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Tower Theater takes center stage: New performing arts theater set to open this summer

April 01, 2010 | Mitzi Bible

For about six years, the tallest, most visible spot on the Liberty University campus was silent. But in fall 2009, the tower at Campus North became a buzz of activity as construction began on a new 600-plus seat theater.

In late 2008, Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. tagged the tower area as the last undeveloped portion of the 1 million-square-foot Campus North building (originally a cell phone plant) — and he spotted an opportunity he couldn't resist. After watching award-winning theater students perform in a renovated lecture hall to a crowded audience of 250 (with many more being turned away for sell-out shows), and with academic improvements at the top of his list, building a new theater became a priority.

After consulting with architects, it turned out the tower space was a perfect fit and Falwell announced in March 2009 that a theater would be built there, and a fundraising campaign was launched.

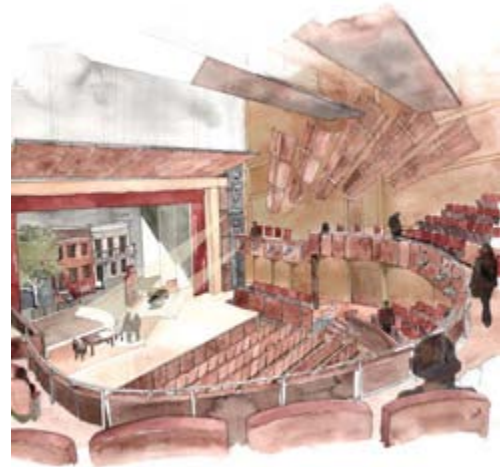
“Pray for that fundraising effort,” he told students in convocation. “It’s long overdue.”

The Tower Theater will make its debut with a grand opening in August, at the start of the Fall 2010 semester.

Linda Nell Cooper, head of the Theatre Arts Department, said the excitement of a new theater is spreading through the campus and the region. She said news of the new theater is already helping recruiting efforts. To parents, “it says professionalism,” she said.

With experience in helping build a professional theater in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., Cooper, along with a team of planners from Liberty and an outside firm, have designed a top-notch facility that should position it among the best in the state.

Charles Spence, director of planning and new construction at Liberty, said the theater, which stands at eight-and-a-half stories high, is a “massive project” that’s taken “a ton of coordination.” Estimated at \$6.5 million, the contemporary-style theater will consist of balcony seating, an orchestra pit, catwalks, a fly tower (an intricate system of ropes and pulleys that can move Broadway-size sets and scenery), a box office and 12,000 square feet of support area that includes dressing rooms, a theater practice room, offices, costume shop, prop room and woodworking and scene shops. Future plans call for a separate black box theater to seat 150 people and more lab and studio space.



The artist's rendering shows the new Tower Theater scheduled to open in August.

“This makes a real statement about the university when you have your own performing arts theater — and with the quality this one’s going to be,” Spence said. “It’s all going to be state of the art, — the best sound, the best lighting, the best fly rig you can buy.”

Cooper said donations are coming in, but many naming opportunities are still available.

A popular part of the fundraising campaign is the name-a-seat project. By giving \$1,000, donors can name a theater seat in honor of a family member, loved one, friend or business. Naming opportunities still exist for everything from the theater itself to the main lobby, acting studio, orchestra pit and support rooms backstage.

“I personally would like to thank every person who has given anywhere from \$10 to \$20,000 toward the new Tower Theater,” Cooper said. “You may never realize what a blessing you have been to this department, our students and our future students.”

For more information on giving to Liberty’s Performing Arts Theater Capital Campaign, call (800) 368-3801 or visit www.liberty.edu/giving.