

IPAC: An East Valley Broadway?

By STEVE TALBOT
PHOTOS BY STEVE TALBOT AND COURTESY IPAC

Ever heard of IPAC? It is not a bureaucratic treaty or a strategic defense organization. IPAC stands for Indio Performing Arts Center, which the City has said is the cornerstone for turning downtown into a nighttime entertainment destination. IPAC is providing plenty of quality entertainment right now, tucked away in a kind of “off Broadway” location.

The Center is located at 45175 Fargo Street, 4.5 miles from Shadow Hills, west of Jackson Street and north of Civic Center Drive on Fargo. GPS said it was a 13-minute trip. I got there a little quicker.

So why all the excitement about IPAC? Well, it is four theatrical venues built into one large structure that used to be a stand-alone movie theater. Old Towne Playhouse, which seats 127, is the center piece, showcasing **EIGHT**, live Broadway-style plays and musicals from September – April. *On Golden Pond*, starring SCSH resident actor Arnie Kleban, finished a well-received run in February. *Grease* makes its musical appearance in March.



SCSH residents Arnie and Janna Kleban perform a scene from Desert Theatreworks' production of Neil Simon's "45 Seconds from Broadway." (Courtesy IPAC)

The other venues are the Village Theater, a working movie theater; Cabaret Theater, used mostly for play rehearsals; and the large Expo Hall, seating 320, making it ideal for weddings, holiday parties, and other social events. A featured bar also gives theater-goers a chance to enjoy refreshments while watching the play, during intermission, or after its conclusion.

Desert Theatreworks (DT), a not-for-profit 501(c)3 community theatre company, reached an agreement with the City in April 2017 to be the sole tenant and operator of the facilities after a very successful four years at another

location in Palm Desert. Both DT Chief Executive Officer Ron Phillips-Martinez and Indio Community Services Manager Jim Curtis said the arrangement has been a good one.

“We struggled for a long time here at IPAC,” Curtis said. “We’ve always used it for little things, but that isn’t what this facility was re-designed for. It’s an entertainment performing arts center. When Desert Theatreworks approached us with their big show philosophy, it solved another need, getting IPAC known and attracting people to come.”



Nighttime at the IPAC, when the public comes out to see plays that have been performed on Broadway. (Courtesy IPAC)

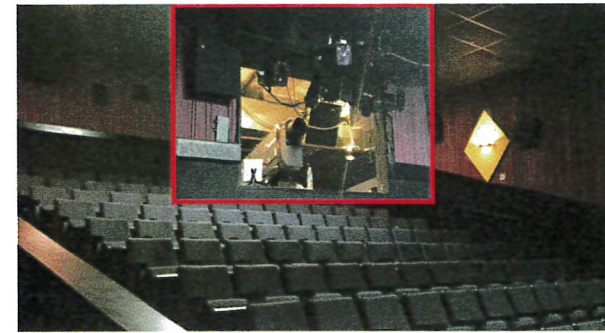


Set construction is underway in Old Towne Playhouse, the IPAC venue where Desert Theatreworks presents its plays. (By Steve Talbot)

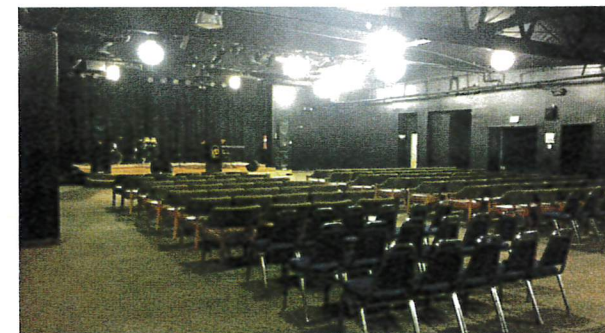
DT also caters to the community. “We do not go dark in the summer,” Phillips-Martinez said. “We put on benefits, smaller productions, our Children’s Playhouse and Summer Camps. There is a free series of four Sunday afternoon play readings. Seniors, thereby, get a chance to read from a script rather than memorize and can stay active with theater. In return we can present less popular works that might be too costly to produce on a large

stage. DT has monthly movies and free sing-alongs, a continuing education class meets here, and we are putting together programs for line dancing and acting classes.”

Despite the fact that DT cannot use paid actors, its productions have received more than 40 Desert Theater League awards. Bringing a play to the stage requires community volunteers for everything from acting to concessions. Opportunities abound for SCSH residents.



Village Theater serves as the movie house venue for IPAC. (By Steve Talbot)



Expo Hall is IPAC's largest venue, seating 320; it can be rented for weddings, rehearsals, public and social events. (Courtesy IPAC)



Desert Theatreworks uses IPAC's Cabaret Theater for rehearsals and for this summer's musical programming. (By Steve Talbot)

How long has the IPAC building existed? Curtis did not really know, although it was “a shell” when he came to work for the City 15 years ago. Arnie’s wife, Janna, also an actor, remembers

what it was like five years later, “When we first walked in there, it was being used as a school with the three theaters as classrooms, and a choo choo train thing that served food to the kids.”

According to Arnie, soon after, he and three partners made a formal proposal to City Council. “The City was looking for something to do with the building. I told them 20,000 seniors living within 4-5 miles of the facility could keep a theater going. The City initially gave us \$300,000, paid for all utilities, telephone, electricity,” Kleban remembered. “They helped renovate the place. We even brought in consultants to make the theater soundproof because trains go by.”



An attractive bar offers refreshments that theater-goers can take with them to enjoy while watching a play. (By Steve Talbot)

While Arnie has moved on to other pursuits, he and Janna hope more money becomes available to renovate the other theaters, by adding stages that don’t currently exist and more outside lighting around the theater, although Janna feels the area is “very safe.”

Curtis and the City have even bigger goals. “We want to transform downtown into an area that is walking-friendly with shopping, quality restaurants, coffee bars, and taverns where you can stop for a nice bite to eat or a quick drink before crossing the commons to see a quality play at IPAC,” Curtis said. “IPAC is at the helm for making all that happen.”

Play performance schedules, facility rentals, auditions, and volunteer opportunities can be found at indio.org/your_government/city_manager/indio_performing_arts_center and www.dtworks.org.



Contact the author at writers2fyou@gmail.com.