, which has proven to be very successful. Iannone has been able to bargain salaries and the number of required contracts with each of the three principal unions with which it has established contracts: Actors Equity Association, Stage Directors and Choreographers
Society, and the American Federation of Musicians. These negotiations have reduced salary expenditures. If your theatre is associated with any of these principal unions, try to negotiate with them to lower the number of required contracts or to “freeze” the required minimum salaries. In many instances the union wants its members to work, so they will most likely be willing to negotiate to a certain extent.

4. **Hire local artists.** By hiring local artists, you are both saving money on housing and transportation and fostering the creativity in your own community, thus, ultimately, helping to improve the quality of life of your community.

By staying financially fit in these hard economic times, a new theatre can both keep its doors open and contribute to the community; an indebted theatre can do neither.

**Management**

Since the theatre’s inception, Ron Iannone has been the Executive Producer and Artistic Director. He has surrounded himself with a Board of Trustees that has provided sage advice, as well as networking opportunities in the community, but in 2004, for the first time in its history, the management structure changed due to Iannone’s suffering health and two new positions were created: Associate Artistic Director and Managing Director. Despite these new positions, the theatre’s management has not changed much over its twenty-six year history with Iannone remaining the man-in-charge and having the final say on all decisions; many people consider this the reason for both the theatre’s continued existence and its stagnant progression into the future.

Joshua Williamson and Neil Bucklew share several opinions concerning the future of West Virginia Public Theatre. First and foremost they both recognize the need for new management in order for the theatre to survive. Williamson insists that any future for the theatre
will require “significant change in the financial structure and in management,” but also asserts that the “mission and vision stay the same.” In this way, Williamson believes, the theatre can continue to fill the need for musical theatre in the region, but it will be done with a stronger foundation. That foundation may include a more extensive and full-time management staff. For years Iannone has been the only full-time administrator at the theatre until recently when his daughter, Mary Beth Sickles, the managing director became full-time. With a limited administrative staff consisting of a part-time accountant, a part-time box office manager, and a seasonal marketing director, the theatre is unable to fully execute its mission. In order to grow, the theatre needs to have a core of administrators (including a full-time education director) to oversee the everyday operations of the theatre; currently, it is too large of an operation to continue as in years past. At the same time, the theatre struggles financially—especially in the offseason—to pay its employees. Therefore, the theatre will need to secure funding (through grants or private sponsorship) or a partnership with another theatre in order to maintain a proper management staff. Perhaps, if the Morgantown Event Center does not live up to Iannone’s hopes, he will be willing to renegotiate with the university. Potentially, new management could inspire a fresh start, but that is yet to be seen.

Neil Bucklew agrees that change in management is necessary. In the future, Bucklew proposes that “Ron [Iannone] and Neil [Bucklew] will not be players” and that the theatre will need “strong leadership and a team that works well together.” Bucklew’s proposition is for new management with fresh ideas. Although he did not presume to mention names for the successors to Iannone and the board, he does believe that the new management should be a combination of those with ties to the theatre and those who are not currently associated with it. Current Associate Artistic Director Michael Licata, because of his professional experience, extensive
knowledge of the industry, and history with the theatre (including his ever-growing advisory role beyond questions of casting and artistic practices) seems to be a logical successor to Iannone.

Bucklew’s insistence on teamwork as the cornerstone of any successful venture needs to be emphasized for any young producer. In this case strong teamwork would include a hierarchy of administrators who work together to support the theatre’s mission with strong and open lines of communication. Furthermore, the team that helps the theatre to succeed will be one that is active in securing new sources of income, establishing stronger connections to the community, and creating new networks to potential corporate and community partners. These three specific goals could be achieved by establishing committees focused on such goals. A finance committee could investigate new governmental grants available (or even existing grants not previously explored). This committee would also visit local businesses and larger regional corporations to determine the efficacy of sponsorships or other partnerships such as trade agreements wherein the corporation provides a valuable physical resource (i.e. lumber or steel at a discounted price) needed in the operation of the theatre in return for tickets and advertising. Another committee of prominent board members and staff could be created to spread awareness of the theatre, its programs, and its benefits to the community, particularly to residents of the region unfamiliar with or currently uninterested in the professional theatre. Through these suggested practices the theatre becomes proactive in creating opportunities for continued existence through new sources of funding and community consciousness.

The committees suggested here would be headed by members of the Board of Trustees—making it a truly “working” board—and comprised of members of the community providing another opportunity for community members to be involved in the life of the theatre. Neil Bucklew emphasizes this need for a “board that is effective and helpful.” Bucklew even
proposes inviting “a couple of key WVU theatre professors” to join the theatre leadership, which will provide a “connection with West Virginia University at a whole new level.” By offering positions to WVU faculty, they will feel more involved in the theatre’s process, governance, and in potential ways that the two might work together. With these recommendations, Bucklew posits that the theatre will be able to help “integrate, forever, the smaller arts groups in the community into an ‘Arts Development Center,’ that will be a nurturing leader of the arts in the community.” Bucklew’s wish may not come into fruition for several years and until Iannone decides to step down as Executive Producer of the theatre or there is new administration in the Division of Theatre and Dance: the bridges burned appear irreparable at the current time.

In order for a theatre to be effective in its mission, whether it is tri-fold such as the one set forth by WVPT or singular (primarily focused on entertainment or education), it must have strong and efficient leadership. A theatre’s administration is its core and, without a strong core, the theatre is set for failure. West Virginia Public Theatre has been able to survive for twenty-six years under the passionate leadership of Ron Iannone, which has proven to be one of the theatre’s greatest assets and greatest limitations. Those limitations have been exacerbated by an aging and inactive board. In order for a theatre such as West Virginia Public Theatre to survive, the administration must be full-time and fully committed to meeting its mission. I believe that it is extremely difficult for any professional theatre to operate with a skeleton crew and propose that, at the very least, these positions are necessary:\(^81\): a Managing Director (responsible for the day-to-day operations of the theatre including staffing), an Artistic Director (responsible for major artistic decisions), a Finance Director (responsible for all budgetary concerns including

\(^81\) In comparison, the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera has many more positions divided into seven departments: Administration and Finance, Construction, Development, Education and Outreach, Marketing and Sales, Production, and Ticketing (www.pittsburghclo.org). The Pittsburgh Musical Theatre does not divide its administration into departments, rather it has five administrators splitting the duties from artistic to education to technical (www.pittsburghmusicals.com)
Box Office), and a Marketing/Development Director (responsible for all marketing, public relations, and similar concerns). If the theatre has an educational component, then an Education Director is vital to the effectiveness of that program. This structure will help the theatre to be fully-functional and attempt to meet every aspect of its mission to the best of its ability. However, funding remains an issue and there are no guaranteed solutions beyond the considerations I have suggested in this chapter: corporate sponsorship and government grants. The issue of funding is a never-ending circle of searching for new lines of economic support and will remain the most crucial, yet elusive, piece to the puzzle that is not-for-profit professional theatre. I do propose that a theatre with this type of structure could find creative ways of sustaining all of these necessary positions. For instance, during the offseason, some positions could become part-time or even combined (i.e. Marketing and Education) as the basis of staffing needs, at least in this case study, change from summer to winter. In addition, incentives could be used to partially fund some positions. For example, the marketing position, through incentives based on advertising sales, or the financial director position through incentives based on group sales. Both structure and funding can be found through creative compromise.

**Communication**

Perhaps the most important consideration for would-be producers is that of communication. In any successful business venture, communication is key in establishing alliances and in working with other organizations (rather than in isolation) to establish mutually beneficial goals. The prime example of the importance of communication in the case of West Virginia Public Theatre lies in its relationship with West Virginia University. As is evidenced in Chapter Three, the theatre has effective working associations with many educational institutions including Fairmont State University, Carnegie Mellon University, Wright State University, and
Frostburg State University, but the storied and stormy past with the land-grant institution in its own back yard provides an instance of miscommunications that have led to a nearly non-existent relationship. When Iannone first established his theatre in Morgantown, he missed out on a chance to create a bond with the Division of Theatre and Dance at WVU and, simultaneously, the university lost a potential professional arts partner. Why was such a situation ripe with promise missed? At the most basic level, the two sides did not communicate their needs. According to theatre professor Held:

WVPT did not or would not work through a real working relationship with the University Theatre and so a lot of bad feeling was created on both sides and many great opportunities were lost. I do not blame the leadership of WVPT for all of this unfortunate history, but someone should have taken it in hand and made it be better. The university leadership failed, the Dean of Creative Arts failed, the chair of Theatre failed, even the theatre faculty failed because they were so small-minded about how the relationship might have benefitted one and all.

Held goes on to say that he still wishes for a compromise, but that it probably will not ever materialize. This rift, built on what seems to be stubbornness on both sides of the table, is one major point of contention between the community and the theatre. It seems from an analysis of the historical rift between the two institutions that members of the WVU faculty were resentful that Iannone did not ask for their advice in starting the theatre and, as a result, Iannone established a pattern of not including the faculty on any of the theatre’s practices, which has since been perpetuated. Although, at times, especially early in its history many faculty members were asked to be a part of the artistic staff (primarily designers), the division as a whole did not participate in the operation of the theatre even when it moved into the division’s facilities. The
two sides have attempted, over the years, to work together, but due to the lack of communication and the lack of an operational (and artistic) plan mutually beneficial to each party, there seems to be little chance of any future alliance. The breakdown of communication between Iannone and WVU is severe and has created a seemingly unbreakable barrier due to past occurrences including, but not limited to late payment, by the theatre, of rent owed to the university and the division’s unwillingness to cooperate with the theatre’s need for space and equipment. However, this barrier only remains if the current management on both sides hold on to their past conceptions of each other. If each side is willing to listen to each other and put aside past grievances, an alliance can be built before there is a change in management. It seems from the views presented here that the community supports the continued existence of the theatre and has strong beliefs in the theatre as an arts leader. Thus, the theatre has the opportunity to be a true leader and mend fences in order to further promote the arts, in their entirety, throughout the community.

However, I propose that, through open communication, hard work, and the willingness of all parties to put aside petty differences and to work toward a common goal, a renewed alliance can be established. This communication could begin with the creation of a region-wide arts council with representatives from all of the major arts organizations in the area, creating a forum for the leaders of these groups to strategize ways in which they can work together. Additionally, a trusted mediator could help to jumpstart conversations between WVPT and WVU providing equal ground from which to analyze, strategize, and plan for working together in a way that benefits the entire community.

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82 In the past few years, certain shop spaces have been off-limits to the theatre. Additionally, the division’s equipment (saws, drills, sewing machines), which at one time were available to the theatre, were no longer part of the rental agreement.
One sticking point between the two organizations that could easily be dealt with is the unfortunate fact that local businesses do not see a separation between WVPT and WVU and, as a result, do not provide credit to the WVU Division of Theatre and Dance due to WVPT’s less-than-perfect financial decisions. This particular example provides the perfect chance for these two institutions to work together or, at the very least, for West Virginia Public Theatre to reopen communication with the university. A representative from the theatre could approach these businesses with both an apology and a plan for a new fiscally responsible connection, including a plan for paying any monies still owed and perhaps even free advertising for the business until it is repaid in full. That theatre representative could also address the clear separation with WVU and explore how WVU might not be held accountable for the woes of the theatre. This might even mean a second meeting with the business with representatives from both WVPT and WVU. As a result the university will see how the theatre is open to mending burned bridges and, perhaps, it will also serve to spur further conversation about how to create a working alliance that could have begun many years ago.

Some of the strongest collegiate theatre programs have durable bonds with professional theatres and a WVU-WVPT partnership could have secured the university’s standing in the national ranks of state theatre programs, but because of a lack of open communication that potential partnership was never realized. Is it completely out of the realm of possibilities for these two institutions to find common ground and work together? Perhaps not, but it would take clear communication. It would also take someone willing to initiate a series of “cooperative conversations” in order to explore how the two organizations might completely rethink how they approach each other. For a truly workable partnership to form, it may take a change in
management on one or both sides of the table as proposed earlier or, more likely, it will take a change in managerial philosophy.

It is within this primary example of communication breakdown that a valuable lesson lies for any young producer. Throughout the existence of West Virginia Public Theatre, the communication with West Virginia University has been unstructured at best. The two organizations began their association on unsettled terms and, despite some attempts from both sides, they have been unable to communicate effectively resulting in very little current contact. From this case study, burgeoning producers can see how a lack of communication eliminates almost any possibility for working partnerships between two institutions who could, if the circumstances were right, find a mutually beneficial artistic coalition. For these young producers, I suggest looking at the work of organizational development consultant, Peter Block, in *The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work*. While his work focuses, primarily, on skills in dealing with manager/employee relationships, his theories on communication are applicable in cases such as the rift between WVPT and WVU.

One of Block’s primary tactics in communicating with others is “share as much information as possible” (90). It is here where Block sets forth some easily applied strategies for making one’s intentions known: “our goal is to let people know of our plans, ideas, changes as soon as possible” and he cautions “when we are thinking of reorganizing, we tell our people right away instead of waiting until the plan is fully formulated” (90). This approach, “to inform,” seems simple enough, but can carry a great deal of weight when first establishing a potential partnership. Block also posits that “if we are thinking of changing direction, goals, or even structure, if is important that we talk to people before our plans are firm” (92). If Iannone had communicated his plans to the members of the WVU faculty, perhaps the current rift may not
have opened; would-be producers can learn from this tenet of open communication as presented by Block. Other strategies gleaned from Block’s work include “giving people the opportunity to get involved” and, in the example of two merging banks, “putting aside their territorial instincts that normally would have taken years to resolve” (92-93). Through these seemingly simple communication strategies, producers have the opportunity to establish open communication, put aside biases, and to foster working relationships that not only benefit their particular institution, but also the entire community.

As the world changes, theatre administrators must be willing to change: learn from the past and journey toward the future by being willing, through open communication, to adjust to changing tastes, needs, and economic situations. This communication could include approaching other organizations with the question: “what are your organization’s goals and dreams?” A simple introduction to each organization’s desire to “become” has the potential to open the door to working together for mutual benefit. This initial contact could also establish protocols for future communication including the use of mediators, if necessary. If a theatre is unable to successfully communicate with both community partners and patrons, it may not be able to attract a new audience base, new funding streams and, consequently, may not grow or be sustainable.

Contribute to the Community

Perhaps, the most important lesson that can be learned from the history of West Virginia Public Theatre is one garnered from all of the best practices of the theatre and culminates in one ultimate achievement: a contribution to the community. Iannone, the Board, and his staff have attempted to give back to the community in a number of ways: holiday programming, educational opportunities, and even charitable contributions such as free tickets for fundraisers.
Philanthropy will pay off in the long run in terms of recognition, grants, and ticket sales. Iannone’s commitment to his community and to the education of its people is, first and foremost, the reason the theatre exists today. If a theatre is not an integral part of the community, there is very little reason for the community to support it and it, most likely, will fail. However, if it fulfills a fundamental need and provides an essential service to the community—like West Virginia Public Theatre—then it can, despite adversity, succeed in service for many years. For producers searching to find their way into such a vital position in the community, I suggest patience and perseverance. Through the considerations provided in this case study, a producer can begin to strategize numerous possibilities of ways to satisfy a need, recruit supporters, and create a place for the members of the community to “be,” “belong,” and, in time, “become.”

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The purpose of this dissertation has been to provide a qualitative look at the West Virginia Public Theatre and the role that it has played (and continues to play) in the greater Morgantown, West Virginia community. The study has been, primarily, presented through the analysis and synthesis of many different voices: the theatre’s own published materials, patrons, community members, theatre employees, and from the words of the theatre’s producer, Ron Iannone, who has steered the theatre’s course from its inception. For many of these people, the theatre is an institution that they hold dear to their hearts and, because of that, they were so idealistic about their opinions that they failed to speak candidly about the theatre’s shortcomings. However, I hope that I have been able to highlight those deficiencies through some passionate critics of the theatre, as well as through my own analysis of the theatre’s practices in order to provide concrete suggestions for both the current administration of West Virginia Public Theatre and for nascent producers hoping to start their own stock or regional theatre. By examining
WVPT’s past successes, as well as practices that have not helped the theatre to effectively meet its mission, I have suggested ways in which to, potentially, avoid pitfalls for future theatre administrators.

As with most research topics of this breadth, a researcher is faced with more information than can be used and with numerous viewpoints from which to approach the subject. Most of the weight of my study has been placed on the stories and opinions of the people who have been most directly associated with and affected by the theatre over its twenty-six years. The principal rationale for this emphasis is that a thorough history and analysis of this particular theatre has never before been attempted and, through the variety of human viewpoints, an examination can take place of how a theatre intersects with its community. The second reason is to provide an analyzed narrative for would-be theatrical producers to use as a model of both successful practices and failed attempts.

My research here is by no means comprehensive, but more of an overview of the theatre’s history and its perceived importance and impact on the community. There are several areas ripe for future research. One area is the need for a wide-ranging economic impact study. I briefly reported and analyzed the economic impact that the theatre has on the area through opinions from my interview subjects and from figures provided by the theatre itself. From this information I have gleaned that the theatre does, indeed, have a significant impact on the community’s economy. However, a quantitative study of the local economy and West Virginia Public Theatre’s contribution to the financial landscape of the area is needed if only to give weight to the seemingly random figures presented here and in literature provided by the theatre. The statistical data provided by the theatre, based on ticket sales, operational budgets, and governmental funding received is valuable, but will require an outside party to do an inclusive
economic survey and analysis (including an in-depth study of the tourism impact) before the data will be seen, by outsiders, as having a noteworthy fiscal impact on the community. Furthermore, a study of such breadth may provide leads to additional sources of funding for the theatre, suggestions for restructuring of the theatre’s financial organization, and proposals for strengthening the theatre’s marketing impact on its ticket sales and sponsorships.

Additionally, a prime candidate for future research would be the specific impact of the theatre’s educational programs, many of which are now defunct. Iannone remarked, in a recent interview, that the theatre’s T.A.R.G.E.T. program was ended because two years ago he “received a phone call from the Monongalia Healthcare administration…they believed that the money could be put to better use.” A study could be conducted on the efficacy of the program: examining the awareness of substance abuse in the schools during the program’s ten-year existence compared and contrasted with that of the past few years without it. If the study shows a significant negative impact from the loss of the program, perhaps funding could be found to reinstate it. Furthermore, the Future Stars program, terminated because “the coordinator (Cindy Timms) no longer has the time to keep it running and we do not have the resources to hire a replacement” (Iannone), could be studied to determine how to make the program financially viable for both the theatre and community, if it was reinstated. This would also be an opportunity to investigate the viability of partnering with the Morgantown Theatre Company. An in-depth quantitative analysis of all of the theatre’s educational programming (covering these now non-operational programs, as well as the Professional Internship Program and the annual holiday productions) would be beneficial in determining if the theatre is focusing its resources in the most efficient and advantageous programs. This proposed quantitative study would also help the theatre to determine new directions in which to take the educational component of the
theatre, as well as uncovering potential new sources of funding by examining the efficacy of promoting the programs further in the community; this may encourage corporate donors to fund the educational programs. Additional governmental grants may be found as well as a result of clarifying, strengthening, and focusing the theatre’s educational goals.

A third and valuable area for future research is to compare and contrast the community impact of other theatres similar in size, structure, and mission to West Virginia Public Theatre. Within this study I have used a few different theatres in the state and region as touchstone comparisons, but none that are specifically AEA summer stock theatres in semi-rural areas that produce primarily musicals and that have a major focus in educational programming. Although these criteria certainly narrow the field down a bit, there are several theatres across the country who contend with many of the same issues as West Virginia Public Theatre (The Little Theatre on the Square in Sullivan, Illinois83 and Surflight Theatre in Beach Haven, New Jersey are prime examples). A study of their histories, successes, and failures might be valuable to the understanding of what it is to run a summer stock theatre from inside the producer’s office.

West Virginia Public Theatre: Utopic Performance?

In “Utopia in Performance,” Jill Dolan writes: “A utopian performative is a mode of thinking and seeing that relies on the magic of performance practice, on a belief in social justice and a better future, on the impact and import of a wish, and on love for human commonality despite the vagaries of difference (171). What happens when these ideals are put through the crucible of their practical application? This is an important question to ask when comparing Dolan’s idealistic theories of “utopian performance” to what is actually presented on a commercial stage. Although West Virginia Public Theatre does not present the kind of works

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83 A doctoral dissertation focused on this particular theatre was written in 1999 by Beth Conway Shervey at Bowling Green State University.
Dolan has used to support her theory of utopian performance (performance art, slam poetry, *The Laramie Project*), that does not mean that the essence of her ideals does not apply to the work done by WVPT or any number of summer stock or regional theatres across the country. At the very heart of her theory is the way that theatre brings together a group of strangers and creates a community of people (“human commonality”) hoping to be moved by what they see on stage. Who is to say that they cannot be moved by a Broadway musical? The key to Dolan’s theory is that audiences are not simply emotionally stimulated, but challenged and moved toward action. Certainly, audiences can be inspired to change the world for the better by any number of different performance styles including musical theatre. Stacy Wolf, in her article “‘Something Better than This’: *Sweet Charity* and the Feminist Utopia of Broadway Musicals,” examines how the musicals of the 1960s, exemplified by *Sweet Charity* create a “feminist utopian performative”:

> it valorizes the bonding among women expressed in performance, as they sing and dance their way to an imaginary no-place, a Utopia. That these feminist ideals are presented in the form of the musical ensures that the audience will be taken to that pleasurable no-place, too, as we tap our toes and hum along. In other words, the expansiveness and self-consciousness of the musical allow the women in *Sweet Charity* to make available what Jill Dolan describes as a "Utopian performative." (312)

If a feminist version of utopic performance can be found in *Sweet Charity*, then similar utopias may be found in other musical theatre productions such as *Hairspray* and *Rent*.

Although West Virginia Public Theatre focuses on presenting the most mainstream and popular of Broadway musicals, it does not mean that the work is not meant to evoke emotion or
provoke thought. Even the most traditional works of Broadway (i.e. *Oklahoma!* can have an emotional and visceral effect on its audience. Can this work then be called “utopic?” When Rodgers and Hammerstein first presented the material at the height of World War II, the American public went to the theatre expecting to be moved by the American ideals presented through song and dance; why should this same story not have a similar effect on an audience some sixty-years later? I believe it can and theatres that choose to present such material, in my estimation, can be considered potential vessels of utopic performance. However, it is in the totality of the production wherein utopia lies. If a production is presented as mere entertainment, then it cannot strive toward utopic performance, even if it does encourage the making of community (“communitas”: a primary tenet of Dolan’s theory). In order for a production to attempt to attain some sense of a utopian performative, it must meet the other principles of the theory.

One vital aspect of Dolan’s concept is the call to action or the inspiration that these performances can have for social change. Can Broadway musicals inspire social change? Yes, they can: *The Cradle Will Rock* stimulated a response to the 1930s governmental opposition to unionization. Numerous similar examples can be seen throughout the history of the musical theatre form, but many would argue against this type of performance as utopic. For those critics I charge them to examine the original production of *Hair*, which inspired an entire generation of young Americans to make a choice concerning their individual journeys through life or *Showboat* that challenged society’s views on racial tolerance.

While these examples certainly have the ability to encourage debate and change, it seems that because of their longevity in the musical theatre canon and their popularity, innovative production approaches must be considered in order to provoke new generations with the same
These innovations can come in the guise of directorial concepts or, more effectively, making connections with the community through the productions (i.e. using Cats as a tool to promote literacy). Furthermore, professional theatres focused on providing family-friendly, sterilized entertainment can expand their horizons by including experimental or fringe works that promote the kind of discussion and change proposed by Dolan (i.e. The Laramie Project). While these productions may not be as lucrative as a production of Annie, they serve to educate, stimulate thought, and, potentially, force change. A choice such as this does not come without risks. In order to defend against the potential loss of ticket sales and controversy the theatre could think about producing this type of production off-season or, perhaps, at an alternate venue. Change must be made slowly in order to temper the impact the addition of such projects might have on the theatre’s finances.

While examining West Virginia Public Theatre’s history and practices, I have fallen short in providing more than a few examples of the company’s successful attempt at utopic performance. The theatre’s primary focus, throughout its existence, has been on producing musicals and plays that audiences want to see as an escape from their everyday lives. The notion is that the typical WVPT audience member does not want to think at the theatre, but rather sit back and relax. While this may be mostly accurate, that way of thinking, I believe, is detrimental to the community and is a missed opportunity for the theatre.

In the past the theatre has been successful with two specific performances that have been, to a great extent, generally utopic in spirit but, perhaps, not in intent or goal: the T.A.R.G.E.T. program and the post-September 11th A Christmas Carol. T.A.R.G.E.T. was specifically designed for social change and, according to the post-performance studies conducted by the theatre, proved to be successful in raising awareness and promoting change. Furthermore, the
special conceptual performance of *A Christmas Carol* played a vital role in using theatrical tools as stimulators for debate.

In an ideal world, perhaps West Virginia Public Theatre would only present material that would cause great change in the social structure of its community. However, in a practical world, the theatre makes an attempt to affect the community in a positive way through entertainment, education, and other contributions that improve the quality of life. While it is praiseworthy to theorize about performances that change lives, it is noteworthy to see a theatre that wants to make lives better, if only for a short while. In my estimation the work of West Virginia Public Theatre is not utopic in regard to Dolan’s theory as it, for the most part, does not promote immediate social action. However, it does provides a cultural escape for the residents of a community who, for a moment, can feel what a better world might be like whether through a Broadway musical, a skit on substance abuse, or through experiencing the actual art of creation. This, in itself, is worthy of note and could be called, by many, utopic performance.

My hope for West Virginia Public Theatre is that it continues to expand and to do the work that it has been able to do for over twenty-five years finding moments to challenge its audience to see a better world and struggle to create it. I also hope that would-be producers and young theatre artists are able to take note of the theatre’s triumphs and tribulations as considerations for their own theatre companies. In an era when theatres are closing and American families frequently choose television or film over live entertainment, producers need to adjust to changing tastes in order to survive and must become deeply involved and connected to their communities. If West Virginia Public Theatre had not made such an impact on the greater Morgantown area, it would not exist today and if its administration was not willing to both take risks and adjust to the changing face of its audience, it would not have a future. West
Virginia Public Theatre and its administration do not seem to fear stepping beyond the tested material of Broadway in order to perform material more specific and important to its constituents; this is a primary reason for the theatre’s sustainability. If a theatre can connect to its community in more ways than simply providing entertainment, then it can become an institution that is integral to the cultural, educational, and social milieu of the area.
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# APPENDIX A.
WEST VIRGINIA PUBLIC THEATRE
PRODUCTION HISTORY

1985 *(Sheraton Lakeview)*
Musical Revue starring Carol Lawrence  July 1-7, 9-14
Musical Revue starring Judy Norton Taylor  July 16-21, 23-28
Musical Revue starring Dean Jones  July 30-August 4, 6-11

1986
The Phyllis Newman Show  July 1-6
West Side Story  July 8-13
I Do! I Do!  July 15-20
A Chorus Line  July 22-August 3

1987
No, No, Nannette  July 7-12
Sweet Charity  July 14-19
My One and Only  July 21-26
Godspell  July 28-August 2
Same Time Next Year  August 4-16

1988
42nd Street  July 5-17
Company  July 19-24
Fiddler on the Roof  July 26-August 7
Funny Girl  August 9-14

1989 *(WVU CAC)*
George M!  July 5-9, 11-16
Mame  July 18-23
Anything Goes  July 25-30
Harvey  August 1-6, 8-13

1990
The Sound of Music  July 3-15
A Chorus Line  July 17-22
Oklahoma!  July 24-August 5
Man of LaMancha  August 7-12
Riverboat Man (Charleston)  August 23-24

1991
West Side Story  July 2-14
Gypsy  July 16-21
The Music Man  July 23-August 4
Carousel  August 6-11
1992
Hello Dolly!    July 7-19
The Mousetrap    July 14-18
Guys and Dolls    July 21-26
Grease    July 28-August 9
My Fair Lady    August 11-16

1993
Fiddler on the Roof    July 6-18
Peter Pan    July 20-25
Cabaret    July 27-August 1
Camelot    August 3-8
South Pacific    August 10-15

1994
Love Letters    June 28-July 3
The King and I    July 5-17
Oliver!    July 19-24
Nunsense    July 27-31
A Chorus Line    July 26-August 7
Evita    August 9-14

1995
Little Shop of Horrors    June 27-July 9
Damn Yankees    July 11-16
Annie    July 18-30
Forever Plaid    July 25-30
Jesus Christ Superstar    August 1-6
Big River    August 8-13
A Christmas Carol    December 19-23

1996
Nunsense    June 25-July 7
Crazy for You    July 9-14
Will Rogers Follies    July 16-21
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat    July 23-August 4
Lost in Yonkers    July 30-August 4
Funny Girl    August 6-11
Peter Pan    December 17-22

1997
Beehive    June 24-July 6
Sugar Babies    July 8-13
Annie Get Your Gun    July 15-20
Phantom    July 22-August 3
Always, Patsy Cline  
Bye Bye, Birdie  
Cinderella  

1998
Always, Patsy Cline  
Seven Brides for Seven Brothers  
Singin’ in the Rain  
Kiss Me, Kate  
Shenandoah  
42nd Street  
A Christmas Carol  

1999
Honky Tonk Angels  
Showboat  
Man of La Mancha  
The Unsinkable Molly Brown  
Cabaret  
Oklahoma!  
Peter Pan  

2000
The Sound of Music  
Hello Dolly!  
The Secret Garden  
The Most Happy Fella  
She Loves Me  
Grease  
West Side Story  
Streets of Gold (Uniontown)  
Cinderella  

2001
1776  
South Pacific  
Camelot  
Annie  
Fiddler on the Roof  
Carousel  
Grease (Uniontown)  
A Christmas Carol  

July 29-August 3  
August 5-10  
December 16-21  

June 23-July 5  
July 7-12  
July 14-19  
July 21-26  
July 28-August 2  
August 4-9  
December 19-23  

June 22-27  
June 29-July 11  
July 13-18  
July 20-25  
July 27-August 1  
August 3-8  
December 18-23  

June 27-July 2  
July 5-9  
July 11-16  
July 18-23  
July 25-July 30  
August 1-6  
August 8-13  
October 11-28  
December 13-23  

June 12-17  
June 19-24  
June 26-July 1  
July 3-18  
July 24-29  
July 31-August 5  
October 16-20  
December 18-23
### 2002 (Vinyl Structure)

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<td>My Fair Lady</td>
<td>July 30-August 4</td>
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<td>The Music Man</td>
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<td>Annie (Uniontown)</td>
<td>October 11-12</td>
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<td>The Wizard of Oz (Fairmont)</td>
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### 2003 (Vinyl Structure)

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<td>My Way</td>
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<td>Guys and Dolls</td>
<td>July 8-13</td>
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<td>Ain’t Misbehavin’</td>
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<td>Will Rogers Follies</td>
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<td>Jesus Christ Superstar</td>
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<td>Scrooge! (Fairmont)</td>
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### 2004 (WVU CAC)

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<td>The King and I</td>
<td>July 20-25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</td>
<td>July 27-August 1</td>
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<td>42nd Street</td>
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### 2005

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APPENDIX B.
WEST VIRGINIA PUBLIC THEATRE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1987
Mel Kofod
Jerri Heiskell
William Thunhurst
Dave Bucy
Peter Pro
Ron Iannone
Vince Cardi Legal Counsel

1988
Jerri Heiskell President
Mel Kofod Vice-President
Dave Satterfield
Pat Jackson
Dave Bucy
Ron Iannone
Judith Williams
Ora Lee Kirk-Ludwig

1989
Mike Oliverio
David Schatz
Jim McCartney
Christine Meredith
Fred Crouch
Tom Rogers
Annabel Timms
Irene Batlas

1990
Jerri Heiskell President
Annabel Timms Vice President
Christy Meredith Vice President
John Carline Treasurer
Pat Jackson Secretary
Irene Batlas
Robert Thomas
Ron Iannone
Ora Lee Kirk- Ludwig
Frank Mirandi
Thomas Rogers
David Schatz
W. James Brown
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>President</th>
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<th>Secretary</th>
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<td>Annabel Timms</td>
<td>Christy Meredith</td>
<td>John Carline</td>
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<td>Irene Batlas</td>
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<td>W. James Brown</td>
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<td>Dave Satterfield</td>
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<td>Ted Lustig</td>
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<td>1993</td>
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<td>Ron Iannone</td>
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Ted Lustig
Herman Mertins, Jr.
Shirley Schrieber
Dave Stuart
Robert Thomas
W. James Brown  Ex-Officio
Phil Faini  Ex-Officio

1994
Thomas Rogers  President
Annabel Timms  Vice President
James McCartney  Vice President
Pat Jackson  Secretary
Irene Batlas
Ro Brooks
Barbara Davis
Carolyn Grubbs
Ron Iannone
Tina Levelle
Ted Lustig
Herman Mertins, Jr.
Jean Riley
Dave Stuart
W. James Brown  Ex-Officio
Phil Faini  Ex-Officio

1995
Thomas Rogers  President
James McCartney  Vice President
Herman Mertins  Treasurer
Pat Jackson  Secretary
Irene Batlas
David Bell
Nancy Bell
Ro Brooks
Phil Faini
Barbara Davis
Annabel Timms
Carolyn Grubbs
Ron Iannone
Tina Levelle
Ted Lustig
Victor McQuiston
William J. Windsor
Neil Bucklew
John Buchanan
Carolyn Blaney  Advisor
Robert Eberly  Advisor
Bill Hayes  Advisor
Susan Seaforth Hayes  Advisor
David Raese  Advisor
Kathleen Raese  Advisor
Ed Skriner  Advisor
Norma Jean Skriner  Advisor
Joseph Timms  Advisor

1999
Tom Rogers  President
James McCartney  Vice President
Ro Brooks  Secretary
David Bell  Treasurer
Irene Batlas
Nancy Bell
Fred Brooking
Neil Bucklew
Terry Erell
Phil Faini
Ron Iannone
Sherry Ligouri
Victor McQuistion
Rodney Pyles
James Robinson
Annabel Timms
Jaime Winsor
Jo Loftstead

2003
Tom Rogers  President
James McCartney  Vice President
Ro Brooks  Secretary
David Bell  Treasurer
Nancy Bell
Fred Brooking
Neil Bucklew
Ron Iannone
Rodney Pyles
James Robinson
Carolyn Blaney  Honorary Trustee
Robert Eberly  Honorary Trustee
Bill Hayes  Honorary Trustee
Susan Seaforth Hayes  Honorary Trustee
David Raese  Honorary Trustee
Kathleen Raese  Honorary Trustee
Ed Skriner  Honorary Trustee
Norma Skriner  Honorary Trustee
Joseph Timms  Honorary Trustee

2004
Tom Rogers  President
James McCartney  Vice President
Ro Brooks  Secretary
Rodney Pyles  Treasurer
Dave Bell
Nancy Bell
Neil Bucklew
Vickie Adams Gianola
Geoffrey Graeber
Ron Iannone
Mike Garrison
Tom Jones
Steve Lacagnin
Chris Lambert
Debbie Prezioso
James Robinson
Kathy Petroplus
Carolyn Blaney  Honorary Trustee
Robert Eberly  Honorary Trustee
Bill Hayes  Honorary Trustee
Susan Seaforth Hayes  Honorary Trustee
David Raese  Honorary Trustee
Kathleen Raese  Honorary Trustee
Ed Skriner  Honorary Trustee
Norma Skriner  Honorary Trustee
Joseph Timms  Honorary Trustee

2005
Tom Rogers  President
Jimmy McCartney  Vice President
Ro Brooks  Secretary
Stephen LaCagnin  Treasurer
Neil Bucklew
Dave Bell
Vickie Adams Gianola
Ron Iannone
Nancy Bell
Tom Jones
Rodney Pyles
Deborah Prezioso
Jim Robinson
Bernie Shultz
Ron Stovash
Steve Brooks
Darlene Dunn
Rick Brown
Andy Walls
Peggy McKowen
Mike Garrison
Carolyn Blaney    Honorary Trustee
Robert Eberly    Honorary Trustee
Bill Hayes       Honorary Trustee
Susan Seaforth Hayes    Honorary Trustee
David Raese       Honorary Trustee
Kathleen Raese    Honorary Trustee
Ed Skriner        Honorary Trustee
Norma Skriner     Honorary Trustee
Joseph Timms      Honorary Trustee

2006
Tom Rogers        President
Jimmy McCartney   Vice President
Ro Books         Secretary
Stephen LaCagnin  Treasurer
Dave Bell
Nancy Bell
Steve Brooks
Ricklin Brown
Neil Bucklew
Darlene Dunn
Mike Garrison
Vickie Adams Gianola
Ron Iannone
Tom Jones
Peggy McKowen
Deborah H. Prezioso
Rodney Pyles
James Robinson
Bernie Schultz
Ron Stovash
Andy Walls
Carolyn Blaney    Honorary Trustee
Robert Eberly    Honorary Trustee
Bill Hayes       Honorary Trustee
Susan Seaforth Hayes    Honorary Trustee
David Raese       Honorary Trustee
Kathleen Raese  
Ed Skriner  
Norma Skriner  
Joseph Timms 

Honorary Trustee

2007

Tom Rogers  
Jimmy McCartney  
Ro Books  
Stephen LaCagnin  
Dave Bell  
Nancy Bell  
Steve Brooks  
Ricklin Brown  
Neil Bucklew  
Darlene Dunn  
Mike Garrison  
Vickie Adams Gianola  
Ron Iannone  
Tom Jones  
Peggy McKowen  
Deborah H. Preziosio  
Rodney Pyles  
James Robinson  
Bernie Schultz  
Ron Stovash  
Andy Walls  
Carolyn Blaney  
Robert Eberly  
Bill Hayes  
Susan Seaforth Hayes  
David Raese  
Kathleen Raese  
Ed Skriner  
Norma Skriner  
Joseph Timms

2008

President

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Tom Rogers  
Jimmy McCartney  
Ro Books  
Stephen LaCagnin  
Dave Bell  
Nancy Bell  
Steve Brooks  
Ricklin Brown

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee

Honorary Trustee
Neil Bucklew
Darlene Dunn
Mike Garrison
Vickie Adams Gianola
Ron Iannone
Tom Jones
Peggy McKowen
Deborah H. Prezioso
Rodney Pyles
James Robinson
Bernie Schultz
Ron Stovash
Andy Walls
Carolyn Blaney Honorary Trustee
Bill Hayes Honorary Trustee
Susan Seaforth Hayes Honorary Trustee
David Raese Honorary Trustee
Kathleen Raese Honorary Trustee
Ed Skriner Honorary Trustee
Norma Skriner Honorary Trustee
Joseph Timms Honorary Trustee

2009
Tom Rogers President
Jimmy McCartney Vice President
Ro Brooks Secretary
Steve LaCagnin Treasurer
Neil Bucklew
Vickie Adams Gianola
Ron Iannone
Deborah Prezioso
Bernie Schultz
Rodney Pyles
Darlene Dunn
Ron Stovash
Andy Walls
Carolyn Blaney Honorary Trustee
Robert Eberly Honorary Trustee
Bill Hayes Honorary Trustee
Susan Seaforth Hayes Honorary Trustee
David Raese Honorary Trustee
Kathleen Raese Honorary Trustee
Ed Skriner Honorary Trustee
Norma Skriner Honorary Trustee
Joseph Timms Honorary Trustee
### 2010

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<td>Jimmy McCartney</td>
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<td>Ro Brooks</td>
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<td>Steve LaCagnin</td>
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<td>Carolyn Blaney</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Eberly</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<td>Bill Hayes</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<td>Susan Seaforth Hayes</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<td>David Raese</td>
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<td>Kathleen Raese</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ed Skriner</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norma Skriner</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Timms</td>
<td>Honorary Trustee</td>
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Presenting Broadway’s Best

West Virginia Public Theatre greatly appreciates your patronage. We invite you to complete and return this brief survey so we can continually improve our service of providing you with quality Broadway shows.

Thank You!

1. What is your zip code?  ______________________
2. Please indicate your age category:  __ Under 18__18 – 25 __ 26 – 35__ 36 – 50 ___ 50 +
3. Please indicate your sex:  ____ Male          ____ Female
4. Please indicate your highest level of education:     ___ GED/High School Diploma___Bachelor’s Degree ___ Master’s/Doctorate ___ Vocational/Technical ___ Other __________________
5. Please indicate your household income range:      ___ Under $20,000  ___ $20,000 - $39,000 ___ $40,000 - $59,000 ___ $60,000 - $79,000 ___ $80,000 - $99,000 ___ Over $100,000
6. Please check the classification which best describes your present occupation:  ___ Self-Employed   ___ Professional ___ Trade/Laborer ___ Retail  ___ Retired ___ Student ___ Other __________________
7. How did you hear about our productions this summer?    ___ Early Bird Subscription ___ Website ___ Newspaper Review ___ Newspaper ___ Radio Promotion ___ Radio Ad ___ Television Ad/Story ___ Tourist/Travel Info ___ Friend/Relative ___ Season Brochure ___ Trade Show ___ Other ___________
8. How did you purchase your tickets?  ___By Mail ___By Phone ___Online ___Box Office
9. Would you be interested in printing your own tickets through our website?  ___Yes  ___No
10. Are you attending this performance with: ___ Family ___ Bus/Tour Group ___ Business Assoc. ___ Friends ___ On your Own ___ Other ____________

11. Which concert would you like to see ___ Tony Orlando ___ Judy Collins ___ Kathy Mattea ___ Frankie Valli ___ Chuck Mangione ___ Diana Krall ___ Other ______________________

12. Did you/will you attend *Doubt*? ___ Yes ___ No

13. Today, have you or do you plan to: ___ Dine out? Which restaurant? _________________
   ___ Stay Overnight? Which Hotel? _________________
   ___ Shop? What Store(s)? _________________
   ___ Other? Specify _________________

14. Would you like to see more plays with us? ___ Yes ___ No
   If yes, please name a show that you would like to see (musical or non-musical) __________________________

16. Would you be interested in attending Cabarets during the winter season featuring ___ Yes ___ No
   productions such as *Always Patsy Cline*, *Forever Plaid*, and *I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change*, etc.?

17. Would you like to see *High School Musical* again next year? ___ Yes ___ No

18. What are your favorite shows of the following? (Check all that apply)
   ___ *Hairspray* ___ *Always Patsy Cline*
   ___ *Bye Bye Birdie* ___ *South Pacific*
   ___ *Joseph* ___ *Phantom*
   ___ *Jesus Christ Superstar*

17. What type of ticket holder are you? ___ Single Show ___ Group Show ___ Six Show Package ___ Corporate Ticket ___ Three Show Package ___ WVU Faculty/Staff

18. Were you a season subscriber in 2008? ___ Yes ___ No
19. Are you a season subscriber this year? ___ Yes ___ No

*If not, please explain why: ________________________________________________________________

20. Would you want season tickets with: ___ Best seats available?
    ___ 2nd tier seats for lower prices?

21. Volunteers are an integral part of all non-profit organizations. Are you interested in volunteering for WVPT?

   ___ Yes ___ No

   *If yes, please fill out an interest card

22. Have you ever visited our website: ___ Yes ___ No

   www.wvpublictheatre.com?

23. How might our website be improved? __________________________________________________________

   _______________________________________________________________________________________

24. Any comments concerning the quality of our productions?

   _______________________________________________________________________________________

   _______________________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D.
JANUARY 2002 FEASIBILITY/DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

Conducted by Jerold Panas, Linzy, and Partners

1. Has the West Virginia Public Theatre improved, stayed the same, or gone downhill over the last five years?

2. How would you rate the influence and prestige of the board?

3. How would you rate the effectiveness of the management of West Virginia Public Theatre?

4. How important is the proposed program for the West Virginia Public Theatre?

5. Is a $10 million goal realistic?

6. How do you feel that top community leadership will work actively on this project?

7. Would you be willing to serve in some capacity?

8. Will you and/or your company be willing to give to this program?
APPENDIX E.
PRIMARY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you have any association with West Virginia Public Theatre?

2. If so, what is that association and how long have you been involved with the theatre?

3. Do you think the theatre has benefited the community through its educational programs? If so, how? If not, why not?

4. Do you think the theatre has benefited the community through entertainment? If so, how? If not, why not?

5. Do you think the theatre has benefited the community through financial contributions? If so, how? If not, why not?

6. Do you think the theatre has improved the quality of life in the community? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

7. Do you believe that West Virginia Public Theatre is a necessary institution in the community? If so, why? If not, why not?

8. How do you think that the theatre could be a more successful and contributing member of the community? What are the theatre’s shortcomings?

9. Do you believe that the arts are important to the community’s development and growth? If so, why? If not, why not?

10. How does West Virginia Public Theatre contribute to the community’s development and growth?

11. If West Virginia Public Theatre ceased to exist, how do you believe the community would be impacted?

12. What are your hopes for West Virginia Public Theatre in the future?