

Legacy *Matters*



in this issue: Nov/Dec 2015

Smart Investment:
Performing Arts
in the Valley

Donor Spotlight:
Gary & Francesca
Scarpa

Good News:
Responsive
Grants
Announced

Smart Investment: *Performing Arts in the Valley*



Valley Shakespeare Festival has been bringing the Bard's classics to life through Shakespeare in the Park productions each summer (above) and an Education Initiative (below) to help students better understand and appreciate the works.



Derby's Sterling Opera House could be a vital part of the city's future downtown revitalization.



*Center Stage Theatre provides entertainment and opportunities for local residents - on stage and off - with an annual season of four or more productions, such as *Peter Pan* (above) and *The Christmas Carol* (below).*



There is no denying that the performing arts can have a vital impact on the quality of life in a community.

Theatre, dance and the like draw patrons and performers to a city or region for entertainment, education and employment.

"Valley Shakespeare Festival was started with the goal of becoming a nationally recognized regional theatre, to the area," explains Artistic Director Tom Simonetti. "We employ members of Actor's Equity as well as locals and offer an extremely rigorous summer intern program for youth who are interested in the arts as a profession."

Since its establishment in 2013, Valley Shakespeare Festival has created unique opportunities for people to experience the Bard: in the park, in the bar, and in school.

"Through polling, we found that most people are accustomed to going to New York or to New Haven and spending \$500 for an evening of theatre where they feel alienated from what is happening," Simonetti says. "Valley Shakespeare Festival works to provide a much different experience and create new opportunities for the community to come together."

The annual Summer production is performed in Veteran's Memorial Park in Shelton, staged readings of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* are held every year at the Plumb Memorial Library, and the company adapts one of Shakespeare's works each year to be performed in a local bar or restaurant in the Valley. Last month, the company performed a condensed version of *The Tempest* at Porky's Café in Shelton.

"Theatre is immediate, immersive, and intimate and has pushed society's boundaries more than any other medium of story-telling out there," Simonetti says. "By truly experiencing a live performance and being an active audience member you can take away so much."

Derby Mayor Anita Dugatto agrees with that sentiment. The city's Sterling Opera House is a historic landmark set right in the middle of its downtown district. Its 125-year history includes legendary

entertainment acts like Red Skelton, Harry Houdini and George Burns, and advocates for renovating the long-vacant venue want to see it return to that prestige.

"Having access to arts and culture is so important, because it transcends economic status in a community," Mayor Dugatto says. "It brings everybody to the same place."

The challenge, Mayor Dugatto says, will be getting the Sterling Opera House to *be* that place. Suggestions include renovating the first floor to be retail space, meanwhile launching an awareness campaign – across not only the region, but the entire state – to show what the Sterling Opera House is all about. That could bring additional funders to the table.

Across the Housatonic River, Center Stage Theatre has been providing a variety of performing arts experiences for the community for more than a decade.

"Many people are enriched in the process," says Francesca Scarpa, cofounder of Center Stage, which inhabits part of the former Lafayette School, renamed the Richard O. Belden Cultural Center in October. "Our patrons, the children who benefit from our educational programs, the adults who volunteer as actors, set builders and seamstresses and everyone who continues to make Center Stage a vibrant part of our community."

Education, and literacy, are also priorities for Valley Shakespeare Festival. Last year, at the request of the Shelton Board of Education, the company created an Education Initiative that could be brought into the public schools. A shortened production of *As You Like It* was presented to fourth graders across town. This year, the Initiative will extend to libraries and other community centers.

"We wanted to make sure that we would be able to help schools and other organizations through performing these older texts," explains Simonetti. "It was encouraging to hear teachers express their desire to see more programs like this, noting that it's the first time many of their students had experienced live theatre."

Donor Spotlight:

Gary & Francesca Scarpa



"We are honored to be among the many people who have had funds established in their names and who have made the Valley a better place in which to live and work. It is our hope that this fund will be a part of our legacy and that Center Stage will continue long after we're gone," says Francesca Scarpa.

The performing arts have the ability to create a ripple effect throughout a community.

The Lower Naugatuck Valley has a shining example in Center Stage Theatre, a nonprofit providing affordable, quality theatre for the community while also encouraging education of the performing arts for local students.

"Our work in the theatre has been what our lives and our children's lives is all about," says Francesca Scarpa, who cofounded Center Stage with husband Gary in 2005.

The Scarpas have been cultivating the performing arts for nearly 40 years. This devotion led the Scarpas to establish the Gary

and Francesca (Riggio) Scarpa Fund for Center Stage Theatre at VCF in 2014. They intentionally chose to create a designated fund as the vehicle to support their organization in perpetuity. In the unlikely event that Center Stage should cease to exist, the Fund's annual grant distributions will be used to support youth performing arts programs in the Valley.

"Center Stage has been the recipient of funding, so we know first hand the benefits VCF offers to nonprofits in our community. We have benefited greatly by the educational programs and grant dollars," says Scarpa, explaining the decision to place the fund at VCF. "We are hopeful that the Fund will help Center Stage to continue the good things it has

accomplished and carry on our vision statement of 'building community one performance at a time!'"

Center Stage recently made its community building more inclusive during the production of *Mother Hicks*, which featured deaf actor Joseph Ronan and the use of American Sign Language. For the first time, two deaf-accessible performances were included in the production, attracting students from the American School for the Deaf and the American Sign Language Interpreting program at Northwestern Community College, as well as members of the larger community with hearing impairments.

"The production also featured a Q & A after every performance, which gave our audiences

insight into the world of the deaf," Scarpa says. "We hope to feature plays with deaf characters in the future and include "signed" performances of all of our future plays."

Center Stage's annual season includes five major productions, including an annual Christmas show and Youth CONNection summer musical — regular occurrences in the region long before Center Stage. It also produces the annual Teen Musical Theatre Workshop and several cabaret performances as well as Summer Camp and classes.

"Creating theatre in the Valley has been profound for us," Gary Scarpa says. "It was time to establish a fund to help ensure the future of theatre in the area."

VCF Sponsored Events

November

Commodore Hull Thanksgiving Road Race

The 14th Anniversary 5K Road Race is at 8:00 am on Thanksgiving Day at the Farmers Market, 44 Canal St. in Shelton. Visit www.electronicvalley.org for info.

Christmas Parade

The Seymour Christmas Parade will be Sunday, November 29th in downtown Seymour.

December

Valley Council for Health and Human Services

The Valley Council holds its Annual Meeting on Tuesday, December 1st at the THC Beer Garden in Derby. Register at www.valleycouncil.org.

Celebrate Shelton

The Community Tree Lighting begins at 5:30 pm Friday, December 4th at Veterans Memorial Park. Children are invited to make ornaments to place on the tree. For more information, visit www.celebrateshelton.com.

January

Assumption Church

The next "Sundays at Five" concert is Sunday, January 31st at 5:00 pm at the Church, 61 North Cliff St. in Ansonia.

Planned Giving

Valley Community Foundation welcomes John & Laura Zaprzalka and Laura Lane to the Gates Society.

Your planned gift will impact the charities you're passionate about forever, regardless of the amount.

Call us at 203-751-9162 or learn more at www.valleyfoundation.org!



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Visit www.valleyfoundation.org for a full listing.

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Good News About the Valley

The Valley Community Foundation has awarded \$395,186 in single- and multi-year grants to the following nonprofits providing services to Valley residents:

Ansonia School Readiness to support the implementation of the Ansonia and Derby Early Childhood Councils' community plans. The Valley United Way is the fiscal sponsor; \$40,000

BHcare to support the design and implementation of a Family Justice Center, a co-location of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who provide coordinated services to victims of family violence; \$20,000

Center Stage Theatre Inc. to support theatrical lighting upgrades and improvements in the theatre space; \$18,000

Derby Historical Society to support the restoration of the exterior of the General David Humphreys House; \$50,000

Healthy Eyes Alliance to support the Healthy Eyes for Connecticut Kids Project which provides free vision screening, referral and follow up services for preschool children in New Haven and in the Valley; \$48,186

Housatonic Council, Boy Scouts of America to provide general operating support for scouting programs for Valley youth; \$30,000

Junior Achievement of Western Connecticut, Inc. to provide general operating support for programming to give young people the knowledge and skills they need to own their economic success; \$55,000

New Haven Legal Assistance Association Inc. to support a school-based legal aid clinic at Head Start in the Valley; \$16,000

Online Journalism Project Inc. to provide general operating support for the Valley Independent Sentinel; \$80,000

Rape Crisis Center of Milford Inc. to provide general operating support for educational programming to end sexual assault, and for comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services; \$16,000

Visiting Nurse Services of CT to support a pilot program in partnership with Griffin Hospital to provide a pre-discharge visit for specifically diagnosed patients from the Valley to enhance transitional care (acute to home-based healthcare) and to achieve improved measurable health outcomes; \$22,000

"These wonderful programs are addressing critical focus areas in the Valley," says Sharon Closius, VCF President & CEO. "Our fund holders want to make a difference here in the Valley and we are proud to be able to connect their passion with the needs of the community."

Grants were awarded through VCF's responsive grantmaking cycle, which is done with its partner in philanthropy, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. As an added benefit of the collaborative grant process between VCF and TCF, three of the grants awarded were done jointly in the areas of health to BHcare, Healthy Eyes Alliance and Rape Crisis Center of Milford.

The following funds at VCF partnered with the Foundation to increase the dollars available for grant projects through the responsive grants process: Ancient Order of Hibernians, Cohen Community Fund, Salvatore and Linda Tiano Coppola Family Fund, Lawrence J. DeTullio, Jr. Fund, The Future Fund, Mario Garofalo Family Fund, The Mary Fund, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of Ansonia Fund, Paul & Gloria Konwerski Family Fund, Herb Rollinson Fund, Dorothy E. and Kenneth E. Schaible Community Fund, Shelton Congregational Church Fund, Torbi-Saldamarco Family Fund, Mary Vartelas Stamos Fund, Sally & Dominick Thomas Fund, John Tyma Fund, Valley Community Fund, Angelina M. and Valentina V. Vitali Fund, Warichar Family Fund, Selma L. and Harold B. Yudkin Fund.

In addition, funding was provided by The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven through its Gates Fund and other preference funds.

For more information, please visit www.valleyfoundation.org.