

Midtown Arts Center slated for fall opening in Fort Collins

Carousel Theatre to relocate

BY STACY NICK • StacyNick@coloradoan.com • March 11, 2010

Kurt and Kate Terrio had their first date at the Mann 4; now, the couple is hoping to return the old movie theater to a date-night hot spot once again.

Carousel Dinner Theatre owners have purchased the former four-plex cinema - which closed in 1999 and up until this year was used by the Lithia car dealership to store tires and equipment - and plan to reopen it this fall as the Midtown Arts Center.

"We're so excited that this is finally happening," said Kurt Terrio, adding that they kept the project secret, even from the dinner theater's employees, until they were certain it was going to go through.

The Midtown Arts Center, located at 3750 S. Mason St., Fort Collins, will feature the Carousel Dinner Theater - moving just down the block from its current location at 3509 S. Mason St., Fort Collins - as well as a black-box studio classroom, a 200-seat performance hall and a 200-seat banquet/convention ballroom.

The additional theater space will be rented out to local theater and music groups, as well as youth arts groups and school productions. A former school choir instructor, Terrio said he remembers what a big deal it was for students to have at least one performance outside of the usual places like the school cafeteria or the gymnasium.

"We're not trying to discount the dinner theatre," he said. "That's our bread and butter; but we felt that something would be missing if that was all we did (with the space)."

The center will open Sept. 10 with the show "Aida," a production that would have been too large for the old theater's stage, Terrio said. But patrons who appreciate Carousel's up-close-and-personal feel will be glad to hear that even with the larger venue, no seat will be more than 45 feet from the stage.

"We didn't want to be another cavernous theater like in Denver or at the Lincoln Center," Terrio said. "This is one of the things people know us for."

Terrio had his eye on the Mann 4 space for a while but said he couldn't afford to purchase both the building and its parking lot. In a cross easement agreement with the neighboring Institute of Business and Medical Careers, Terrio was able to purchase the building and the small front lot and will share the larger back parking lot with the school - with IBMC using it during week days and the theater using it evenings and weekends. Terrio purchased the building for \$700,000 and estimated that the renovations will cost between \$500,000 and \$700,000.

While the updates won't mean much additional seating for the dinner theater - Carousel currently has seating for 200 and would be able to fit 210 in the first phase of its renovation, 260 once it completes the upper mezzanine in phase two - it will mean more bathrooms, more backstage space and more parking. Housed in a warehouse district, Carousel shares a parking lot with several other businesses, including an ambulance service center and a medical marijuana dispensary and parking always has been an issue for patrons.

The center's fall opening couldn't be better timed as Fort Collins' major performing arts venue, Lincoln Center, will be closed for renovations beginning this summer and into 2011.

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Like many groups that utilize Lincoln Center, Canyon Concert Ballet was put into a bit of a tailspin when it learned it would have to find alternate venues for its performances, which include a Christmas production of the Nutcracker as well as a spring dance performance and school recitals.

But the company has been busy looking at various new locations, including the Midtown Art Center, said Kim Carter, CCB executive director, adding, "We definitely would be interested in the space."

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