



Urban Times

ARCHIVES

FROM: AUGUST 2008

Festival gets a real home

DURING ITS FIRST THREE YEARS, THE Indianapolis Theatre Fringe Festival was able to find headquarters space in vacant Mass Ave properties.

Now, thanks to a deal worked out with property owner R.L. Young, the festival known as IndyFringe has a real home – the historic church building at 719 E. St. Clair St. But the space will become much more than just the administrative office for the burgeoning festival. Pauline Moffat, the IndyFringe executive director, said that once renovated, the building will:

- ❑ Become the home of “FringeNext” performances, the element of the festival which features productions for student-aged groups.

- ❑ Provide year-round accessible, low-cost space to independent artists for both performances and rehearsals.

To achieve the latter goal, Moffat said her organization wants to partner with a young actor’s theater company to produce performances year-round.

“The new space will allow the festival to remain close to its traditional home on Massachusetts Avenue while providing additional space to increase shows for the 2009 festival,” IndyFringe Executive Director Pauline Moffat said when the deal was announced in early July.

The IndyFringe Board of Directors has agreed to complete a major renovation of the building, in exchange for discounted monthly rents – and a three-year option-to-buy. The structure won’t become the full-time home to the festival until that work is completed in 2009.

The need to create an additional venue for IndyFringe



▲ The historic church building on St. Clair Street just east of College Avenue will be the administrative home of the Indianapolis Theatre Fringe Festival, and also offer the festival a venue where groups can rehearse and perform year-round.

productions was necessitated by the massive response to the first three years of the festival, Moffat said, “as demand for venues quickly outstripped available theater space in the Mass Ave Art & Theater District.” During its upcoming 10-day run, IndyFringe productions will be featured in the Phoenix Theatre, Theater on the Square, the Athenaeum (in both the Auditorium and American Cabaret Theatre), and ComedySports.

To help facilitate the renovation, IndyFringe has received a façade grant of almost \$4,000 from the Local Initiative Support Corp., for the re-painting of the building in tradi-

FRINGE HOME / page 2

tional “little white church” style, with a palette of black, charcoal and white. The building will also feature new red doors, increased handicap accessibility and a new roof.

The decision to renovate the building came about after the completion of a feasibility study underwritten by the Christel De Haan Family Foundation. The historic building has not served a congregation for many years, and was most recently occupied by a flea market business, and before that by a metal sculptor.

Moffat said that IndyFringe’s development beyond the 10-day festival is typical of other such festivals. “Many Fringe fests (including Indy’s) make important contributions to local arts and culture year-round,” she said. “Indy FringeFest sponsors performances throughout the year and returns 100 percent of admission revenue to its performers.” She said that, during the first three years of its existence, IndyFringe returned over \$202,000 to performing artists alone, with another \$12,000 going to visual artists and \$40,000 to local theatres.

“Perhaps most excitingly, these numbers are only expected to go up, as Festival attendance is projected to increase by two thousand attendees each year,” Moffat said.

In addition to funding the arts, studies indicate that IndyFringe has also brought an estimated revenue of over \$1 million to Massachusetts Avenue businesses over the past three years, Moffat added. “IndyFringe works closely with the Mass Ave Merchants Association to increase attendee accessibility.” She pointed to another grant IndyFringe has received to link the various blocks of the Avenue together with color-coded “feather flags.” The flags, she said, will direct visitors to Fringe events as well as to retail and dining opportunities.

“The flags will improve visibility for pedestrians and help moderate automobile traffic,” Moffat said, adding that many Mass Ave retailers will offer 10-percent discounts to anyone wearing an IndyFringe “backer button” (which are required before visitors can purchase an IndyFringe ticket). Retailers reported a 20-percent increase in business in 2007 with the inaugural button discount program,’ Moffat said. ■