



Performances from musicians ranging from Duke Ellington to Weird Al Yankovic have performed at the Palace Theatre. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Palace Theatre is an area treasure

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From Staff Reports Marion Star
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If walls could talk, the stories told by the walls of the Marion Palace Theatre would be remarkable.

Prominent performers of the day – then and now – Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, The Band Perry and Weird Al Yankovic have all taken the Palace stage. There are even stories of gambling raids and robbery. The Palace is rich in history.

Construction began early in 1928. The entertainment venue, designed by John Eberson, was complete in just eight months. The opening night crowd of 3,200 was the first to experience the lavish Spanish-inspired interior, including the atmospheric courtyard with its midnight blue sky, birds in flight, twinkling stars, and clouds afloat overhead. This theater remains an anchor in downtown Marion and hosts more than 65,000

Each week, this series will share stories of our many wonderful people, places, products and programs in the greater Marion community. To read more stories of Marion's great people, places, products, and programs, or to share some of your own stories, visit MarionMade! online at marionmade.org or on Facebook.

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guests each year.

The Palace Theatre has overcome many setbacks since it was first built. After several decades of changing ownership, the Palace suffered from hard use and neglect. In the mid-70s, the owner was looking to sell what had become a movie theater in need of repair. The Marion Concert Series shared the space and was more than a little interested in seeing the Palace remain the masterpiece its designer intended.

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Spearheaded by John Keggan, the Palace Guard was born. The group of seven Marion businessmen pulled out their wallets and rolled up their sleeves. They rallied the Marion community and invoked the support of area industries. In 1976, the Palace was “re-born” in all its splendor, under the operation of the Palace Cultural Arts Association.

Today, the Palace operates under the direction of the PCAA board of trustees. Currently, Bev Ford, who started at the Palace in 1998 as a part-time ticket office agent, serves as the executive director. When Ford began working for the Palace, she was simply looking for a little extra income. In short order, she was promoted to marketing manager, then to director of theater operations and, in 2011, became the executive director.

In 2008, the PCAA opened a multi-purpose addition, the May Pavilion, to serve community needs for meeting space, weddings, receptions, and reunions, as well as smaller theatrical productions and more intimate performances by local and regional bands.

In 2013, it was discovered that the structural steel of the front facade was deteriorating. A fund raising campaign was introduced and the community responded once more. Not only was the facade restored, but a new digital marquee was unveiled to the applause of the gathered crowd.

“The Palace is a great asset to our community,” said Ford. “It provides shared artistic and cultural experiences to both audience and performers, as well as economic value to the community itself.”

According to the American’s for the Arts Economic Impact Calculator, in communities the size of Marion, every person who attends an event at the Palace is spending, on average, \$22.50 in addition to the price of their ticket at area restaurants and shops, transportation, and the like. This adds up to more than \$1.4 million spent in the Marion community.

Last year, the Palace benefitted from more than 8,000 volunteer hours—the equivalent of a \$188,000 donation. The Marion community has proven time and again that it is willing to do whatever it takes to preserve this landmark for generations to come.

The Marion Palace Theatre is a vibrant performing arts venue for national touring artists, regional performers, local thespians, and second run films. From shows to rehearsals, meetings to movies, this community gem is in use more than 345 days a year.



A local fund raising campaign helped fix the Palace Theatre’s deteriorating steel structure in 2013.



The new Palace Theatre marquee met with applause as it was unveiled.