

THE KENOSHA THEATRE
for performing arts

Market Study

Architectural Analysis

August 1989



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INTRODUCTION

The Citizens Group for the Kenosha Theatre, Inc. (CGKT) was awarded a grant by the City of Kenosha for a marketing feasibility study and an architectural analysis for use in the restoration process of the Kenosha Theatre.

The A-E-C Group, Inc., Architects from Springfield, Illinois was commissioned by the CGKT to conduct surveys and develop a Market/Feasibility Study and a comprehensive Historical and Architectural Analysis of the Kenosha Theatre. This is the completed report on this work.

The conclusions and recommendations contained in this report are based on surveys conducted through newspapers, organizations, direct mailings to citizens, personal interviews and meetings with the CGKT and other groups. Information was also supplied by the City of Kenosha, Department of City Development. The architectural analysis of the Kenosha Theatre is based on site observations by members of the Architect's staff and his consultants.

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are based on the results of this study. The order of listing does not establish priorities.

- Establish a Performing Arts Center for southeastern Wisconsin composed of several live stage facilities, each having its specialty menu. This image would truly be one of 'A Center for the Performing Arts'.
- The Kenosha Theatre has the greater potential to provide live touring performances and productions, therefore the theatre has a purpose and should be restored. The structure should be made weathertight to minimize further deterioration. The schedule to begin the restoration should be delayed until study and plans for redevelopment of the Lakeshore Business District and the Jupiter Lakeshore Development have been finalized.
- The Rhode Opera House should be converted and restored as a year-round dinner theatre. Dining is recommended to be in the 'House'. This conversion should not take place until after the Kenosha Theatre has been reopened. Until that time the theatre should continue operation utilizing one auditorium for live stage performances and the other auditorium as a movie house.
- The Reuther Auditorium should continue in its role as the home of the Kenosha Symphony Orchestra and hostess for community activities and events.
- The Orpheum Theatre could play a future role as a night club with live stage entertainment or a live stage theatre presenting specialty type performances and productions. The theatre could be an asset to the Performing Arts Center for southeastern Wisconsin; only time will tell. Further consideration is placed on 'Hold'.

To encourage coordination of the events and activities of the various arts groups, the Kenosha Arts Council should maintain an arts calendar of events. This calendar should be shared and used by the Kenosha Area Tourism Corporation to publicize and promote the arts image of Kenosha outside the community. This promotion must be a continuous, cooperative effort. The efforts will have added importance as the performing arts expand and have a greater need for a strong outreach into the expanded market areas.

The image theme for the downtown/lakeshore development area should include entertainment. The total packaged performing arts concept will contribute to the transformation of the now declining area into one with a viable people collector image. Being a part of this image will also be helpful in the fund raising.

A sound organization and management plan for the operation of the Kenosha Theatre should be adopted at least one year in advance of the grand opening. The Director/Promoter should be hired during the early months of that year.

To be financially successful and to maintain continuous public interest, the theatres must have year-round schedules.

Complete restoration initially is the most desirable, however the Kenosha Theatre renovation has been structured to permit phased construction programs.

Continue seeking out the missing appointments and artifacts from the Kenosha Theatre and the Rhode Opera House.

The planning of the integrated redevelopment of downtown/lakeshore will affect the Kenosha Theatre and the Rhode Opera House. The following recommendations are on items that are needed by the theatres for the convenience and safety of the patrons.

- A quality restaurant within walking distance to the Kenosha Theatre is needed. Dining overlooking the marina and Lake Michigan would be ideal.
- Adequate parking within two blocks of the theatres is needed. Parking areas to be well illuminated.
- In the planning of the downtown/lakeshore area, the traffic patterns near the theatres should be planned to permit the drop-off and pick-up of the patrons with minimum traffic congestion.
- Provide public transportation within a half block of the theatre entrances.
- Provide for tour buses loading and unloading.
- Faster and less congested access into the downtown/lakeshore area from I-94 is also very important to the theatres.

MARKET/FEASIBILITY STUDY

Market Area

Investigations indicated a local theatre market area consisting of Kenosha and Racine counties in Wisconsin population 258,000, and Lake County, Illinois, population in excess of 500,000, provides a potential local market in excess of 3/4 million people. Organized bus tours and effective tourism promotion can extend a theatre's market area to over a 50 mile radius. This extended market area is especially important for a dinner theatre. This size market area has the potential to support both a performing art theatre and a dinner theatre.

The extended market area would be those areas beyond the local market area. These areas are promoted with emphasis on group outings, bus tours and weekend vacations. Local and state tourism agencies can be effective in this type of promotion. This extended market would include metropolitan Chicago and other areas of northern Illinois, metropolitan Milwaukee and southeast Wisconsin.

Analysis of Market/Feasibility Study

Surveys conducted in Kenosha, Kenosha County, Racine and Racine County produced the following results.

- Response to questionnaires was mainly from age 25 to beyond age 60. The median age was in the mid-fifties. Approximately 24 percent of the respondents were retired.
- The median annual income of the respondents was approximately \$36,000.
- Comedy, musical and drama performances received the strongest preference. Variety acts, dance performances and symphony followed with well over 50 percent ratings.
- The patrons of live theatre rated high quality of performance and a comfortable theatrical environment as top priority for their attendance.
- Kenoshans indicated a strong preference to attend live theatre performances locally, providing quality of performance and comfort is equal that found in the metropolitan areas.
- For top entertainment and quality of performance the median ticket price was in the \$15 range. This price range is financially feasible for a theatre having a 2,000 plus seating capacity.
- Kenosha area respondents indicated a 90% likelihood to attend performances at an entertainment center in downtown Kenosha, Racine area respondents indicated 70% likelihood.

Many comments were received on returned questionnaires.

All of the comments are printed in the 'Survey of the Market' section and the Appendix. You are encouraged

to read these comments. The following are positions expressed a number of times on the particular subject.

- There were pros and cons on whether Kenoshans would support a live entertainment center. There were considerably more pros than cons.
- Many people expressed the desire to have more opportunities to attend live performances in Kenosha. Some are now going to metropolitan areas but would prefer to not travel; others indicated they would attend locally more often. Attending local entertainment is the only opportunity for some people.
- Many people are active theatre goers and would welcome more opportunities to see live performances.
- There is an interest in live performances for children.
- Many people believe Kenosha is changing and support for live theatre will increase.
- There is interest in having a dinner theatre in Kenosha.
- Many theatre goers in the Racine area indicated they would attend live entertainment in Kenosha.
- Some people do not believe Kenosha can support two live performance theatres, others believe they will.
- Many believe the cultural image of Kenosha is enhanced when new art activities become available in the city.
- Many point out a need for more dining opportunities in the downtown area.
- Parking close to the theatre is important.

A study of the arts in Lake County, Illinois has resulted in the following conclusions.

- There is strong, supportive interest in performing arts. Most of the art organizations have been in existence for many years.
- The Effective Buying Income of the county is expected to be third highest in the nation by next year.
- The fastest growing housing area in the county is a corridor following I-94 north.
- Traveling distance to downtown Kenosha is less than that for two thirds of Lake County to travel to the Chicago loop. The northeast quadrant of the county is less than 30 miles from downtown Kenosha.

There is a strong live performing arts market in Lake County. It will take good promotion to direct part of that market to Kenosha for entertainment. The Kenosha Area Tourism Corporation promotes metropolitan Chicago and places some emphasis on entertainment opportunities in Kenosha.

Conclusions

A performing arts entertainment center will draw people into the downtown/lakeshore area and will contribute to the revitalization of the area.

A Performing Arts Entertainment Center will enhance the cultural image and the general image of Kenosha.

One of the comments received
in a returned questionnaire.

"The development in Kenosha would be a tremendous asset in the field of the Arts for those of us who cannot often attend in Milwaukee or Chicago. It would be one way to improve the overall image of what Kenosha is all about! We would most definitely support the entertainment center!"

The extended market must be developed by the management of the Center and tourism.

The Kenosha Theatre must be completely renovated, refurbished and equipped with adequate technical support systems for live stage performances, and to create exciting theatrical environment and comfort for the audience.

The Kenosha Theatre is the only performing arts facility in the city with a large enough seating capacity to maintain ticket prices in the \$10 to \$19 range for good quality touring productions and performers.

There is a market for dinner theatre in the identified extended Kenosha market. Promotion and marketing is crucial for a successful dinner theatre.

The study has identified strong Kenosha support for live performing arts as did the Kenosha Focus 2000 study. A strong market also exists in Kenosha and Racine counties. Persistent promotion of the Lake County market should produce results:

- providing the Kenosha entertainment is high quality,
- the theatrical environment is exciting and comfortable,
- there is less travel time and inconvenience,
- the cost of the evening is comparable, or more reasonable than in metropolitan Chicago.

A Performing Arts Center as presented in this study would have the capability to provide a total package of live stage entertainment with a year-round schedule. The Kenosha Theatre and the Rhode Opera House are historic buildings:

- each is capable of being returned to their original splendor,
- each will have a purpose that will support the revitalization of the area by attracting people,
- Each will help fill the need to have more local exposure to the performing arts,
- each is worth saving.

Kenosha is fortunate to still have these theatres.
The Kenosha Theatre and the Rhode Opera House should be
reopened to present live performing art performances.

The following is from the Epilogue in the publication,
the "Castle in Spain". A final quote from a little card
that was posted by the Kenosha Theatre's main swithboard:

PLEASE DO NOT TURN ON THE CLOUDS
UNTIL THE SHOW STARTS.
BE SURE THE STARS ARE TURNED OFF
WHEN LEAVING.

To which we add:

IT IS NOW TIME TO TURN
THE LIGHTS BACK ON