

Sooner Theatre awarded \$100K grant

Theatre:

COMMUNITY

By Mack Burke

Transcript News Editor

The Sooner Theatre's future looks bright.

Last week, Public Relations and Development Director Nancy Coggins confirmed that the theater has received a grant from Impact Oklahoma worth \$100,000. It also made a little history in doing so.

"We are the first arts and culture focus area grantee in the 15 year history of Impact Oklahoma," she said. "It took us three years of trying to win."

Coggins said it was the culmination of years of effort and will make a big impact for the historic theater, which plans to use the money to buy a new lighting system, among other things.

"The first time we applied, we made it to the semi-finals round," she said. "Last year, we were a finalist, but did not win. This year, we were honored to be chosen as one of the two winning organizations. I can't tell you for sure how we won, but I know we are so incredibly grateful this group of women saw the impact the arts has on communities, and how

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on Impact Oklahoma grant

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From **Page A1** organizations like the Sooner Theatre are changing lives every day. And, I know they understand the impact their gift can have on our organization."

Coggins said 55 nonprofits in all five of Impact Oklahoma's focus areas submitted grant applications this year. Page Beatty, the founder of Impact Oklahoma, a nonprofit community of women dedicated to the betterment of Central Oklahoma, said there were so many quality organizations and causes to consider, but what made the difference was Sooner Theatre Executive Director Jennifer Baker's presentation.

"Don't get me wrong, we had five amazing nonprofits, but Jennifer's presentation blew everyone out of the water," Beatty said. "It was amazing."

During her presentation, Baker talked about how the money would help transform the theater by funding the purchase of a new lighting system and other upgrades. Baker said the new system will also save the theater substantially on costs.

“The Sooner Theatre’s project was titled ‘Light The Way,’” Coggins said. “Some people may not know this, but the Sooner Theatre does not own any stage lighting of our own. We rent every light used in each of our 50-plus performances each year.

“In addition, we have to rent microphones and are currently running sound on equipment that is 20 years old. The cost of renting lights and sound each year is around \$50,000. In the next year or so, our current microphones will also be obsolete as new FCC regulations require a change in the frequencies we must use to transmit sound over our wireless microphone system. One microphone can cost around \$1200 and we need 12 to 16 per show.”

The grant also will help fund expanded outreach programs, special needs training for instructors and scholarships.

Beatty, who lives in Norman and has plenty of love for Sooner Theatre, said she was pleased to see the grant awarded and was surprised Sooner Theatre didn’t win it sooner.

“It’s very obvious that they are great stewards of the money they receive and the things that they want to do for kids and the money that would be freed up ... she made an amazing presentation. [Baker] said this whole system will last us 20 years. That’s \$1 million we can pour back into the Sooner Theatre.”

Beatty said it’s a big win for the Sooner Theatre, who was awarded the grant by board vote, but it was also another victory for Impact Oklahoma.

“It’s the visibility that we create, that intangible, that takes these nonprofits to the next level,” she said. “And that’s what we want to do.”

Since its founding in 2003, Impact Oklahoma has bestowed 48 grants totaling more than \$3.1 million.

For more information about Impact Oklahoma, visit impactok.org.

Senior students take their final bow during the Sooner Theatre Showcase Sunday at the Sooner Theatre. The revue style show featured students of all ages from The Studio of The Sooner Theatre showing off the performance skills they learned during the year.

Kyle Phillips / The Transcript