



The renovated Dixie Theater will be able to seat 90 people for themed film festivals, says Arcadia Project President Tom Wagner.

Renovation of Dixie Theater means show will go on in Staunton

by Cathy Jett

Teens got their first jobs and couples experienced their first kisses at the former Dixie Theater in downtown Staunton.

Now the vacant building, which opened in 1913 at 125 E. Beverley St., is a step closer to becoming a community cultural center, thanks to a \$1.5 million grant from the state Industrial Revitalization Fund, which encourages economic development through the renovation of vacant and derelict structures.

Staunton received the funding in August on behalf of the nonprofit Arcadia Project, which formed in 2017 to revamp the building into a theater with event space, classrooms and a small café.

“It’s definitely going to be a vibrant and wonderful addition to our community, not only for locals but also visitors downtown,” says Greg Beam, executive director of the Staunton Downtown Development Association, which is promoting Arcadia’s fundraising events and wrote a recommendation letter for its grant application.

Arcadia’s board was set to begin advertising for a contractor in late October for the \$3 million renovation, which is expected to begin in early 2024 and be completed by early 2025. Two-thirds of the cost has been raised so far in money and in-kind donations, including a \$30,000 in-kind donation of surround-sound

movie theater equipment from George Lucas’ Skywalker Ranch. The rest will be in hand by opening day, says Executive Director Pamela Wagner.

Board members reached out to the community to determine the activities people wanted to see offered in the building, which closed in 2014.

“We envision this place to be a building that will hold programming relevant to everyone’s life,” says Vice President Abena Foreman-Trice.

One of the theater’s two auditoriums will be converted into a 90-seat theater and lecture hall that can host themed film festivals, including the Music at the Movies series the nonprofit has been hosting with Visulite Cinemas in Staunton, says Arcadia President Tom Wagner. The other auditorium will hold up to 260 people for conferences and events.

When open, the theater will likely employ five to eight people, says Pamela Wagner.

“From the city’s perspective, a project like this generating activity in our downtown area is fantastic,” says Amanda DiMeo, Staunton’s economic development specialist. “The Arcadia Project is something the community is excited about, and we see it as a positive to have a longtime vacant building restored and occupied with ample opportunity for growth and engagement.” ■

FOR THE RECORD

Buc-ee’s Super Center is coming to a busy stretch of Shenandoah Valley highway near Mount Crawford. Buc-ee’s Mt. Crawford LLC purchased 21.3 acres at the intersection of Interstate 81 and Friedens Church Road in Rockingham County from Lispen LLC for \$6.6 million, Norfolk-based S.L. Nusbaum Realty announced Sept. 26. The second Buc-ee’s planned in Virginia, the Rockingham travel center will include up to 75,000 square feet of retail space, 120 fueling positions, electric vehicle chargers and parking for more than 650 vehicles, including buses. (*VirginiaBusiness.com*)

Community opposition failed to stop the **Clarke County Board of Supervisors** on Sept. 19 from imposing zoning restrictions on farms that produce and sell alcoholic beverages. County officials contended the restrictions are necessary to ensure the businesses don’t become nuisances to neighbors. During a public hearing, representatives of the businesses countered that the restrictions could hurt their enterprises, put people out of work and stifle the county’s agricultural economy. As part of the vote, supervisors allowed the businesses to use amplified sound systems until 7 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. (*The Winchester Star*)

Jon Henry General Store in Shenandoah County in late September debuted six electric vehicle charging stations. The project, in the works for more than a year, was kickstarted with a multimillion-dollar grant — the Mid-Atlantic Electrification Partnership — awarded to the Virginia Clean Cities Coalition to deploy electric vehicles within an ecosystem. Virginia Clean Cities is a statewide nonprofit based in Harrisonburg that works to reduce emissions in the transportation sector. The grant funded 400 charging stations and more than 100 electric vehicles throughout Virginia; Washington, D.C.; West Virginia; and Maryland. (*The Northern Virginia Daily*)

Leiber, a German manufacturer that processes brewer’s yeast into animal food, biotechnology and supplements, announced Sept. 18 that it will invest as much as \$20 million to establish its first U.S. operation in Rockingham County’s Innovation Village, adding an estimated 35 jobs. Founded in 1954, Leiber works with breweries to offload yeast for further upcycling, operating five production sites in three nations and supplying products to more than 65 countries. It also conducts product research and development in company labs. Virginia competed with four other states for the project. Construction was expected to begin in October, with production beginning in the first quarter of 2025. (*VirginiaBusiness.com*)

Short-term rentals were a hot topic at the **Shenandoah County Planning Commission’s** monthly meeting Oct. 5, amid a flood of applications from property owners to rent out their homes on sites like Airbnb and Vrbo. Director of Community Development Lemuel Hancock said 44 new permits are being processed to convert homes across the county to host guests. Hancock then presented a map of 40 of the applications based on where the permitting fees were paid; locations included California, Ohio, New York and South Carolina. Only 20% were from within Shenandoah County. (*The Northern Virginia Daily*)

Visitor spending in **Winchester-Frederick County** reached a record-breaking \$287.5 million in 2022, representing a 10.5% increase over the previous year and a 14.8% increase over pre-pandemic levels in 2019, according to data announced Sept. 26 by Virginia Tourism Corp. The tourism sector in Winchester-Frederick County supports 2,486 jobs and \$80 million in paychecks; state and local taxes generated by tourism spending reached \$21.05 million in 2022 in the region. Tourism generated \$30.3 billion in visitor spending statewide in 2022, exceeding 2019 levels by 4.4%. (*The Winchester Star*)