

Friends of the Opera House

PO Box 493

Elgin, OR 97827

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislature,

For the record my name is Kathy Bonney and I am the Executive Assistant for the Friends of the Opera House in Elgin Oregon. I am sharing our story about our post pandemic challenges.

- In the fall of 2021 after being closed for over 20 months we decided to produce Matilda, previously scheduled for March of 2020. The federal and state funds we received were invaluable to the success of the performances and gave us confidence that even though our audience was about a third of capacity, we would be able to survive financially. As our community struggled financially, these funds were also used to scholarship actors and students that would not have been able to participate without financial assistance.
- The long-term effects of being closed for so long was the loss of our audience. A show that should have been a sell-out was performed for a much smaller crowd. We even experienced hesitation from our faithful actors. Every aspect of our business was negatively affected by the pandemic. Our audience continues to grow at a steady pace, but it has been a long slow road to recovery.
- Our programs were thriving in 2019 with record numbers of audiences, successful camps and studio classes. We had become a regional entertainment draw. Over 60% of our audiences came from outside Union County. The pandemic stopped the momentum of our brand and it was like starting over. We are hopeful that 2023 sees us reach the levels of participation that we enjoyed in 2019.
- The town of Elgin has a population of about 1800. With the closure of one of the two mills in town, the economic impact of that event and the pandemic has been experienced by all commerce in town. With the shuttering of the Opera House in 2020 and half of 2021, this impact was compounded. Economic revival in small communities is slower than in metropolitan areas. At the Opera House we would normally produce 3 to 4 main stage and 3 to 4 small stage productions per year with casts between 15 to 60 actors. Each show runs 3 to 4 weeks and brings in audiences of 150 for small stage to 750 for the main stage each weekend. These folks eat in the restaurants, buy fuel, shop in the stores and truly support Elgin and all of Union County. The economic impact of the closure was felt throughout the region.

The Friends of the Opera House and all of our actors and audiences have a resilient spirit. We will continue to bring quality, family friendly entertainment to Northeast Oregon in the true tradition of the pioneers that settled this area. Our programs have benefitted from the funding the State of Oregon Legislature has provided and we look forward to our future with optimism.

Though we are on the road to post pandemic recovery our path is not without many struggles, so we ask for your continued support so that live theater can once again thrive in Northeast Oregon. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathy Bonney

Executive Assistant