

THE COLONIAL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

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With new second venue *SHOWROOM* completed, renovations set to begin on The Colonial Performing Arts Center's historic theatre.

COVID-related shutdown provides opportunity to condense project timeline to a one-year renovation, with plans to reopen in first quarter of 2022.

KEENE, NH – Twenty months ago, the Board of Directors of The Colonial Theatre announced its intention to transform the 95-year-old live performance and film venue into a world-class *Colonial Performing Arts Center*, offering expanded opportunities and greater accessibility to performers, audiences and students.

Beginning last spring, the organization took an important step in that process by acquiring and renovating a second building which now houses *SHOWROOM*, The Colonial Performing Arts Center's smaller, multipurpose venue tailored for emerging artists, local performers and educational programming.

Today officials announced that renovations are beginning on The Colonial's main stage and lobby, accelerating this final phase of the project from a two-year effort to a one-year plan.

While the accelerated timeline will keep the Main Street venue closed to performances for a year, pending COVID protocols, the community will have access to arts programming in the new second venue, according to Alec Doyle, Executive Director of The Colonial Performing Arts Center.

“With our brand-new *SHOWROOM* now complete, the community will have a fantastic venue for film and smaller performances while construction is happening on our main theatre over the coming year,” he said. “We are confident that *SHOWROOM* will be a wonderful place for people to gather and appreciate the performing arts as soon as the current healthcare crisis allows.”

According to Doyle, The Colonial’s leadership team decided that the COVID-19 situation presented both a challenge and a unique opportunity when it came to renovations of the main theatre. “Under the projected reopening timing and guidelines, our theatre would have only been open to very limited-capacity audiences for much of 2021 anyway,” he said. “With that in mind, we felt the tradeoff of staying dark for a full year – yet completing our renovations in half the originally planned time – was a smarter alternative for our patrons and for our organization’s long-term fiscal stability.”

“We hope and expect that there will be live performances in our beautifully renovated main theatre beginning in the first quarter of 2022,” Doyle said, “and with both buildings in full operation The Colonial Performing Arts Center will be able to play a significant role in helping re-energize our whole community after this health care crisis ends.”

With architectural plans by local firm Weller & Michal Architects, the local office of DEW Construction will begin work on the main theatre this month. The project will include extensive renovations and expansions, providing greater accessibility to performers, audiences and students. The renovated theatre will feature a spacious ticket lobby, a patron lounge and a dedicated concessions area, as well as improvements to restrooms and administrative offices. Plans also call for increased energy efficiency and reliance on renewable energy with all new high-efficiency heating and air conditioning systems, enhanced insulation and replacement of all exterior windows and doors.

Importantly, the project also features crucial enhancements to the stage and backstage area, including an enlarged stage, new rigging and staging technologies, creation of an artist green room and new, contemporary dressing rooms – all of which theatre representatives say will help attract world-class performers and performances.

“Our programming has historically been defined by the physical limitations of a theatre which was originally designed for vaudeville productions and film,” said Doyle. “Production and technological demands of the performing arts in 2021 and beyond are dramatically different from nearly a century ago – and today we’re simply unable to host certain performances.”

“That all changes with this exciting project,” he said.

The Colonial’s new *SHOWROOM* is located at 20 Commercial Street in Keene, where it shares the public parking lot behind the existing theatre’s main stage building. The building was the former location of Downtown Fitness for Women and the Lady of America fitness center. Designed by local architect Dan Scully, the venue features seating for 150 patrons, including an automated, retractable seating unit on the first floor, as well as fixed seating on a second-floor wraparound balcony. The retractable first floor seating allows the venue to quickly convert to a flat club-style floor for concerts, dances or functions accommodating up to 280 guests. In addition, the venue features state-of-the-art LED lighting and audio systems, HD video projection capability with surround sound, and a 20-foot-wide cinema screen. There is also a catering kitchen that allows *SHOWROOM* to accommodate a wide range of events.

“We know there is pent-up demand in Keene and the region for a more intimate venue that appeals to a younger demographic and *SHOWROOM* will fulfill that need. It is going to be a wonderful place to present emerging music artists, local performers, comedy and spoken word,

educational presentations and lots of other programming that complements The Colonial's main auditorium presentations," said Doyle.

According to Abigail Abrash Walton, Board Chair, the project is being funded through private gifts from individuals, businesses and foundations. "There has been a wonderfully positive community response to the unveiling of the Colonial's long-term plans," she said. "Just one measure of this community's support is the fact that to date, we have quietly reached 67% of our Capital Campaign goal. This robust level of early support has allowed the Colonial to complete the work to date and to support the next stages happening in the coming months."

"The Colonial is a proven success story in advancing the arts and economic prosperity of our region," said Abrash Walton. "When our vision is completed in early 2022, we expect this enhanced performing arts center to provide outstanding service to patrons and deliver even more diverse arts programming for current and new audiences."

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For more information:

<https://thecolonial.org/about/the-next-act-setting-the-stage-for-the-next-100-years>

Named to the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places in 2004, The Colonial Theatre is the Monadnock Region's preeminent performing arts venue, and a key component in the economic engine of downtown Keene and the surrounding area. Annually, more than 50,000 patrons enjoy performances ranging from international touring productions and concerts, to niche film screenings, to locally produced performances. The Colonial's Student Matinee Series engages more than 8,000 students and their educators from over 70 area schools to experience a variety of programs and workshops. Local arts organizations and other nonprofits use The Colonial's production resources and rely on the theatre as their performance home and fundraising venue, enhancing the cultural and creative spirit of the Monadnock Region.