

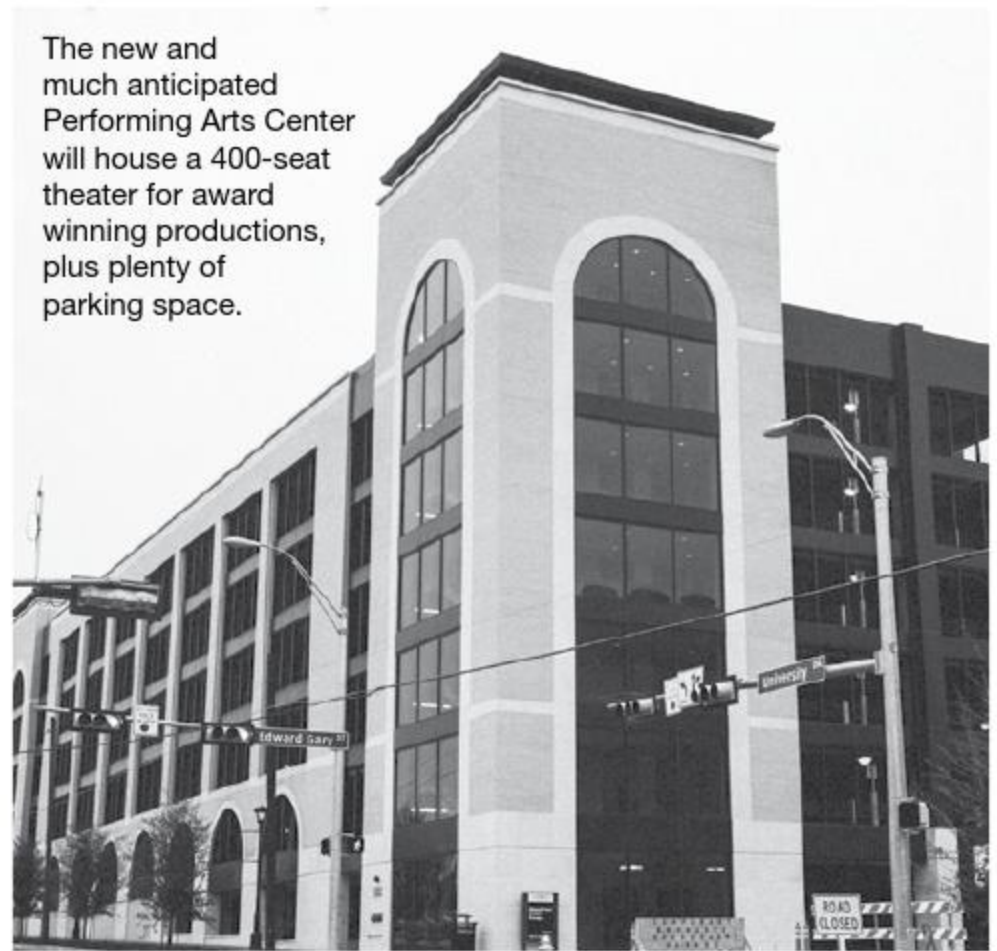
OFF BROADWAY

THE NO-ACCESS GRANTED; INSIDE LOOK

-To some degree, the only way to know for certain that the Performing Arts Center's facilities are competitive to other universities is on April 7, when the Texas State Department of Theatre and Dance performs its spring musical, "Anything Goes."



Few have seen inside Texas State's new Performing Arts Center. No tours or press are allowed inside the Performing Arts Center until the building dedication on Feb. 27 for university faculty, staff and invited guests. A stroll down the sidewalk beside the center off University Drive may warrant a photo opportunity or a peek into every accessible nook and cranny of the 43,700 square foot structure, which includes a recital hall, theater, dressing rooms, offices and rehearsal space that has been the subject of discussion and debate for years.



The new and much anticipated Performing Arts Center will house a 400-seat theater for award winning productions, plus plenty of parking space.

John Fleming, chair of Texas State's Department of Theatre and Dance, said that before this 'no access' mandate was instituted he would occasionally escort university students into the center.

After all, Texas State students are the people who will be taking advantage of and utilizing this space the most. The Performing Arts

"We're getting nationally recognized for degree programs and as a department as a whole, that just keeps feeding the growth,"

Fleming said.

Center was deemed necessary by university officials to help foster and support one of the nation's leading fine arts programs.

The lively Sarah Mullinnix, acting senior, said she decided to attend Texas State in the spring of 2011 because of its theater department and for the opportunity to perform on stage in the new center.

"It drew me here, rather than UT," said Mullinnix, whose mother is a Texas State alumna. "Texas State's known for its theater department and the number of programs within it. ... I'm really proud."

Mullinnix, who cited fellow curly haired actor/comedians Gene Wilder and Gilda Radner as inspirations, added that the faculty and staff in the Texas State Department of Theatre and Dance provide opportunities for students' voices to be heard and work to find them the help they need to succeed professionally in a close-knit, family dynamic.

"We're getting nationally recognized for degree programs and as a department as a whole, that just keeps feeding the growth," Fleming said.

In what may have been a less controversial setting, Fleming said he would occasionally participate in hard hat walk-throughs of the structure. His first visit inside the "substantially complete" center was in September, when it was transferred from Hunt Construction to the university.

"People who have walked into the building are really impressed,"

Fleming said.

And an October tour of the center left the project's lead donor, Patti Strickel Harrison, "speechless" he said.

Harrison's PSH Foundation donated \$8 million to the Texas State Pride in Action Campaign that launched the construction of the Performing Arts Center in January 2008. The building's 400-seat theater is named in her honor.

Fleming believed the estimated total cost of the theater was about \$23 million, with the remainder acquired through other outside donations and state funds.

Besides the theater and recital hall, the Performing Arts Center consists of a 455-vehicle parking garage, a south chill plant, and street and ground improvements, totaling more than \$83 million, according to Texas State's Office of Facilities Planning, Design, and Construction Project Status Report from November.

Flipping through the fall 2013 briefing brochure for the Texas State Performing Arts Center, it's apparent that many of the building's features can be appreciated by both the technologically inclined and lovers of the arts across multiple disciplines.

Two concert grand pianos and a harpsichord with an early 18th-century Franco-Flemish design will be featured in the 300-seat recital hall in the center, which, along with the theater, will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified.

Fleming, who has been actively involved with the project since plans for the center were announced in spring 2008, said he feels fortunate that Texas State officials have strongly included faculty in the university's School of Music and Department of Theatre and Dance in many aspects of the center.

He said they were involved in choosing the architectural firm who was hired, provided feedback on feasibility and planning documents as well as material orders, like the more than \$400,000 worth of lighting equipment. "It's a beautiful space, and I've said we need to make sure it's equipped properly."

To some degree, the only way to know for certain that the Performing Arts Center's facilities are competitive to other universities is on April 7, when the Texas State Department of Theatre and Dance performs its spring musical, "Anything Goes."

A portion of this Golden Age musical, which centers on the madcap antics aboard an



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◀ Boogie-Woogie (piano-based blues) fan and former Texas State student, Patti Strickel Harrison, donated \$8 million to launch the construction of the Performing Arts Center. The building's 400-seat theater is named in her honor.

ocean liner bound from New York to London, will be performed as part of the opening events of the center on Feb. 28 and March 2.

"Anything Goes" was chosen in part because of Harrison's love of musical theater, Fleming said.

Harrison, a Port Neches native, grew up surrounded by music. Her mother was a piano teacher, and while she took a few lessons, she said she would have rather played boogie-woogie, a piano-based blues, as opposed to the more formal, classical variety that was traditionally taught.

Her love of music extended to her formative years as a Port Neches High School student, where she played tenor saxophone for the band.

Although her parents didn't attend college, they expected Harrison and her younger brother to go.

A neighbor of the Harrison's attended Texas State, then Southwest Texas State Teachers College, a school that lived up to her expectations after visiting the campus. The summer before Harrison moved to San Marcos to attend Texas State, her mother, father and younger brother died in a vehicle accident.

From her father's vehicle dealerships in Port Neches, Harrison inherited a car and money for tuition.

Harrison attended Texas State pre-med from 1947-1948 with aspirations of becoming a

psychiatrist. She was part of the first group of women to live in Beretta Hall, fondly remembering the building's Mexican tile.

"It was just a new world to me," said Harrison. "I met a lot of good friends." Many of her friends were English majors and could work and study from their dorms or the library, unlike Harrison, who was mainly confined to the lab, she remarked with a chuckle.

Her time at Texas State wasn't all work and no fun. Harrison said at the time there were no Greek organizations on the Texas State campus. Instead, she became a member of the women-only Charles Craddock Literary Society.

Having a car on campus, a rare feat at the time, also led to memorable trips with friends, one of which would change Harrison's life forever.

It was a spring afternoon when Harrison and her friends piled into her 1942 Mercury, ready to explore the Texas Hill Country. They eventually wound up in Wimberley, a place that continues to enchant Harrison.

Harrison recently sold her home in Wimberley, after living there for more than three decades. She moved to Las Cruces, NM, partly because of a new business venture, with hopes of returning to Texas in the future.

Her success as an entrepreneur may be based on a confidence and independence that doesn't seem to lose sight of others – a generosity that looks toward investing in the future.

These traits led to Harrison receiving one of the first medical technology degrees offered, having first read about the field from a brochure in former Texas State Dean Mary Brogdon's office, she said.

For nine years, Harrison worked as a medical technologist at Hermann Hospital in Houston, later becoming the technical director of its blood bank instead of enrolling in medical

school. This turned out to be a positive move.

After Harrison left Hermann Hospital, she partnered with friends in New Jersey (and moved there too) to form the company Spectra Biologicals that went into competition with Johnson & Johnson.

Two winters in the Garden State proved to be all Harrison could handle and she moved back to Houston. "I'm a Texan and I always will be," she said.

Spectra Biologicals was sold four years after she returned to Texas, when she formed a new company in Dallas. That company was soon sold too, with Harrison selling mutual funds, performing well in the stock market and forming another company with friends along the way.

Harrison also found love during her return to Houston from New Jersey, marrying dentist Raymond Harrison in 1972. Raymond died three years later, but Patti Harrison remained close to his daughter, Mary Jane, who would go on to teach for 17 years with Houston Independent School District and become the executive director of Harrison's PSH Foundation in Wimberley.

The PSH Foundation, which has since ceased operations, was established in 2001 to provide scholarships and other funds for Texas State.

The Mary Jane Hamilton Memorial Presidential Endowment, which Harrison established after Mary Jane died from ovarian cancer in 2003, continues to award funds to students in the Texas State College of Education.

By 2008, Harrison said she was "very much involved with Texas State," having donated funds to the university for about 15 years.

But Harrison said it was time for her to close the PSH Foundation and "take care of that particular part" of her life.

All these years, Harrison explained that she was looking for a way to give back to the community by bringing it together.

The dedicated 84 year old Texas State Bobcat found the answer with the Performing Arts Theater Center.