

OUR VIEW : A Victory for all

Benton County Daily Record

Posted on Thursday, April 16, 2009

URL: <http://www.nwanews.com/bcdr/Editorial/72560/>

Way back when, during a time most of us don't remember, the Victory Theater in downtown Rogers opened as the first motion-picture theater in northwest Arkansas.

The day was Dec. 5, 1927. Calvin Coolidge was our president. The Grand Ole Opry was about to make its first radio broadcast. Earlier that year, Charles Lindbergh had become the first pilot to fly nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean - from New York to Paris. Babe Ruth was in his prime for the Yankees.

One can imagine the excitement that the Victory Theater's opening produced. Remember, this was a time before the Internet, before television, before a cell phone on every hip. A movie theater? That was really something. Opening night drew people from all over northwest Arkansas.

More than 80 years later, we are celebrating the Victory Theater again. It might not be as big a deal as it was back then, but there certainly is reason for glee.

The Rogers Little Theater will host a building dedication and open house from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at the Victory Theater. The event is a celebration of the completion of the theater company's capital campaign.

Just a couple of years ago, such an event was hard to imagine. The Rogers Little Theater purchased and renovated the building in 2000 but had struggled to pay off the \$2.7 million it had borrowed for the renovation project. Foreclosure wasn't exactly imminent, but it was clear the theater company needed a windfall to bail it out of its financial predicament.

That's when the Walton Family Foundation announced it would be giving the Rogers Little Theater a \$750,000 matching grant. Dozens of private donors stepped up, and the banks agreed to discount the debt. And last August, Rogers Mayor Steve Womack officially signed off on the city's purchase of the Victory Theater, which would relieve the theater group of its debt altogether. The city is now leasing the Victory to the Rogers Little Theater.

A bailout? You could call it that. But lending a hand to a nonprofit that provides quality entertainment for our area and is part of the foundation of Benton County's arts scene doesn't make us squirm as much as the thought of pumping billions into banks or the auto industry.

Downtown Rogers has withered some in the shadow of the Pinnacle Hills Promenade. Lacking much of a retail draw, downtown's identity rests on the presence of live theater.

With its debt out of the way, the Rogers Little Theater can put the money it raises into its programs. And there have been many good programs - for kids as well as adults - over the past year.

The thespians of the Rogers Little Theater continue to shine. Starting this weekend, they will present Neil Simon's "Rumors" at the Victory.

As times have changed, so has the Victory Theater, but its continued presence in Rogers is a win-win situation.