

Act 1 to curtain call: A history on the Sandusky State Theatre

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Editor's note: The following article and related information appeared in the Register's special bicentennial commemorative edition, which printed in 2018, marking Sandusky's 200-year anniversary.

Chris Parthemore, Sandusky State Theatre executive director

SANDUSKY - In 1918, 100 years ago, the West House, a local hotel located at Columbus Avenue and Water Street, was demolished.

Almost immediately a local tailor, William F. Seitz, began negotiating to purchase the land with the dream of bringing a theater to Sandusky.

Several years later, Mr. Seitz would meet J.M. Schine, president of Schine Enterprises. Soon after Schine Enterprises and the Seitz Theatre Co. would work together to open the Schine Theatre in October 1928. The opening night feature was "The Night Watch," starring Billie Dove.

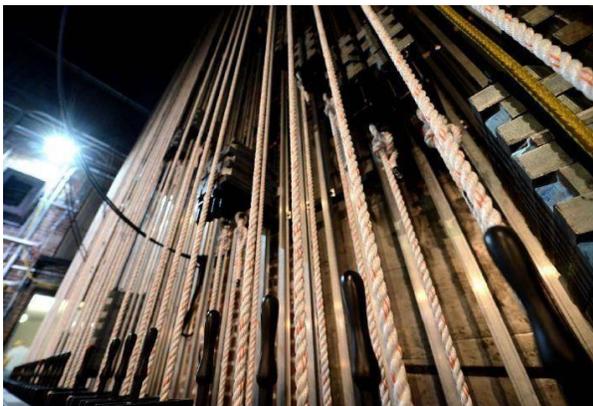
Originally planned as a vaudeville house, the Schine Theatre was designed by Dutch architect Peter M. Hulsken. Mr. Hulsken was a graduate of the Ecolé des Beaux Artisan in Paris. He was also a member of the American Institute of Architects and specialized in theaters.

In the coming decades, the theater would have several names and play many different roles in the community. We have seen many types of performing arts featuring artists such as Shirley Temple, B.B. King, David Copperfield, Ray Charles and Willie Nelson, among others.

We are lucky to have such a rich past and strong ties to the arts in Sandusky, but, as we celebrate the bicentennial, it has been clear that we've done so with our eyes on the future. Sandusky's renaissance has also seen new investment in the arts. Public art is making a comeback, the city has a renewed focus on art, and the Sandusky State Theatre has been able to put its best foot forward this year.

In addition to putting on summer concerts, our usual lineup of shows, and bringing Broadway back to Sandusky, we've opened our doors as a community gathering place and have put an emphasis on arts education.

In the coming years, as we close in on the theater's 100th birthday in 2028, we will continue to bring prized performers, work with



the children of Sandusky to provide educational opportunities and continue to restore this beautiful historical landmark.

We look forward to seeing you at the show.

Timeline of notable Sandusky State Theatre events

- 1918: The West House, a local hotel located at Columbus Avenue and Water Street, was demolished.

1918-1928: William F. Seitz would meet J.M. Schine, president of Schine Enterprises. Soon after Schine Enterprises and the Seitz Theatre Co. would work together to open the Schine Theatre in October 1928. The opening night feature was "The Night Watch," starring Billie Dove. The theater was owned by the Seitz family from the 1930s to 1980s.

- 1961: The Golden Voiced Marvel Page organ was sold to keep the theater afloat. The organ was sold to Detroit resident Lloyd Bunt.

- 1980-1982: Robert Neubauer leased the theater from the Seitz family, bringing back movies, adding amateur nights, concerts and stage shows.

- 1982: Thelma Jefferson and husband Leonard purchased the Sandusky State Theatre from the Seitz family.

- 1982: "Boxcar Willie" played on May 8.

- 1988: Thelma Jefferson sold the theater for \$170,000 to the Sandusky State Theatre, a state-chartered institution.

- 1989: Ray Charles performed on July 22.

- 1991: Dizzy Gillespie performed on June 7; Roger Miller performed on June 22.

- 1992-93: About \$1.1 million is secured in private fundraising for renovations at the theater.

- 1993: Johnny Cash and June Carter performed on Oct. 26.

- 1995: The Golden Voiced Marvel Page organ returned to the theater. The previous owner decided to donate and return the organ to its original home after 34 years of having it on display in his two Michigan homes.

- 1999: The Broadway musical "Little Orphan Annie" played on Oct. 21; Beach Boys members Mike Love and Bruce Johnston performed on Oct. 22.

- 2001: Joan Jett performed on May 10.

- 2003: Carrot Top performed on April 22; Michael Borton performed on Oct. 11; B.B. King performed on Nov. 7.

- 2005: The theater closes due to financial reasons but reopens in 2006, thanks to a fundraising campaign led by the late Ruth Frost Parker and her foundation.

- 2014: Bill Cosby performed on Jan. 30; Ron White performed there on May 2; "Legally Blonde: The Musical" played on Aug. 1;

- 2017: Ohio Gov. John Kasich delivered his State of the State speech on April 4; The theater received \$750,000 in state capital improvements to upgrade its lighting, sound and rigging systems.

- 2018: New curtains debut at the theater; Broadway's "Monty Python's Spamalot" played on Nov 21-22.

- 2019: "Letters from Anne & Martin" plays on Feb. 11; In November, the theater hosts its 91st fundraising event, Under the Sea, to generate funds for theater improvements.

- 2020: "Finding Neverland" played on March 11; The coronavirus pandemic forced the theater to cancel shows throughout most of the year; On June 10, the structure's roof partially collapsed, destroying the stage and many other inside areas.