



THE STANLEY THEATRE ♦ ARTS IN EDUCATION INSTITUTE ♦ ARTS COUNCIL SERVICES

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## 2008-09 Budget Hearing Comments November 27, 2007

Thank you for visiting our region again to hear from citizens of the Mohawk Valley regarding assembly of the New York State budget for 2008-09. Thank you to Governor Spitzer for making this hearing possible and seeking our input.

We are very grateful to New York State for its on-going support for the arts through the New York State Council on the Arts, arts in education and for capital support for economic and quality of life projects like the Stanley Theatre here in Utica. The arts in the Mohawk Valley are an integral asset of our regional economic revitalization and a viable bridge between business and community, job retention, community educational resource and general community well being. They remain a potent and enduring regional legacy of the Mohawk Valley.

Regional, community-based arts programs and services provide a unifying voice in community diversity and most importantly a critical component of economic development for our region as we endeavor to attract high tech industry investment and new jobs.

To make these regional and local resources truly viable, it is critical that secure, renewable public sector support for arts, education services and facilities is led by New York State in order to leverage our regional and upstate support for these ventures and grow our productive regional community assets.

Each of our regional legislative representatives recognizes just how much these community assets are active catalysts to our economic growth as well as extremely tangible resources essential to the fundamental improvement of life long learning and quality day-to-day living.

We therefore respectfully urge Governor Spitzer and the New York State Legislature to increase the budget for NYSCA to a level of \$60 million in local assistance monies. We also urge commitment of State Education funding for arts education at the local and regional level.

Without significant public sector investment led by New York State, however, upstate and the Mohawk Valley will continue to be

marginalized particularly as smaller regions like ours suffer declines in the 18-30 year old population base while trending ahead of the national average in the older population demographic. Population issues amidst corporate sector consolidations, a severe decline in the manufacturing industry, an accelerating shift to the retail/service sector industries does not trend well without significant attention to potential technology industries and our higher education based resources. This begs the question of what interventions/investments need to occur and in what level of concentration in order to maximize their impact.

When considering solutions for upstate and in particular smaller upstate communities like ours, developing infrastructure and community-based assets has to occur on a faster track with a vision of meeting larger expectations for the future. In order for this to happen, larger concentrated reinvestment allocations need to be invested in order to realize the effective impact local assets can make on revitalization and growth in our communities.

I want to draw particular attention today to three NYS initiatives that can help to make a difference. First, 2008-09 funding for NYSCA needs to increase \$60 million for aid to localities. This increase would continue to return aid to localities similar to that in 1988-89 pr approximately \$3.00 per NYS resident.

Aid disbursed through NYSCA to localities needs immediate enhancement and particularly in the area of the Decentralization Regrant funding that targets smaller communities likes ours. In a larger canvas, reinvesting in the upstate economy also demands a greater investment in the cultural quality of life initiatives that are critical to effective economic development such as the tech or computer industries. NYSCA Regrant funds are especially critical to the small regionally based arts program as counties, cities and smaller municipalities have either eliminated all together any kind of general operating support for arts programs or are significantly decreasing funding as we speak. We urge increasing the NYSCA budget as a critical part of any upstate jumpstart.

The Central New York Community Arts Council's Arts in Education Institute has served schools in Oneida, Herkimer and Madison counties for the past 18 years. NY State Education funding for the Association of Aesthetic Education ended 6 years ago and this year we are urging you to consider including the Arts in Education Institute as a line item in the state budget at the level of \$150,000. This level of funding would allow us to continue our work as well as expand into underserved schools throughout our region. With the physical expansion of the Stanley theatre also comes the creation of an Education department in order to increase our capacity to provide services to our community.

The focus of our program is student learning. In our 19-year history of partnering with regional school districts, we have brought opportunities for teacher professional development, artists as collaborative partners for teachers in the classrooms, and high quality works of art as focuses for academic work and arts centered learning. We assist

districts in meeting and exceeding New York State learning standards through creativity, innovation and building teacher capacity.

The Arts in Education Institute is one of six such programs around the State. For many years, the New York State Institutes for Aesthetic Education had been part of a legislative grant that provided base line support for the Institutes. Since 2001, our line item has been absent from the State budget and we have been struggling to continue in the face of reduced funding. While the Arts in Education Institute is the fortunate recipient of several legislative member items during these past 6 years, we continue to struggle to make ends meet. Relying on member items from year to year is a great detriment to our program and hinders our ability to make reasonable commitments to school districts, to plan ahead and expand our services. It is the absence of consistent support of operating needs that hinders us most. We ask you to return the Arts in Education Institute to a line item in the State budget.

The Stanley Theatre Project is an extremely grateful recipient of funding from New York State over the last 8 years. Construction began in July of 2006 with reopening scheduled for January 29, 2008. Many thanks go to all of our local NYS representatives, including Assemblywoman Destito, former Senator Meier and now Senator Griffo for their incredible support and belief in the Stanley Project. Putting the funding quilt together has been an exercise in extreme patience for this region as the project worked with legislative help in securing 11 different NYS grants, 3 Federal grants, 7 years of County funding, several years of City commitment and participation in extremely complicated Federal tax credit programs. In the eight years of piecing funding together, including the over \$3.8 million in private local support, the cost has increased an average of 4% annually just because of inflation and materials volatility. This brings me to the third initiative of concern.

New York State passed legislation last fall 2006 to create a tax incentive program to encourage the rehabilitation of historic properties that is designed to parallel the similar Federal Historic Rehabilitation tax incentive program. The NYS program has yet to be implemented and a legislative revision to the initial program is now under consideration in the legislature. We strongly urge this legislative revision be passed and immediately implanted to assist further projects like the Stanley in smaller regions. This could be huge incentive option for these types of projects particularly in the upstate region where so much historic property and structure exists.

Thank you for your interest and ongoing support.

Ronald Thiele  
Executive Director  
Central New York Community Arts Council