



# The Institute of Outdoor Theatre Newsletter

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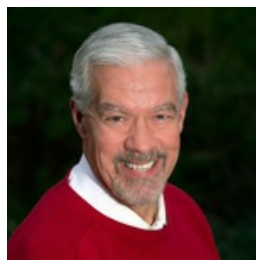
## Next Newsletter:

Do you have something you want to share with the IOT membership in the next newsletter? Just send it to: [iot@setc.org](mailto:iot@setc.org) and we will try to include it in the next newsletter.

**This new contact information for the IOT begins on May 3, 2017**

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Conference  
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336-272-3784  
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## Letter from the Director



Welcome to the IOT newsletter, the last to be produced by our current staff prior to the Institute moving to its new home at SETC this summer. The wonderful team I work with—"HRH" Susan Phillips and grad assistant Scott Rose—have loyally culled the internet and badgered you to collect news of the membership, hold up your successes, and duly recognize both the great and the unsung of our field. This publication will continue under SETC of course, and Susan and Scott join me in urging you to keep sending your news which so enriches both the national and international image of

outdoor theatre.

Since our last edition in December 2016, the staff have completed the 2016 attendance and budget surveys, produced our annual summer theatre auditions, and plunged into the morass of planning, sorting, discarding, and packing up that precedes the arrival of the moving truck in June. Our partners at the East Carolina University Joyner Library have worked with us to further expand the research archives of the outdoor theatre movement, digitizing a large collection of video and audio materials which had accumulated in the grandmother's attic of our Institute. We are now in the process of identifying some of those materials: which theatre produced that A Midsummer Night's Dream and who was that dancer in the loincloth and body paint? It gives us a lot of satisfaction to know that these materials are now preserved and far more accessible through the internet than they ever were in our third floor walk-up store room.

The 2016 attendance reports are all available on our website (<http://www.outdoor-theatre.org/attendance-reports/>), and this is the first year since 2013 that we've seen a slight decline (about 5%) in overall attendance for the theatres that have consistently reported for the past five years. For those that reported in the last two years, however, the results are more mixed. History dramas dipped by 4% while variety (plays and musicals) increased by 5% and the Shakespeares were flat. Ticket income (as opposed to attendance) was also mixed, with the non-Shakespeare revenues dropping about 1% while the Shakespeares saw an increase of 6% while attendance only rose by a half percent (can you spell 'ticket pricing'?). All of this and much more information can be found in the reports posted on the website. And before leaving this subject, I want to observe how much like pulling teeth it is to get this information out of your theatres! This

has been true for the more than 50 years we have been collecting this data, and I do urge you all to do better. It is the only field-wide measurement that exists of how our business is doing and, even though you do your own individual data analysis, it only takes a few extra minutes to send us your numbers so we better can see the whole picture and explain it to the media.

Our January auditions went quite well as they have since we moved our dates early in the season to coincide with the Martin Luther King weekend. With the SETC transition, these auditions will move to Greensboro NC next year and continue on the same date. Consequently, a contingent of seven staff from SETC and Greensboro College joined us to observe our little ways and start their own planning process. The IOT auditions have a unique place in the annual cycle of summer theatre auditions with this being the first audition for many actors, and an average of 75% of them

getting hired. This year 215 actors from 23 States and 74 colleges and universities auditioned for 10 companies from Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

This brings my report to a close. I will retire from East Carolina University at the end of June, hibernate for the next six months (as required by the State of North Carolina), and re-emerge from my chrysalis in 2018 to advise SETC on the continuance and expansion of our feasibility and consulting programs. More on that later in this newsletter. This has been a wonderful opportunity to work with new and old friends, and I particularly want to recognize the intrepid members of my kitchen cabinet: Susan Phillips, Scott Parker, and David Weiss for their unstinting help, advice and judgment. To the dozens of theatres I have visited over the past five years and the hundreds more that I wish I had: thank you for a rewarding adventure and the great pleasure that comes from seeing smart, talented people carrying on in spite of the elements and doing such great work. Finally, let me assure our members and followers that the SETC team of professionals soon taking over the reins are 100% dedicated to continuing and expanding the work of the Institute of Outdoor Theatre. A strong and diverse organization, led brilliantly by its Executive Director Betsey Horth, SETC will offer a wealth of expertise and resource that will ensure a bright and lasting future for the IOT.

Michael Hardy  
Director

## Susan's Farewell



The past 11 years have really flown by, it is hard to put into words what my tenure with the IOT has meant to me. It has been my honor and privilege to work for you and with you. I sometimes think that I have been taking money under false pretenses; needless to say, I have really enjoyed my job. It has enabled me to meet so many of you across the country and see your fine productions. I have seen productions in 80 year old amphitheatres and productions of site-specific theatres they don't have a permanent amphitheatre. In some cases attendance is slowing down but in others attendance continues to climb. Let's say this out loud and together, "Outdoor theatre is still relevant."

I want to offer a big Thank You for Scott Parker for hiring me back in 2006. I know I was different from the other assistants he had, I had outdoor theatre experience. Who knew it would be such a wonderful and fulfilling adventure. I would also like to thank David Weiss for his constant support and guidance over the years, always our voice of reason with a touch of humor. Thanks to

Michael Hardy who joined the IOT in 2012. He came in and trusted me to do my thing and I can't thank him enough for that.

You are my tribe; though distance and states divide us, we are family. A word of thanks to a few of you that have always given me your support and assistance, I couldn't have made it over the years without you; Mike & Diane Graham, Lance Culpepper, Marina Hunley-Graham, Jackie and Denver Mills, John Russell, Brandon Smith, John Tissue and Johnny Warren.

I am staying on at ECU and will be working for the College of Fine Arts and Communication and with SRAPAS, their performing arts series. My email address ([phillipss@ecu.edu](mailto:phillipss@ecu.edu)) and phone number (252-328-5363) will remain the same. Call or email if you have any questions, I hope to see you at auditions and at the conference.

With much love,  
Susan  
Business Manager

## The New IOT Memberships

As a current IOT member you are automatically a Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC)

As a current IOT member you are automatically a Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) member! And with the spring season upon us, it's the time of year for annual renewal of memberships. SETC will reach out to current IOT members over the next two months in an effort to renew memberships by the SETC and IOT merger date of July 1, 2017.

SETC is continuing the services that have long been valued by IOT members, including Outdoor Theatre Auditions, the annual IOT conference, year-round consulting, research, online resources, and more.

SETC is excited to offer this year's membership renewal at our standard individual or organizational membership price of just \$77. This is a substantial savings for IOT members as compared to previous annual dues. And, since SETC's annual membership generally runs from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, renewing IOT members will in fact receive 18 months of coverage if they renew by the July 1 date.

Look for a membership renewal message from SETC by email in May or June. If you have questions please contact SETC's central office at 336-272-3784 or [iot@setc.org](mailto:iot@setc.org) after May 3.

## 2017 IOT Conference

Mark your calendars now. The fall IOT conference will be held on October 19 - 20, 2017 and will be hosted by Serenbe Playhouse in Chattahoochee Hills, GA (just outside of Atlanta). The conference will offer two days of meetings and networking and exploring topics of interest to outdoor theatre. Serenbe Playhouse is in its 8<sup>th</sup> Season and continues to offer the best in "artistically rich site-specific performances and programming."



The conference will offer good food, good conversation and a night of **The Sleepy Hollow Experience** which was recognized as one of the Top Five Halloween Plays in the country by American Theatre Magazine. Please come and join us and see how this company is thriving with its site-specific theatrical performances.

## The New IOT/SETC Consulting Program

Since the IOT began in 1963, our executive directors accompanied by a number of theatre, tourism, architectural and marketing professionals have conducted feasibility studies for new theatres as well as management, facility, and artistic audits at the request of existing theatres. With the move of IOT to SETC, that consulting practice will expand to include indoor theatres and a much larger base of consultants drawn not only from the membership but from full-time professional consultants who agree to be "on call" for their special expertise. Our goal is to offer a wide range of services from low or no cost assistance to sophisticated studies using a custom tailored team of specialists.

The first joint consulting venture between the IOT and SETC has kicked off this spring with a fascinating new project in Johnstown, PA. The Steeples Project, Inc. there wants to create a new theatre within the former St. Columba, a beautiful Lombard Romanesque cathedral. Our consulting team of Betsey Horth (SETC's Executive Director), Larry Gustke, and Michael Hardy will develop the feasibility study with plans for marketing, tourism, programming and operations. Our team has recently returned from a three day visit to the community which has a rich and storied history of immigration, industry and the deadly flood of 1889 that is now commemorated by the U. S. Park Service's National Memorial <https://www.nps.gov/jofl/index.htm>.

## Member News

**Utah Shakespeare Festival** (Cedar City, UT) celebrated the retirement of Executive Director R. Scott Phillips, who retired on March 1, 2017. Phillips was involved with the festival for 40 years. He graduated from Southern Utah University in 1975 and was the first full time employee of the festival; he was marketing director, managing director, interim Festival director and finally executive director for the past nine years. His contributions to the Utah Shakespeare Festival and outdoor theatre speak volumes of the man. He achieved many milestones in his career but his crowning achievement was the new Beverly Taylor Sorenson Center for the Arts. The Institute of Outdoor Theatre honored him in October with the Mark R. Sumner Award and then in January he was honored by the Shakespeare Theatre Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. Happy Retirement Scott.



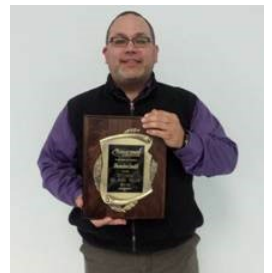
**Gamut Theatre** (Harrisburg, PA) producers of Harrisburg Shakespeare Festival's executive director, Melissa Nicholson was elected president of the Shakespeare Theatre Association at their annual conference in January. The Shakespeare Theatre Association's mission is to provide a forum for theatres primarily involved with producing the works of William Shakespeare. This international organization includes 120 theatres from around the world.



**Commonwealth Shakespeare Company's** (Boston, MA) founding Artistic Director Steven Maler received the Elliot Norton Sustained Excellence Award for 2016 by the Boston Theater Critics Association. The Elliot Norton Sustained Excellence Award pays tribute to the recipient's body of work rather than to contributions during a given year. CSC has received numerous Elliot Norton

Awards over the years.

**Tecumseh!** (Chillicothe, OH) CEO Brandon Smith was honored by the Chillicothe Jaycees as Citizen of the Year. He was recognized for the many contributions brought to the Ross County area by the outdoor drama such as tourism and an overall sense of community pride. Since taking the position as CEO in 2014, he has worked hard to seek out partnership opportunities with other organizations in the area. Brandon says he is particularly proud of the success of a food drive conducted during the "Tecumseh!" productions. Brandon was also elected to serve as Co-chair of the Professional Division of SETC representing Outdoor Theatre.



The Scioto Society (producers of **Tecumseh!**), is opening a new boutique shop in downtown Chillicothe, OH called the Tecumseh! Trading Co. They will carry a variety of items concentrating on handmade Native American art and Collectibles, locally made goods, books jewelry and art. Brandon Smith, CEO, said "We're concentrating on items that you can't get anywhere else in Chillicothe. We want to compliment the shops already downtown, not compete with them. I think our jewelry selection will be very interesting and unique and the variety of Native American made goods will be among the best available at any shop in the state. We won't carry large amounts of any one item, the idea being that when it's gone it's gone and we get to go find some other cool item to offer."

**The Lost Colony** (Manteo, NC) has announced that to honor its 80th Anniversary Season it is now offering endowed seats in the Waterside Theatre for \$250. The purchase of a seat is a donation and is tax deductible and will build the endowment fund for the future of the production. An engraved plate with a personalized inscription will be affixed to the seat you purchase. [www.thelostcolony.org/contribute/seatcampaign/](http://www.thelostcolony.org/contribute/seatcampaign/)

## Other News

**Strike at the Wind**, the story of the Lowrie War in 1865 returns to an indoor stage at the Givens Performing Arts Center on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. The Outdoor Drama ran from 1976 until 2007 at the amphitheater at the Lumbee Tribal Cultural Center

Outdoor drama ran from 1978 until 2007 at the amphitheater at the Lumbee Tribal Cultural Center and was written by NC playwright Randolph Umberger. The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina has partnered with UNCP to revive the drama and it will be performed on June 23 and June 24, 2017.

## In Memoriam



Neil Hess, formative figure of dance in the Texas Panhandle, died Wednesday, June 8, 2016. He was 85.

"He's a giant in the arts in Amarillo," said Robert Hansen, longtime colleague and arts professor at West Texas A&M University. Hess began his stint with the outdoor musical drama "Texas" in its first year as choreographer, later becoming the production's director for its 1985 season until his departure in 2001.

In 1976, Hess founded Lone Star Ballet. Hansen said Hess' work ethic and his high expectations of students elevated the ballet to national prominence. Hansen also credited Hess with pushing "Texas" to become the best attended outdoor musical drama in the U.S. "It's his vision that got it there," Hansen said, "because he understood what outdoor musical drama means."

"Texas" Executive Director Kris Miller said Hess' impact on the production still resonates today, with key figures including Choreographer Crystal Bertrand, one of Hess' most prominent students, taking cues from her old instructor. The "Texas" cast and crew would dedicate Thursday night's performance (June 9) to Hess, Miller said, and Lone Star Ballet Executive Director Craig Henderson announced on Friday the establishment of the Neil Hess Memorial Scholarship Fund.

In 2001, Hess premiered "Lone Star Rising," a musical celebrating the cowboy, Mexican-American and Native American cultures of Texas. Presented at the Lake Meredith amphitheater, the show ran through the early 2000s. "That was his vision," said Corey Coon, a "Texas" alumnus and student of Hess'. "The music, the show, the dances. That was really all his."

Hess and his wife Camille retired to South Carolina about 10 years ago, daughter Lisa Jones said. In that time Hess worked with independent dance companies around the U.S., was a prolific painter, and wrote music, plays and children's stories.

"He didn't stop much," Jones said. "I wouldn't call it retirement. He just continued to produce amazing things." Hess' survivors also include two other daughters, Jillana Webb and Alexia Sheehan. Each of his daughters has carried on successful careers in dance.

"He had many gifts, but he did love to teach," Jones said of her father. "He really did love his students."

The Institute of Outdoor Theatre (IOT) is a program of the College of Fine Arts and Communication at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. Since its inception in 1963, the Institute's scope has grown to provide services to a wide variety of theatrical organizations around the world who perform in outdoor settings including historical dramas, Shakespeare festivals and religious and contemporary theatrical presentations. These organizations are united by their common challenges in producing theatre in outdoor settings and their unique roles in providing exceptional values in tourism, education and entertainment. For more information please visit our website at [www.outdoor-theatre.org](http://www.outdoor-theatre.org).

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