



The Institute of Outdoor Theatre

Newsletter

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Next Newsletter:

Do you have something you want to share with the IOD membership in the next newsletter? Just send it to: outdoor@ecu.edu and we will try to include it in the next newsletter.

Letter from the Director



We're hearing a lot about 'economic recovery' these days, and the view from our office is that something is definitely stirring out there. One of our regular activities over the years has been the preparation of feasibility studies, business plans or theatre design/construction reviews for new and existing theatres, and we are seeing a significant uptick of interest in all of these areas. After a year and a half of relatively little activity, we have just completed a major study for the Saluda Shoals Park in Columbia, SC and are juggling six other inquiries in various stages of development. This is great news because it signals the continuing vitality of outdoor theatre and, we hope, the end of the Great Recession's drag on our members and fellow theatres. The same positive signs are seen in our annual [attendance survey](#) where overall audience participation has increased for the second year in a row after several seasons of decline. We still have a way to go, but the tide seems to have turned.

As in Spring, early hints of better weather ahead can be deceptive, but it does raise hope and makes this a very good time to plan for improvements. Whether it's for your theatre facility, or staff, or marketing campaigns, or artistic ambitions: 2015 looks like an excellent year to look ahead and start putting some numbers to those wishes. If your bottom line is getting better, it's also a good time to improve your capitalization in preparation for the realization of your dreams.

We are always looking for stories to share with our members, so if you are already traveling down this road, please let us know so we all learn and gain inspiration from what you are doing.

Michael Hardy

2015 Conference

This year as an experiment we combined the Annual IOT Conference with our national auditions, with both taking place over the same weekend (January 16-18). We lowered the registration cost for the event and compressed the program into one day with an opening party the night before.

For those theatres who usually attend both the conference and the auditions, this produced a very clear benefit in money and time, since only one trip was needed to attend both. Another benefit was that several more theatres attended the auditions because it could be combined with the conference. In general, we were quite pleased with the results. We spent most of the time in the IOT business meeting debriefing on the conference, and the consensus was that we should take it back to a two day event to have more time for sessions and networking, and definitely keep it tied to the auditions. Since those auditions were so successful this year (we sold out after only four weeks), we may expand those to two days as well.

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The key sessions this year were on strategic planning, marketing and social media, and group culture. In the strategic planning session, **John Russell** of Montford Park Players described the years of planning that have led his theatre to a significant expansion and now a major renovation and enlargement of the theatre facilities. Members then shared their own planning challenges, and the program morphed into a group consulting (therapy?) session with members sharing advice and brainstorming about each other's situations. **Johnny Warren** and ECU Communications Adjunct Professor **Brittany Thompson** led a session on social media, and **Brandon Smith** presented data and tips on how to increase bus tours to our theatres. (The [handout](#) from Brandon's session is available on the IOT website.)



At the annual awards luncheon, ECU College of Fine Arts and Communication Dean Christopher Buddo welcomed the delegates and reaffirmed his College's commitment to the IOT which moved to ECU five years ago. The second annual **Scott J. Parker Award** for an outstanding volunteer was presented to **Emily Coghlan** of *Montford Park Players* together with the grant award's check for \$500.00.



The highlight of the luncheon was the presentation of the **Mark Sumner Award**, recognizing significant contributions by an individual to a specific organization, or to outdoor theatre as a whole, including but not limited to playwriting, directing, acting, design, theater architecture, patronage, scholarship, musical composition, technology and innovation, producing and administration. This year the award was presented to a man who qualified in each and every one of these areas: Mr. **Michael Graham**, Director/Producer of *Power and Light*

Productions in Wauchula, Florida. Mike has created, produced and directed *The Story of Jesus* for almost 30 years, and more recently a new production of *Noah*. Each season he works with about 500 living creatures, 150 of them with four legs! A board member of the IOT, he has been a faithful member of the Institute for many of those years. Accepting the award with his wife, Diane, Mike spoke about both the challenges and joys of their seasons, and demonstrated the inspiration that has kept his hundreds of volunteers coming back every year.

The conference was also attended by **Marsha Warren**, the executive director of the Paul Green Foundation. Marsha introduced the seminar and described the work of the Foundation which has sponsored the annual Paul Green Seminar for our conference for many years.

2015 Summer Theatre Auditions

This year's auditions at Wright Auditorium on the campus of East Carolina University represented several "Firsts" for the IOT. We invited any



Several months for the year we missed any summer theatre to attend the auditions this year, something we had never tried, and then we were forced to close registration on December 16, 2014 because we had reached our 225 quota. It is a great feeling knowing our auditions are growing.

We had 12 companies attending representing six states; the companies were very pleased with the organization of the auditions and the talent in attendance. We had 225 register for auditions from 19 states and representing 75 schools. The auditionees received a combined total of 543 callbacks (which did not include the tech interviews).



For several years we have been holding the auditions over the MLK holiday weekend and this seems to be working out well for our companies as well as the auditionees. Our auditions are among the first unified auditions for the summer season. The audition experience begins on Friday evening with a Q&A followed by a Welcome Reception. This reception gives the auditionees a chance to meet the companies in an informal atmosphere. Audition day (Saturday) starts early with an 8:00 am procedural meeting and auditions continue until late afternoon; then callbacks begin and conclude late into the evening.

2014 Attendance Reports

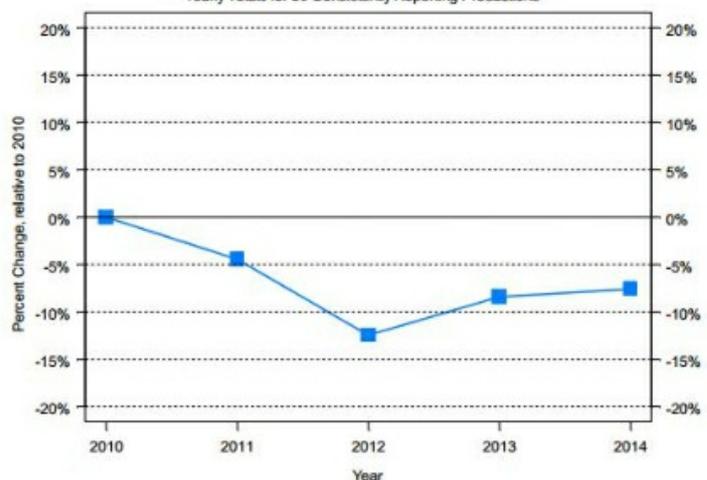
Distribution of Theatre Income, Outdoor Theatres

Theatre Segment	N	Earned	Gov't	Foundations	Indiv. Donation	Corp.	Endowment
Small Outdoor Non-Shakespeare (< \$100k)	9	54%	13%	18%	11%	5%	0%
Mid-size Outdoor Non-Shakespeare (\$100k - \$500k)	10	55%	6%	16%	14%	9%	<1%
Large Outdoor Non-Shakespeare (> \$500k)	8	67%	7%	8%	7%	8%	3%



The number of theatre companies reporting on their 2014 attendance and budget numbers continued to grow for the past season, with 76 theatres reporting up from 68 in the prior year. The total attendance for all theatre reporting consequently grew as well, from 1.4 to 1.6 million. Not every theatre reports every year (unfortunately), but for the theatres who consistently reported for the past two years all had a small net increase in attendance from 1-3%. For the 36 productions reporting consistently for the past five years, the numbers were also up by a similar percentage, making this the second year in which attendance has begun to recover from its lowest year in 2012. Overall, however, it is still about 7% lower than in 2010. The largest increases were from

Outdoor Theatre Attendance 2010 - 2014
Yearly Totals for 36 Consistently Reporting Productions



increases were from

the "Pay"

Shakespeare theatres, the smallest for Variety Theatres, and History Plays averaged a 1.4% increase. All the attendance data, including individual theatre reports is available on the IOT website at <http://www.outdoor-theatre.org/attendance-reports/>. Past year reports for 2011, 2012 and 2013 are also available for comparisons.

Membership Renewals

A reminder that [IOT Members](#) can renew their membership until March 31 when it will expire. Renewal information can be found at [IOT Member Renewal](#). If there are any questions about the process, please contact Susan at phillipss@ecu.edu. This is also a good opportunity to update member information with season dates for 2015, new photos, etc.

Member News

Ramona

The Ramona Bowl Amphitheatre Association, the group that keeps the storied amphitheatre and outdoor play alive, received the San Jacinto Valley's most prestigious honor, **The Book of Golden Deeds**. It was a deserved and timely choice. The award has been given annually by the Exchange Club of the Hemet-San Jacinto Valley since 1967. It goes to community leaders, and sometimes institutions, for their years of volunteer work.

Shakespeare in Delaware Park

Shakespeare in Delaware Park will be celebrating their 40th season in 2015. This season they will be offering **Romeo & Juliet** (June 18 – July 12) and **Twelfth Night** with an all-male cast (July 23 – August 16).

Nebraska Shakespeare

Nebraska Shakespeare teams up with The Slowdown to present the 5th Annual Shakespeare on the SilverScreen Festival. The festival highlights the films inspired by Shakespeare's life and plays. **Othello** will be presented on February 18th and **As You Like It** on March 5th. Following each film will be a discussion covering the film, the history of its production, and the interpretation of Shakespeare's texts led by Vincent Carlson-Brown, **Nebraska Shakespeare's** Artistic Director and guest scholar, D. Scott Glasser, Associate Professor for the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Department of Theatre.

Illinois Shakespeare Festival

The Illinois Shakespeare Festival Touring Company will present **Othello**, **Romeo & Juliet** and **As You Like It** with its theatrical "guerrilla Shakespeare" approach to the great works of Shakespeare. Eight actors will play all the parts in a 40-minute abridgement that can adapt to any space and includes a lot of audience interaction. They are currently booking performances for schools and community institutions for the Fall. The company tours on Fridays beginning October 10 through December 5, 2015.

Mountain Play Association

Peter Pan will be **Mountain Play Association's** 2015 production. Heidi Leigh Hanson will be the costume designer. Heidi has worked with the Marin Theatre Company, Shotgun Players and The Cutting Ball as well as work in film and TV including Netflix's **Arrested Development** as a set costumer. The choreographer will be Nicole Helfer. Nicole's experience includes Broadway by the Bay, Contra Costa Musical Theater and Pacific Coast Repertory Theatre Company.

Sleepy Hollow Theatre & Arts Park

Susan Lundberg reports that they will be touring in the western/northern North Dakota with their **Broadway Musical Revue** and a Middle School Program that will include three hours of instruction daily in singing, dancing and acting. In addition to the Broadway Musical Revue they will also be producing **Mary Poppins** in the 2015 season.

In Memoriam

Gayle Bowling retired from **Theatre WV** with 23 years of service and almost 20 of those were as general manager. "Miss Gayle" as she was known by her theatre family passed away at her home on Tuesday, January 27, 2015, following a short illness. She was a long time board member on the Southern West Virginia Convention and Visitors Bureau in Raleigh County and was the 2008 Mark R.



Sumner Award recipient from the IOT. Susan Landis, executive director of Beckley Area Foundation and a former TWV board president, said Bowling didn't have any experience in acting or theater administration when she first joined the TWV team, but she immediately fell in love with it. "Once she became employed there, she found something that made her heart sing," Landis said. "She loved her work and what was happening creatively on stage." Landis said she had a special relationship with everyone there — people who painted the sets, sewed the costumes, the directors, actors, dancers and musicians. "They all knew her and respected her in a really unique way." Bowling welcomed all the members of the theater to come to her with issues, and she was always ready to help them find a solution. "She wasn't just appreciated as their boss. They loved her." Landis said being general manager at TWV wasn't just a job to Bowling; she was passionate about it. In lieu of flowers, donations of sympathy may be directed to the Bowers Hospice House, 454 Cranberry Drive, Beckley, WV, in memory of Gayle Bowling.

Chris Parsons' involvement with outdoor theatre began when he originated the role of Ben Campbell in Paul Green's **Trumpet in the Land** in New Philadelphia, OH. He also worked at **The Legend of Daniel Boone** in Harrodsburg, KY and directed the premier productions of **Black River Traders** and **Dreams and Drill Bits** by Mark R. Sumner in Farmington, NM. Over the years he enjoyed acting, directing, managing and producing for companies based in NY, MD, KY, OH, RI, TX, NC, NM and FL. He was a professor at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, NC. Chris began his theatre education with the famed Children's Theatre Association of Baltimore, MD, earned his BFA in Acting and Directing at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, studied with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio, NYC, and did his MFA in Theatre Performance at University of Florida, Gainesville.



Chris passed away on October 24, 2014 in Haven Hospice, Orange Park, FL.

Memorial Gifts in Chris Parsons' name may be offered to: **Christopher A. Parsons Memorial Bible Fund**: Rockledge Presbyterian Church, 921 Rockledge Dr. Rockledge FL 32955, 321-636-0811, www.RockledgePres.org

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.

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Institute of Outdoor Theatre
ECU College of Fine Arts and Communication
201 Erwin Building, Mail Stop 528
Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353
US



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