



The Frauenthal Center in downtown Muskegon seeks to raise an additional \$7 million from the public for capital improvements at the historic landmark. PHOTO: MIBIZ STAFF

Frauenthal launches new \$7M public fundraising campaign for capital improvements

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MUSKEGON — Leadership at the **Frauenthal Center** stepped back in 2019 to administer a full architectural assessment of the historic performing and events center, which has endured nine decades of consistent wear and tear.

Partnering with Ada-based **Erhardt Construction Co.** for the assessment, Frauenthal Center Executive Director Eric Messing and his team identified several millions of dollars in critical repairs and upgrades in order to keep the Muskegon County staple in proper shape for future programming.

That's when leaders decided to raise some cash — and also when the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

Despite the economic hardships that came with the ensuing 15 months of the pandemic, the Frauenthal Center, which operates as part of the **Community Foundation for Muskegon County**, was effective in raising initial funds and addressing the facility's more pressing needs.

"Because of the pandemic, we were able to really focus on this campaign, which is an interesting time to be fundraising, but it enabled us to make several significant improvements to the building during our closure," Messing said.

Dubbed the "Next 90 Years Frauenthal Preservation Campaign," the campaign by the Frauenthal Center and the Community Foundation aims to raise \$7 million to make the upgrades to a venue that is regularly used by

organizations like the **West Michigan Symphony Orchestra** and the **Muskegon Civic Theater**, in addition to hosting its own series and events.

The campaign has so far raised \$4.1 million from local donors and corporate partners. Messing said that the initial success in raising money was a testament to what the venue means to the community.

At the beginning of June, the campaign turned to the general public in Muskegon County to bring it across the finish line.

"We'll continue our efforts speaking to public and private foundations, but in the public phase of this, we're looking to the community to join us in preserving this gem for the next 90 years," Messing said.

A COVID facelift

With the initial money raised, the Frauenthal Center was able to address some of its more pressing needs. This included 102 new, historically accurate and energy efficient windows that are expected to save the center on energy costs. Another portion of the funds was devoted to repairing and reinforcing the center's fire escapes.

Perhaps the most significant upgrade, especially in light of the pandemic, was a new HVAC system designed to enhance and protect air quality in the theater and lobby areas.

"We hope that everyone feels safe in returning here," Messing said.

"We're looking to the community to join us in preserving this gem for the next 90 years."

ERIC MESSING

Executive Director, Frauenthal Center

While summer is dotted with occasional event rentals, in addition to a free family movie night available to limited audiences, the bulk of the Frauenthal's season begins late in the fall.

Installing heated sidewalks along the perimeter of the facility as well as updating its digital display screen and marquee are the next steps. Upgraded sound and video systems that are also crucial for the center will follow.

"Our technical equipment is so dated that we have to rent sound equipment and bring it in," Messer said. "Some touring shows will pass over our facility because of some of our outdated technical equipment. By upgrading and updating sound, video and eventually lighting, it's not only going to enhance the patron experience but also artist experience and be more attractive to clients." **MiBiz**



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