



## Ward 8 News

by: Gabriel Pacyniak

### THEARC Proves Demand for East Washington Performing Space

A year and a half after opening, Ward 8's The Town Hall Education Arts & Recreation Campus buzzes with activity. Everyday over 150 children and teens flock to the after-school program at the Boys and Girls Club at the facility, located at 1901 Mississippi Ave., SE. Young artists take music lessons at the Levine School of Music, dance at The Washington Ballet and art at the Corcoran Academy of Art. And in addition to the private Washington Middle School for Girls, older students can gain an associates degree at a satellite campus of Trinity University.

But perhaps one of the most surprising signs of success is that THEARC's 365-seat theater is booked solid for months in advance. During 2006, the theater hosted 170 shows alone, ranging from high-profile professional acts like Three Mo Tenors to youth group drama performances. Recent performances have included a special performance by Yoko Ono, storytelling by Master Storyteller Griot Baba-C, a play by Ballou High School students titled "You Don't Know My Story," and a gospel concert by the Jubilee Majestic Concert Choir.

"In February we performed Bridges of Song with my church choir and the congregation of Allen Church," says Gloria Whitfield, a longtime Parklands resident and board member of the THEARC. "If the THEARC hadn't been there, we wouldn't have had that type of production, one that can bring together the community and the church."

In fact, THEARC's theater is thriving while larger theaters in traditional entertainment districts, like U Street's Howard Theater, are struggling. According to Edmund Fleet, executive director of the THEARC's nonprofit operator Building Bridges Across the River, the success is due to the theater's modest size and smaller cost. The theater charges a base rate of \$600 for a performance, although community groups qualify for a sliding scale.

This spring the theater will also be booked solid for two weeks with graduations from area schools, hosting two or three a day.

"Who would have believed that we would have had so many groups looking to use a theater East of the River? Clearly there is a need for something like this," says Fleet.

But the theater receipts don't pay for the operating costs of the 110,000-square-foot campus. Although the \$27 million structure is fully paid for, the member organizations, which also include Children's Hospital and Parklands Community Center, still have to pay the substantial \$547,000 yearly operating bill. This year, THEARC launched a fundraising campaign to raise \$10 million to create an endowment for its operational cost. The high-profile campaign was backed by Washington Post Chair Donald Graham and featured Colin and Alma Powell in advertising around the city. To date, the campaign has raised \$700,000, far short of its goal.

Even so, Janet Stone, THEARC's fundraising campaign manager, remains optimistic that organizations will raise the endowment. "[It's already] an unusual success ... given that nonprofits typically don't work collaboratively on fundraising, and we have ten nonprofits here at THEARC all working together on this," says Stone. She adds that several foundations had expressed interest in substantial contributions now that the organizations had approached the foundations as a group.

For more information about upcoming events or how to lease theater space at THEARC, visit [www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org) or call 202-4-THEARC.