

## **Fire Mountain Arts Council (FMAC) History and Mission**

The FMAC was formally organized as a nonprofit corporation in Morton, Washington in January 2003. In April 2003, we received our 501 (c) (3) status from the IRS.

### **Our mission:**

- **To enrich our community life through the arts**

### **Our Goals:**

- **Present theater, movies, music, and other arts events**
- **Foster arts education for our youth**
- **Create an environment that nurtures local talent**
- **Feature our regional character**
- **Provide venues for the arts**
- **Stimulate economic growth.**

Although FMAC has just recently formed as a non-profit corporation, our actual history begins in 1986 with a drama class at Centralia College East. The class presented a locally written play with a musical revue called *Notes on a Reunion*. Since then we have produced twelve major musical productions including *Oklahoma*, *Music Man*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Showboat*—our most ambitious and successful productions. Attendance has ranged from 700 to 1500 for a run of four shows; this is about 5-10% of our local population. All of these productions were made possible by hundreds of community volunteers partnering with Centralia College East. The core of our team of performing artists and production staff has essentially remained intact over the years.

Since 1986, we have produced our musicals in the high school gym, but the gym is acoustically and visually poor, only available on a limited basis, and uncomfortable for the audience. Nevertheless, audiences and participants alike are extremely supportive and proud of the quality of our performances.

In June 2003, our primary focus became fundraising for the purchase and renovation of the Roxy Theater. We put on five variety shows and a gala fundraising evening. By December we had raised enough to make the down payment, close the theater purchase,

hire an architect, and move forward with confidence to renovate the Roxy into a performing-arts and movie theater with an art gallery.

### **Roxy Renovation—Pre-planning Analysis**

We chose to purchase the Roxy Theater after several months of careful analysis and conversation within the community. The following six factors influenced our decision to proceed:

1. Five members of our board participated actively in the development of the USDA Forest Service-funded *Morton Community Revitalization Plan* and the US Department of Interior's *US 12 Corridor Charette* in 2001 and 2002. We realized that development of a theater and related educational programs would not only respond to the demand for increased arts-based opportunities but could be a dramatic economic boon to eastern Lewis County.
2. When we had eighty-four children audition for the six roles in *The Sound of Music* in summer 2002, we realized that children and their parents were starved for experiences in the arts. Missoula Children's Theater offered a program in neighboring Randle. Fifty children auditioned.
3. Initially, building an amphitheater seemed like the cheapest, hence best, plan. However, during preliminary arts council meetings in winter 2002-2003, it became clear that a renovated Roxy was more practical (as a non-weather-dependent venue), was critical to the revitalization of downtown Morton, and captured the imagination of hundreds of people in the community.
4. The City Council, Centralia College, Morton School District, Morton Chamber of Commerce, and other community groups were (and are) extremely supportive of this project.
5. We hired structural engineer Mike Szramek; his report assured us that the theater was structurally sound
6. Expanding tourism has become a major focus in Lewis County. Upon looking at the astounding numbers of traveling public, we realized the untapped tourist potential and the many visitors plus residents that we could serve with our performances and programs.
  - a. Eastern Lewis County is home to about 15,000 permanent residents. However,

twenty times that population lives within an hour's drive.

- b. Mt. Rainier National Park has two million visitors annually; most come by car.
- c. Washington State Department of Transportation website shows an average traffic count of 1,788,500 cars annually at the junction of US Highway 12 and State Route 7 in Morton.
- d. 55% of travelers completing the Comprehensive Tourism Plan survey were traveling to Mount Rainier or St. Helens, so they were going past or through Morton.

### **Roxy Renovation—Needs, Opportunities, and Benefits**

The purchase and renovation of the Roxy will enable FMAC to fulfill our mission by using the arts as a means to enrich community life both culturally and economically. A renovated Roxy will provide long-term benefit to the people of eastern Lewis County by addressing three key problems:

1. First, the people of eastern Lewis County are culturally underserved with minimal local opportunities to experience and participate in the arts. The nearest performing-arts theater is at least one hour away. The renovated Roxy will provide a much-needed performing arts venue. Access to the theater and art gallery will make possible multiple arts-based offerings. It will be a place for our community, and especially our youth, to create and enjoy the arts.
2. Second, this 1925 movie house, vacant since 1980, is an eye-sore in downtown Morton. The Roxy renovation will create a centerpiece for downtown revitalization, a need emphasized in the *Morton Community Revitalization Plan* and *US 12 Corridor Charette*.
3. Third, eastern Lewis County has a timber-dependent economy. As a result of major cutbacks in the timber industry since 1990, our region has suffered economic hardship, with the attendant job loss, depopulation, and social impacts. Tourism, however, offers a viable economic opportunity. Over the course of the summer several hundred thousand visitors travel to and through our area. (See “Pre-planning Analysis” 6. above.) Additionally, two rail companies are now organizing trips to Morton, potentially delivering hundreds of tourists weekly to Main Street. The Roxy, with its top-notch arts entertainment, can catalyze economic development by substantially increasing tourist traffic in a revitalized historic city center.