

## David A. Straz, Jr. Center For The Performing Arts Celebrates 25th Anniversary

By Karen McBride

Up until the 1980s, Tampa had been primarily an industrial city. Warehouses lined the Hillsborough River. Surrounding cities began embracing the cultural society. St. Petersburg had the Mahaffey Theater, Clearwater had Ruth Eckerd Hall, and Sarasota had Van Wezel Hall. Mayor Bob Martinez formed a committee to begin planning a civic center in Tampa. In the early stages, the members were unsure how much impact a performing arts center would have on the growing city.

The David A. Straz, Jr. Center for the Performing Arts (Straz Center) opened in 1987 and was originally named the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. The name was changed in 2009, after David A. Straz, Jr. and his wife Catherine Lowry, through the David A. Straz, Jr. Foundation, made a substantial donation to the center. The retired bank investor and his wife enjoy supporting the arts and the community. He has served on the board of the Tampa General Hospital and University of Tampa and she on the Lowry Park Board (although no relation to the namesake).

The Straz Center will celebrate its 25th Anniversary with special activities and opportunities such as \$25 tickets and Fan Favorite Performances. A free 25th Anniversary Open House will be held on Sunday, October 21, from 10 am to 3 pm and a 25th Anniversary Gala on Saturday, December 1, where the Tony Award-winning actress, singer and songwriter Idina Menzel will perform.

The 335,000 square foot facility is owned by the City of Tampa and operated by the David A. Straz, Jr. Performing Arts Center, Inc. a non-profit corporation. The Straz Center has five theatres: Carol Morsani Hall, Louise Lykes Ferguson Hall, Jaeb theatre, the

TECO Energy Foundation Theater, and the Hinks and Elaine Shimberg Playhouse.

The 2,610-seat Carol Morsani Hall, with its 120-foot stage, and horseshoe-shaped seating is the ideal place to see Broadway shows, operas, ballets, and orchestral concerts. Frank and Carol Morsani have made substantial contributions to the community. The automobile dealer and his wife were not always well off. She remembers when they had to eat popcorn and tomato soup for dinner because the money ran out before the next paycheck. During those early days, her husband taught her that you can contribute to your community, even if you cannot donate money, you can donate your time. That's when she became involved in Brownies, Girl Scouts, and at church as a Sunday school teacher.

Louise Lykes Ferguson Hall has two tiers of curved balconies and orchestra seating. The hall seats 1,040 and can be used for corporate meetings, lectures and seminars. Stella Ferguson Thayer and Howell L Ferguson and their families donated \$4 million in honor of Louise Lykes Ferguson.

The Jaeb Theatre has three levels and seats 289. The cabaret-style seating, with round tables and chairs gives you the perfect view of the stage on any level. Robert and Lorena Jaeb's gift to the Capitol Fund Drive in 1985 helped establish the endowment fund for the David A. Straz, Jr. Center for the Performing Arts. The Jaeb's owned Shop & Go convenience stores and later sold them to Circle K.

TECO Energy Foundation Theater, located on the first floor of the Patel Conservatory, seats 250. It is designed for performing arts education and is used for rehearsals and performances. "Patel Conservatory Youth Theater Produces" and showcases of Patel Conservatory classes including "Rock School" are held in the

theater.

In 2000, Hinks and Elaine Shimberg donated \$1 million. The Playhouse was named in their honor and holds 150. The Shimberg Playhouse is perfect for poets, musicians, comedians, performance artists, and small theater companies. The seating can be arranged in traditional, three-quarter or theater-in-the-round seating, as needed for the performance.

The Dr. Pallavi Patel Performing Arts Conservatory (the Patel Conservatory), named for Drs. Kiran and Pallavi Patel for their \$5 million donation, has three dance studios, a sound/lighting



*Shows at the Straz Center are sure to bring smiles to all ages!*

laboratory, technical theater workshop, costume shop and state-of-the-art black box TECO Theater. Since it opened in 2004, more than 12,000 children and adults have enrolled in the seasonal, after school and year-round courses in music, theater, dance and media arts. In 2012, the conservatory received accreditation status from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School

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October shows include "You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up". The comedy, starring Jonathan Van Dyke and Gabrielle Mirabella, is a humorous look at marriage on a couple's 10th anniversary. Couples can relate to the quips between them, as the husband appears to be giving his wife a neck rub as she goes on and on about something, and she asks "what are you doing?", the husband's response "looking for the mute button!" Tickets start at \$35.50 and the show is held in the Jaeb Theater.

Orchestra aficionados will enjoy the Florida Orchestra when they present Opening Night:

Beethoven to Bernstein on October 20. Jekyll and Hyde, starring Constantine Maroulis, who gained fame on American Idol, and R&B singer, Deborah Cox, will be at the Straz Center from October 23-28, in Carol Marsoni Hall. The musical is based on the novella "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by Robert Louis Stevenson, about a London doctor who discovers he has an alter ego, while trying to find a cure for his father's mental illness. Wicked, the tale of two witches, based on the Wizard of Oz, will be coming in January, 2013. Tickets are on sale now, starting at \$71.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays at 10 a.m., guided tours are available for the public and they begin outside the Straz Center's Ticket Office. For groups of 10 or more call 813-222-1065. This 90-minute tour of the Straz Center takes you through both the public and backstage spaces of America's largest performing arts centers.

Attending performances at the Straz Center can also include

a nice meal at Maestros, above the Jaeb Theater. The restaurant offers a more formal dining experience and reservations are needed.

Within Morsani Hall, you will find Maestro's Café, a buffet style restaurant that offers a variety of food. To enjoy the beautiful view of the Hillsborough River, patrons may choose to dine outside at Maestro's on the River.

The Straz Center is located at 1010 North WC MacInnes Place, Tampa, FL 33602. Valet parking

is available. Additional parking is available at Poe Parking Garage, and surrounding lots.

Tickets can be purchased at the Ticket Sales Office, which is open Monday through Saturday noon-8 p.m. and Sunday, noon-6 p.m. Season tickets can be purchased and discounts are offered for seniors, students, and groups of 20 or more. For more information, contact the Ticket Office at 813-229-STAR (7827) or visit the website at www.strazcenter.org.



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