

A Report from Theatre Ancaster for ARC West on January 17, 2012 at Highland Secondary

Concerning the Future of Ancaster High School and The Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High School

Brief History of The Theatre Auditorium.

- The Community Theatre Auditorium was built in 1969 as part of the addition to Ancaster High School.
- The Ancaster High School Board planned the school addition with the auditorium to serve both the school and the larger community.
- It purchased extra property as a resource for the community.
- It was intended as a dual purpose auditorium...to be used by Ancaster High during the day and by the community in the evenings as much as possible.
- During the day, it has been used by the school for full theatre production courses, theatre arts and co-curricular student rehearsals and presentations, noon hour drama rehearsals and presentations, co-op education classes, university and community college speaker forums, arts festivals, literary festivals, class rehearsals and presentations, public speaking, debates, assemblies, graduations, speaker and film presentations, workshops and presentations for students by professional musicians, orchestras, and theatre companies, staff professional development sessions.
- Over the years, it has been used by the community for large political and religious gatherings, for film and concert nights, and lectures and talks by famous authors and artists, and for music and theatre productions by and for elementary schools, high schools and the community at large.
- It is a 700 soft-seat auditorium with twin lecture rooms, a large stage, wings, dressing rooms and greenroom, front foyer, cloakroom, ticket booth and attendant rooms for make-up, props, sets and rehearsal space development.
- The auditorium has been recently upgraded with new flooring, seating, lighting and sound infrastructure, stage draperies, some electrical upgrades and new paint.
- Theatre Ancaster led the Take a Seat Campaign that raised \$22,000 within Theatre Ancaster members and in the community at large to help pay for the recovering of the auditorium seats at Ancaster High School in time for the 50th Anniversary of Ancaster High in 2009.

Theatre Ancaster's mandate is

- to provide outstanding, broadly based community musical and theatrical experiences for the citizens of Ancaster and the surrounding community.

Theatre Ancaster's purpose is

- to present excellent quality live musical theatre and related attractions;
- to organize support for such events; and
- to promote a variety of musical, theatrical and educational experiences among the youth and adults of the community of Ancaster.
- Last year, more than 7500 patrons enjoyed our main stage shows.
- In addition, close to 1500 students saw The Wizard of Oz during two special student matinees. Adults associated with the show take holiday time, rearrange work shifts, or sacrifice a day's pay to do the shows for the students. There were 32 elementary

- school Munchkins in the show, and a dozen teens from schools in community. In addition there were 20 adult performers, a 17 piece professional/student orchestra, and 100 plus production team members who worked together to build sets, create props, design sound and lighting, provide box office and front of house services on a level that critics and audiences often term professional.
- Theatre Ancaster shows have consistently received high praise from sponsors, audiences and critics.

Theatre Ancaster's educational work with students

- Theatre Ancaster was incorporated in 1997 after many years of its founders directing high school musicals at Ancaster High School as well as community shows under the auspices of the Ancaster Arts Council.
- Many graduates from these high school musicals are now giving back as teachers, performers, sponsors and production leaders with music and theatre work either with Theatre Ancaster, or through their own dance, music or theatre based organizations and businesses here and in neighbouring communities.
- Each of the musicals at Ancaster High would involve some 200 students and rely on the talent and expertise from some 20 teachers.
- In addition to Main Stage Theatrical Productions for students and the community, Theatre Ancaster runs teen and pre-teen production companies for students, plus teaching, workshop and camp programs for youth and adults during the year and in the summer.
- Theatre Ancaster summer camps for youth are so popular and well respected that all camps last summer for students ages 3.5 to 15 (some 225 spaces) were filled within four hours of the opening of registration.
- Theatre Ancaster will need to expand camps again to meet the community demand.
- One plan is for Theatre Ancaster to use the Theatre Auditorium for part of this expansion to meet the needs of students and children.
- These programs provide employment opportunities for students and opportunities for voluntary leadership development.
- Theatre Ancaster has worked with HWDSB as a co-op education partner since incorporating as Theatre Ancaster in 1997.
- Theatre Ancaster's impact on students as a co-op employer has been considerable.
- Theatre Ancaster directors worked with different teams of co-op students from a dozen different high schools for 5 years from 2000 to 2004 promoting the Skilled Trades and The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) for HWDSB through music, drama and video. Students researched, wrote, rehearsed and presented the materials under the direction of Theatre Ancaster.
- More than 6000 students each year from both elementary and secondary schools saw the presentations in their home schools. That's a total of some 30,000 students.
- In 2008, Theatre Ancaster was approached by Dr. Chris Spence, the Director of Education for HWDSB, to partner with HWDSB to develop and promote a full production co-op education musical theatre program open to all high school students from within the board at one of the HWDSB secondary schools.
- This offer came about because Dr Spence had been impressed with Theatre Ancaster's production of The Sound of Music in November 2007 which featured Samantha Walkes who was a Westmount Secondary grad. Samantha went on to become one of

the 20 finalists in Andrew Lloyd Webber's search for a Canadian Maria to play the lead in the Toronto professional production. Samantha was the only African-Canadian in the competition, and has furthered her studies and career in Los Angeles and New York.

- In 2008, a number of schools applied to host the Art Smart co-op education program for the HWDSB. Hill Park Secondary School was chosen from six applicants.
- In 2009, Theatre Ancaster began this co-op education Art Smart program with HWDSB in conjunction with music and drama teachers at Hill Park Secondary School. The Art Smart program is now entering its fourth year.
- Each year 30-50 students from a dozen different high schools attend Hill Park for a semester to participate in the Art Smart co-op program.
- The program results in the development and presentation of Broadway musicals and original musical creations viewed by some 7000 students each year. (over 21,000 in three years)
- If Hill Park is closed, this program could be run out of the Theatre Auditorium complex at Ancaster High School.

Community Partnerships.

- Theatre Ancaster is a community partner with The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and Ancaster High School. This partnership focuses on the Theatre Auditorium and the attendant spaces though we are also connected with Hill Park Secondary as mentioned as a co-op employer for the Art Smart program.
- Theatre Ancaster has a number of other ongoing partnerships which make our community work possible and more wide-reaching. These include partnerships with The Hamilton All Star Jazz Band, as well as The Ancaster Heritage Village BIA, Ancaster Information Services, and the theatre department of Redeemer College and University. Theatre Ancaster has also been involved with Music at Fieldcote.
- Theatre Ancaster enjoys great community support through sponsorship partnerships with some 40 local businesses, restaurants, community service providers and individuals.
- In return for their support, Theatre Ancaster promotes the businesses and organizations through advertising, personal endorsement, and economic support by the Theatre Ancaster membership.
- The partnerships increase awareness of community involvement by a business or individual, and this community involvement often brings about a direct or indirect economic benefit to the business or professional individual from the community at large.
- Theatre Ancaster supports the work of twenty plus organizations and charities yearly by donating money and/or Gift Certificates for silent auctions and other fund-raising events.

Use of The Theatre Auditorium by Theatre Ancaster

- Theatre Ancaster has played a major role in the use and upgrading of the Theatre Auditorium for educational, creative programs and productions with students and adults.
- Theatre Ancaster presents high quality community musical theatre in the Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High to more than 6000 community members on average each

- year. Last year, more than 9000 children, students, adults and seniors attended performances in the Community Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High.
- Since 1997, Theatre Ancaster has produced more than 30 full Broadway musicals and original pop musical revues for the community in the Community Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High.
 - Students and children from local schools have been involved on stage in more than half these productions.
 - Students and children from local schools have been involved off-stage in all these productions.
 - More than 100,000 individuals including students and children have attended these productions.
 - More than 10,000 students have attended special student matinees of Theatre Ancaster's fall productions at reduced prices.
 - More than 50,000 additional students have attended a variety of presentations by Theatre Ancaster's student co-op education productions since 1997.
 - At the present time, Theatre Ancaster presents four music theatre presentations in the Community Theatre Auditorium that encompass all ages of performers from pre-teens through teens to adults and seniors.
 - More than 200 community volunteers donate their time and creative talents yearly to plan and execute the productions. In any given year, some 50 volunteers will be students.
 - Volunteers donate in excess of 50,000 community hours for one major musical theatre production.
 - Theatre Ancaster operates as a not-for-profit charitable organization but it pays salaries to its summer school leaders and to its musicians ...some 15-20 professional and qualified student musicians for a full Broadway show, 5-10 for a musical revue and honoraria for 10-20 adult production leadership positions.

Economic Benefits to HWDSB and Ancaster High School from Theatre Ancaster's Community Partnership

- Theatre Ancaster has provided in-kind donations or cash in excess of \$125,000.00 for the upgrading of the Community Theatre Auditorium since incorporating as Theatre Ancaster in 1997.
- Theatre Ancaster provides and maintains the stage lighting and sound equipment in the Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High.
- The HWDSB receives grants from \$50,000.00 to \$75,000.00 each year from the Ontario Government Community Sharing of School Facilities Program as a result of the Theatre Ancaster Partnership. Theatre Ancaster as a community partner presently shares the Theatre Auditorium for rehearsals, workshops, and performances about 100 days a year.
- Theatre Ancaster would be able to provide greater economic benefit to HWDSB and Ancaster High through further community programming with increased use of the facility.

Value to Students

- Theatre Ancaster offers student musical theatre training through its main stage productions without charge for both on stage and behind the scenes skill development.
- Since 1997, Theatre Ancaster has involved students on stage in more than half the 30 productions, and as members of various off stage production teams in all 30 productions.
- Theatre Ancaster makes resources, sets and costumes available to schools whenever possible.
- Theatre Ancaster personnel provide technical help and instructional workshops to schools whenever possible.
- Theatre Ancaster believes in Aristotle's dictum that you learn by doing. Theatre Ancaster promotes the education of the whole person, the intellect, the emotion, and the social and personal caring that is important to all. We believe our programs and projects develop and promote this holistic life-enhancing process.
- Classroom learning is important. As a co-op employer, we are directly involved in the evaluation of student learning.
- We all know there are important values that need to accompany what is learned in the classroom. These values include the harder to measure but priceless values of self-esteem, confidence, reliability, responsibility, organizational skills, time management, intergenerational involvement, respect for others and the satisfaction of developing individual creativity and being part of a successful project valued by thousands within the whole community.
- These values are evaluated through the co-op education evaluation process in which Theatre Ancaster participates.
- The various educational and theatre projects Theatre Ancaster undertakes with and for students utilize the Theatre Auditorium facilities.
- Theatre Ancaster provides direct production experience for 30-40 pre-teens on the Ancaster High Auditorium Stage through its Stage 2: Junior Broadway Pre-Teen Program.
- Several hundred elementary students will also have a chance to view this production.
- Theatre Ancaster provides production experience each year for 20-30 teenagers on the Auditorium Stage through its Stage 3: The Young Company.
- Theatre Ancaster provides musical theatre co-op education placements to high school students at Ancaster High and other community schools.
- Theatre Ancaster has been a co-op employer for more than 150 high school students in a variety of theatre related programs since 1997.
- Individuals have been trained in a variety of practical theatre production skills from sound and lighting to set building and props creation, backstage work, stage management, work as a director's assistant, costume creation, box office program work, and graphic design and advertising.
- The majority of co-op students have also been trained in the on stage skills of dancing, acting and singing.
- Some students are now directly employed in their chosen fields.
- Theatre Ancaster also provides a variety of short term options for additional students wishing to complete their 40 hours of Community Service. Close to 100 students have successfully completed their hours of community service with Theatre Ancaster.

- Theatre Ancaster provides summer employment for up to 20 students each summer and summer leadership training for up to 10 students with varying degrees of musical theatrical training.
- During fall and winter sessions Theatre Ancaster provides voluntary student leadership training as part of a mentorship program for up to 10 students.
- Theatre Ancaster is prepared to work more closely with a number of school departments to provide greater opportunities for students as an integral part of their existing school programs to build sets, design and execute costumes, paint sets, create props, develop advertising materials and marketing campaigns to meet real quality-controlled theatrical needs.
- As mentioned, Theatre Ancaster leaders now include many students from the early Ancaster High School musical theatre productions which began in 1982. Some of their children are now involved as well.
- These Theatre Ancaster “grads” of Ancaster High School Musical Theatre Productions and Theatre Ancaster productions now teach and run music and theatre productions and programs at a number of elementary and secondary schools within HWDSB and in neighbouring boards of education.
- These teacher “grads” continue the ripple effect from the original Theatre Ancaster School Productions on the next generation of students.
- Three “grads” from student productions now own or run independent businesses that teach dance, music and/or theatre within the community while others work with neighbouring community theatres.
- Still other grads and associates now work professionally both onstage as performers and musicians and as production team members in Hamilton, Toronto, Stratford, Shaw and Charlottetown.
- Theatre Ancaster knows by direct contact and correspondence that some of the values and life direction of these young people were directly influenced by the programs and production values of shows that originated with the teachers and directors in the Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High. You plant seeds and encourage growth...people then become what they are capable of becoming.
- There are three families who have been involved over three generations with Theatre Ancaster in theatrical work for the benefit of students and the community in the Theatre Auditorium facility, and many with two generations of involvement.
- It is quite possible that none of this would have happened had there not been a Theatre Auditorium facility for school and community use.

Student Retention.

- If the HWDSB closes other schools with auditoriums, the Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High will become even more important to the HWDSB.
- Theatre Ancaster is prepared to be the co-op employer for an arts based musical theatre program using the Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High as a primary resource.
- Ancaster High could become the site for a specialist high skills major program in music, theatre and the arts...the well-equipped Theatre Auditorium is crucial for the success of such a program but its attendant greenroom, dressing rooms, shop and art room facilities are also important for the successful running of such a program.
- Programs and courses would be modified and/or developed by teachers to support the program.

- A conservative estimate would suggest that 50-100 students would be attracted to such a program the first year. Over four years an arts based program could be developed grade by grade as at Cawthra Park in Peel. Cawthrapark.com
- There is no such program offered in the Ancaster-Dundas community and no other auditorium serving the West Arc district.
- The ministry of education is not going to fund a new auditorium. Theatre Ancaster believes it is important to retain this Theatre Auditorium facility for the benefit of students and the community.

Future for The Theatre Auditorium.

- It is unlikely that any new school would ever be able to include such a theatre auditorium again as part of a new community school building.
- If there is a stage area included in a new school, it is likely to be included as part of a gymnasium or cafeteria plan which will have conflicting aims and uses.
- Quality musical theatre with full production values is not possible in a multi-use cafeteria/gymnasium space without specialized stage and acoustical properties.
- Quality production level arts and theatre programs for students need a well-equipped dedicated theatre facility to provide student training with the necessary work and safety procedures and equipment.
- Difficulties in a gymnasium/cafeteria space are ongoing with conflicting demands by class, program and school needs.
- Community involvement by and with students in the facilities is more difficult and the learning for students is not as great.
- Sight lines for performances in a non raked facility are difficult for students and adults alike.
- The Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High could be the cornerstone for a refurbishing project or a new addition to Ancaster High. It is too valuable to be ripped down.
- Wherever a school is placed, busing of students will be needed.
- The Theatre Auditorium and any new addition to the school or the right sizing and upgrading of the present school is in a good location because it is close to the Rotary Centre complex with gym and rink facilities and some community meeting rooms where students already go for programming.
- If HWDSB decides to sell or dismantle the present Ancaster High school facility, Theatre Ancaster strongly recommends that the West Wing and attendant property be sold to the city and maintained as an Arts and Recreational Resource Centre for the community if it is no longer required as a school.
- Theatre Ancaster is prepared to be part of this plan should it be required to save the facility. The plan would include both designated facilities and multi-purpose facilities for arts, recreation and culture for all age groups.
- Theatre Ancaster has the background and skill with its personnel to help lead such a project. Theatre Ancaster's Board of Directors includes community leaders with both political and business experience to help realize this action plan.
- Designated facilities would include the aquatic centre, gym and auditorium spaces, a black box rehearsal and performance space, set and prop construction shops, dance studio, fine arts studio, dirty arts studio, digital arts studio, administrative offices, child-care centre, drop-in centre, kitchen, lunchroom, lounge, operations, caretaking

and storage. It would work in concert with the Rotary Centre and the programming for the community which happens there.

- Multi purpose facilities would include the 700 soft-seat auditorium, meeting rooms, foyer/hall gallery display space, two lecture theatres (100 seats each), small rehearsal/practice rooms.
- Outdoor facilities would include green space for walking and recreation, gardens, playground, parking, and performance stage space.
- Classes, workshops, camps, meeting facilities, gardens, gallery space, and retail sales are envisioned.
- Precedents for such a plan do exist. See the successful transformation of a Halton school facility into the new Queen Elizabeth Community and Cultural Centre. See qepark@oakville.ca

A Proposed Plan for the Theatre Auditorium and the West Wing.

Theatre Ancaster is prepared to help develop and provide arts leadership as appropriate with the HWDSB and Ancaster High using the Theatre Auditorium and the attendant space as a keystone in the programming.

Theatre Ancaster would:

- Support the development of arts programming to lead to the creation of a specialist high skills major for music, theatre and the arts
- Work as a co-op employer for a major arts based co-op program at Ancaster High that would centre on the use of the Theatre Auditorium.
- Increase rental revenue for HWDSB by expanding the scope of evening community activities and entertainment provided in the Theatre Auditorium.
- Provide additional evening and weekend community theatre offerings both musical and non-musical in the Theatre Auditorium.
- Organize a new series of evening musical entertainments for the community in the Theatre Auditorium involving student and adult performers.
- Bring in professional musical and theatrical offerings on a regular basis.
- Move its base of operations to Ancaster High if feasible.
- Expand its program for and beyond youth classes throughout the year in music and theatre related skills development
- Offer summer programs for the students and community using the Theatre Auditorium as a base.
- Expand job opportunities to young theatre grads and train more student high school and university youth volunteers.
- Expand our co-op education work from high schools to colleges and universities.
- Renovate existing west wing spaces if they were declared redundant to include new facilities including a commercial black box performance space (200 seats).
- Develop workshops and programs in the making of theatrical props, sets and costumes in conjunction with staff, program and students and for the community.
- Develop a music theatre festival and arts/music festival in the summer for both students and adults.

Possible Future Development of The Theatre Auditorium and the West Wing as a Community Arts, Recreational and Cultural Centre.

If HWDSB needed to relocate Ancaster High and declared the west wing and the immediate surrounding property surplus, Theatre Ancaster would support the purchase by the city to develop the property as an arts complex.

Theatre Ancaster would:

- Develop and plan the site with the city and other arts, recreation and cultural organizations as interested community partners.
- Work with The Dundas Valley School of Art to establish an Ancaster branch if that was desired.
- Establish a gallery and retail sales venue if feasible.
- Manage the new arts complex.

Conclusion.

- Theatre Ancaster believes the Theatre Auditorium at Ancaster High School is a valuable resource for school use, for the present education of students, and for the development of new and expanded music, theatre and arts programs for students.
- Theatre Ancaster believes that such programs have a ripple effect into the community that promote qualities of community service, volunteerism, stewardship, and provide opportunities for creative, personal development, responsibility and self-esteem as demonstrated by the growth and development of Theatre Ancaster itself.
- Theatre Ancaster believes the Theatre Auditorium should be promoted and developed further for both student and community use. A gymnasium or cafeteria is no substitute for what the HWDSB already has and can utilize more. Just as a well-equipped lab would no more be set up in a gym or cafeteria so too a well-equipped theatre requires dedicated space.
- The Theatre Auditorium should be developed as a destination for a summer music theatre festival run by Theatre Ancaster, the community and the HWDSB.
- Theatre Ancaster is prepared to operate its summer programs out of the Theatre Auditorium.
- If the Theatre Auditorium is retained, students would continue to receive training with quality resources and programming, others would gain employment, and the community would continue to be enriched by the programs, productions and the revenue generation to the local economy.
- The dedicated Theatre Auditorium and the attendant renewed facilities at Ancaster High will pay educational dividends for students and the community far into the future. Witness what has already happened. Theatre Ancaster personnel have contributed to the education, culture and well-being of the students and community for forty years. They received Civic Recognition Honours from the Town of Ancaster and have been honoured as Paul Harris Fellows by Rotary International for their contribution to education and culture in the community. As one of the people involved in this whole process, I can testify that The Theatre Auditorium has been a key ingredient in that ongoing work.

- The Theatre Auditorium is like a pebble dropped into the middle of the lake. The ripples from its use, from the work by teachers, from the development of students into teachers and community members has been significant, and the value for the ripples in education and the community are still increasing.
- Theatre Ancaster believes the Theatre Auditorium should be retained.