



SOUTHERN KENTUCKY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

Arts of Southern Kentucky releases “State of the Arts” one-year review

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BOWLING GREEN, KY – Today, Arts of Southern Kentucky (ASK), which manages the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center (SKyPAC), presented a one-year review of the “State of the Arts” in south central Kentucky. The announcement comes as SKyPAC celebrates ten years since opening its doors.

Since a renovation of Bowling Green’s beloved Capitol Theater on Fountain Square was completed in 1981, the Capitol, along with Van Meter Auditorium at Western Kentucky University, stood as Bowling Green’s primary venues for major performing arts activities, especially those touring from outside the region. However, by the end of the next decade it was becoming clear that the Capitol had built an audience for larger productions than Bowling Green could accommodate.

A group of concerned civic leaders, not only interested in creating a new, larger venue for the Performing Arts, but also creating an attraction that would help stimulate downtown development, sought support for such a center. In July 2000, Warren County created the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center, Inc. (SKyPAC) to accept a \$6.7 million dollar appropriation from the Commonwealth of Kentucky designed to fund early architectural and feasibility studies, acquire land, hire architects and fund early operating costs. Through the support of donors, volunteers, and county government, during the following ten years, SKyPAC presented a variety of entertainment, invited thousands of school children to the facility for educational programming, and welcomed thousands of visitors from 30 US states and three foreign countries.

“Everyone in our region knows what a treasure SKyPAC is. But it has had its ups and downs over the years,” said ASK president and CEO Jeff Reed. “I am happy to announce that since the merger of Orchestra Kentucky and SKyPAC Foundation, Inc. fifteen months ago, the ‘state of the arts’ in south central Kentucky is strong.”

Reed pointed to several community outreach programs initiated during the past year:

- **SKyPASS: Arts Access for All**, which provides up to four (4) *complimentary tickets* to underserved Kentuckians for most Orchestra Kentucky, SKyPAC Main Stage and BG OnStage performances. Partner organizations throughout the ten-county BRADD region determine eligibility so that only those who receive financial assistance from the Commonwealth of Kentucky may participate. In three months’ time, over 100 tickets have been distributed.

Arts of Southern Kentucky, Inc
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- **Curtains Up!** which makes the Rita and Jim Scott Concert Hall available at no charge to kindergarten through post-secondary performing groups.
- **Junior Orff xylophone ensemble**, where children learn the rudiments of reading music
- **Youth Orchestra**, where junior and senior high school instrumentalists are exposed to the great symphonic composers
- **The Golden Chorale**, a community choir for senior adults to enjoy fellowship and music
- **Free meeting space** for nonprofit organizations during weekday business hours
- Offering the **main gallery** and **Carol Wedge Theater** to ArtWorks and Fountain Square Players at little or no cost.
- **Back Stage Pass tours** of SKyPAC to introduce the community to the people's art center
- **BG OnStage** musical theater performances and lessons

Arts of Southern Kentucky is also mindful of the role that diversity, equity, and inclusion play in this time of growth and is making strong efforts to create a welcoming atmosphere for everyone. Diversity committee chair D.C. Clement recalled the early vision of SKyPAC as “being the living room of the community. The goal has not been met for all communities in our area, including African American, Hispanic, and Bosnian communities.” The committee is working hard to make that goal a reality with efforts that have included increased engagement with African American community leaders, increased access to spaces needed for hosting events which encourage and celebrate a myriad of cultures, and offering more programming that would appeal to a wider variety of audiences. The committee is excited to announce that Black Violin, a classical hip-hop group, will perform next season.

On the earned income front, ASK has enjoyed six sold-out performances over the past year from both the Orchestra Kentucky and Main Stage series. Orchestra Kentucky has experienced the highest average paid attendance in its 21-year history this season. Concession sales have also increased, due to a greater efficiency that creates shorter wait times at events. Rental income from SKyPAC is also increasing, with several local, regional, and national groups renting the facility for meetings, pageants, parties and concerts.

According to Reed, the generosity of donors and sponsors has enabled ASK to make the arts more accessible to everyone, regardless of socio-economic status or race. “The community support over our first year has been inspiring,” said Reed. “With Warren County’s support, and that of private individuals and businesses, we are able to make our facility more of a community center where all citizens may enjoy its use.”

Reed said the community support has come in many ways. In addition to the \$1,000,000 gift from Rita and Jim Scott to name the concert hall, membership in the organization’s multi-year giving program has grown from 70 to 155 households in a little over one year. “Thanks to the leadership of Rita Scott and the hard work of our development staff, we have seen phenomenal growth in our Elm Street Society. The group offers donors a way to show their support for the arts and enjoy certain benefits like prime parking at SKyPAC, quarterly private events, stage door access, and trips.”

ASK’s development team is also celebrating a record-breaking year. “Our fundraising staff has set a record, raising the most money in the shortest amount of time in the history of the building,” said Reed.

Finally, the Arts of Southern Kentucky Foundation has been established, which will help ensure the long-term health of the organization.

According to Reed, all the good news means that ASK has no operating debt and is on track to finish the fiscal year with a surplus. Reed attributes the solid financial health of the organization to the aforementioned support, but also a business plan that focuses on practical programming. “We have a little less than 1,700 seats. There is a limit to the acts that we can book that make sense, financially. During this time of COVID and other challenges, we have purposefully minimized the risk in what we program. Instead of booking expensive artist’s programs that *might* sell out but might lose money, we’ve booked events that will make money with a more modest audience size. It’s important that we have a plan that is viable; one that will guide us well into the future,” said Reed. “Once we have a proven plan that works, the board will be able to evaluate future investment in larger, more expensive artists. The organization must determine what will be fiscally responsible so that we continue down the path of solid financial health. Right now, it’s not a good business decision.”

Reed also stressed the importance of being a positive cultural force in the community. “My background is in music. I understand how the arts can change people’s lives. I also understand that it is very difficult to operate an opera company without considerable underwriting. We will continue to evaluate future opportunities for presenting high quality art, while balancing fiscal responsibility so as not to jeopardize the health of our organization.”

“The future of arts and entertainment in our region is definitely brighter,” said Reed. “We are blessed to live in an incredible community, where people believe in and support our work. But we have a lot of work to do. I am confident that we have the team and a plan to do it.”

ARTS OF SOUTHERN KENTUCKY

Orchestra Kentucky - Founded in 2000, Orchestra Kentucky of Bowling Green quickly became south central Kentucky’s professional orchestra. Its members have performed with ensembles such as the Cincinnati, St. Louis, Dallas, Nashville, Charleston and Louisville orchestras. With more than 1,000 subscribers in a community of approximately 60,000, the orchestra attributes its success to innovative programming, designed to appeal to a variety of audiences.

Orchestra Kentucky has backed legendary entertainers, including Neil Sedaka, Glen Campbell, Kenny Rogers, Paul Williams and The 5th Dimension. It is involved in commissioning new works by popular performers, premiering compositions by Neil Sedaka, Keith Emerson, Peter Tork, Jimmy Webb, and PDQ Bach.

Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center - A premier entertainment center, SKyPAC is a multi-use facility located in downtown Bowling Green, KY. The facility includes the Rita and Jim Scott Concert Hall, a 1,700-seat state-of-the-art auditorium; The Renshaw Education Center, which houses the Carol Wedge Studio Theater - a flexible 2,600 sq. ft. space for intimate productions and gatherings; several multi-functional rehearsal halls/classrooms; a children’s art gallery and a main gallery.

Jeffrey Reed - Jeffrey Reed, music director, founded Orchestra Kentucky in 2000. Since then, he has conducted orchestras in Detroit, Indianapolis, Nashville, South Korea, Milan, Italy and St. Petersburg, Russia. He has twice conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at London's Albert Hall. Bestselling author and marketer Seth Godin singled Reed out in his best-selling study of new creativity, "Small is the New Big." Godin praised his "clever" concerts and praised the "totally different way" Reed approaches programming. In 2015, the University of Louisville named Reed its Alumni Fellow for the School of Music in recognition of his distinguished work in his chosen field. In 2008, he received the Jefferson Award for public service in South Central Kentucky. In 2020, Reed was named President & CEO of Arts of Southern Kentucky – a new organization created when Orchestra Kentucky assumed management of the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center.

In 2020, with the assistance of the Warren County Fiscal Court and Judge Michael O. Buchanon, Orchestra Kentucky assumed management of the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center (SKyPAC). The new organization, titled Arts of Southern Kentucky, is led administrative and artistically by Jeffrey Reed.

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