

Drama groups explore opportunities

By Rusty Bradshaw

Independent Newspapers

Sun City theater group members want a performing arts center built in the community and, led by resident Roy Quid, they believe it is possible.

Mr. Quid is the spokesman for 13 different performing arts clubs in Sun City and is researching possibilities for the center. He said the effort has been going on for years and is no closer now than when it started.

However, there is new movement in that direction, according to Mr. Quid.

"I contacted an architectural firm and

they agreed to do some pro boni work for us on the design," he said. "And we had a group tour the performing arts center of Valley Vista High School in Surprise."

The Valley Vista center, on the school's campus at 15550 N. Parkview Place, is similar to the facility supporters want to see constructed in Sun City, according to Mr. Quid, who has 50 years experience in community theater.

"Valley Vista has 1,300 seats, but we're only looking at a 900-seat facility," he said.

The project, with an estimated \$8 million price tag, would be funded through grants and donations, according to Mr.

Quid.

Residents involved in performing arts, as performers and theater-goers, are eager for the project to get started. The facilities they use are not adequate, according to Paul Savage.

"Right now we perform in what can best be described as a barn — horrible acoustics and terrible seating on folding chairs on a level surface," he explained. "Definitely not conducive to comfortable seating or good viewing."

Karen Miller agreed existing facilities

See **Theater** — Page 6

Theater

Continued From Page 1

are inadequate.

"If you've ever been to a play at the Sundial Recreation Center, then you know the need for a theater in Sun City," she said. "Something is needed, reading the paper about the theatre organizations and shows should give everyone the idea a community theatre is needed."

However, some residents believe it is not the best time to consider an expenditure of the magnitude required to construct a theater. Ken Gegg believes with theaters in surrounding communities, building one in Sun City would be an unnecessary expense that would place a burden on residents.

"The costs would be an ongoing expense and would require additional donations to fund it," he said. "Now is not the time to add additional expenses to anyone's budget."

Even resident who say there is a need for a theater in Sun City are concerned about taking on the project during a struggling economy.

"The one drawback, unfortunately, will be trying to raise the estimated amount needed in these times," said Helen Bleecker. "Actually, 900 seats would be perfect. Sadly, the cost at this time is exorbitant. We can dream."

Others question the support of perform-

ing arts, both monetarily and in participation. Ken Svee believes participation in community theater in Sun City is limited and Ethel Sanders believes a theater of any kind would not be supported.

"Sun City had a movie theater in 1975 up in LaRonde Center when I moved here," she said. "Unfortunately, not enough people supported it and it went under. With the economy the way it is, I don't think a theater of any kind will get the support of the people."

She said the Sun Bowl, 10220 N. 107th Ave., does not draw full crowds for the events scheduled there with free admission.

Mr. Quid said a request for a \$100,000 grant through the Sundome has already been made by the Sun City Community Players. This grant would fund architectural renderings and county permits, he said.

"There are a lot of people ready to raise funds for this project," he added.

Wickenberg built the 600-seat Del Webb Performing Arts Center, which is self-supporting, with a population of 8,000, Mr. Quid explained. In addition to grants, theater supporters can get donations from personalities living outside Sun City, he said.

The proposed center would not be limited to community theater, according to Mr. Quid.

"This would not simply be a facility for local performers alone but we could also bring in outside professional symphony orchestras, ballet companies, comedians,

motivational speakers, Broadway musicals directly from New York, etc.," he said.

An actor and director through the years, Mr. Quid, in addition to his community theater work in the Chicago area, has directed plays in Sun City Grand and for the Sun City Community Theater Players and the Westbrook Players.

Ms. Bleecker believes a Sun City performing arts center would bring in residents from surrounding communities who, while in the community for an event, would also spend money in Sun City businesses.

Jean Fritts contests the notion participation in performing arts in Sun City is limited. The Sun City Players, with a membership of about 300, has since 1961 been entertaining the public with plays and musicals, she said.

"Not only has this group brought entertainment to the public, but it has brought to its members the opportunity to become involved in something most never had the time to do before," Ms. Fritts said. "Surprisingly, those involved represent much untapped talent, both in performing and the complex production of shows."

She added attendance during a six-day performance of a main stage show by her group averages more than 2,000.

In addition to accommodating up to 35 actors and stagehands, Ms. Fritts believes a new theater is needed to provide fly space and depth to utilize rear projection, a thrust stage to accommodate large bands or choruses, as well as big musicals, which would increase the use of the facility.

"Sun City, on its 50th anniversary, has waited a long time for a quality facility, and many of us hope to live long enough to stand on that stage singing 'There's No Business Like Show Business,'" she said.

Some residents point to the failure of the 7,000-seat Sundome in Sun City West as justification to oppose a performing arts center in Sun City. However, others counter the Sundome's failure was due, in part, to poor management and maintenance.

"The Sundome had outdated seating and the acoustics needed improvement; among other problems," said Katherine Barngrover. "It would have continued to be a success had these improvements been made."

She believes the smaller venue proposed in Sun City would be an asset to the community.

"I'm a season ticket holder for the Phoenix Theater and enjoy their productions immensely," she said. "It is a smaller theater and everyone has a good seat. I think the key to success (for a Sun City theater) would be keeping it more intimate and sell out all seats."

However, Mr. Svee believes raising \$8 million, especially in a struggling economy, for facilities he believes are already available in the community is without merit. He suggests a full investigation by theater supporters to justify the expense. He said the review should include an estimated revenue and expense report.

"I do not feel this can be supported and the need for it must be justified," he said.

Voters nix arts venue

By P. SOLOMON BANDA
Staff writer

Dec. 4, 1996

The proposal to build an 800-seat performing arts center in Sun City was defeated Tuesday by a 2-to-1 margin.

The vote was 5,795 against vs. 2,239 in favor.

Voters rejected the Recreation Centers of Sun City board of director's plan to build a \$2.5 million entertainment venue at Bell Recreation Centers or the Sun Bowl or convert Mountain View Auditorium to a theater at a cost of \$1.5 million.

Voters also had a chance to vote for a location.

The Sun Bowl location received 410 votes, vs. 1,173 votes for the Bell Recreation Center. Converting the Mountain View Recreation Center Auditorium to a theater received 34 votes.

"The people working for this were misguided in their efforts and they ended up shooting themselves in the foot," said board member Chuck Haddbourn, who supported the measure.

"First they had a grandiose idea of a \$5 million theater, then they wanted to convert Mountain View," Haddbourn said.

On hand for the election results this morning was Jerry Hirsch, newly elected member of the Sun City Home Owners Association, who supported the proposal.

"I think we should have done it. I think Sun City is going to be the poorer for it," Hirsch said. "It all came down to money. I don't think people thought they'd get their money's worth and maybe they (the rec centers) couldn't afford it. They did a bad selling job."



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Gertrude Carvey, left, helps Ethel Stack vote in the Sun City elections Tuesday morning. Marge Greenhalge of the Home Owners Association looks on.

Theater sees light at end of tunnel

By Julie Andreen

Independent Newspapers

Under an agreement with Peoria, Theater Works, a nonprofit community theater group, has until Dec. 31 to raise the rest of its share of \$200,000 in capital contributions toward the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts, their next home.

Only \$17,000 stands in their way.

Once the initial \$200,000 is in, the city will invite bids for constructing the \$5.6 million-dollar Phase I of the Peoria Performing Arts Center, set for the area known as "Old Town" Peoria.

Theater Works must raise a total of \$1.2 million over the next few years to move out of their current location at the former Sun City Lakes Club, 10484 W. Thunderbird Blvd., and fulfill their entire financial obligation.

Jack Lytle, president of the Theater Works board, estimates the organization probably has about 20 months left in its current location. He is confident they will raise the \$200,000 with time to spare.

"The money is coming in little bits here and there," Mr. Lytle said. "We're somewhere between \$181,000 and \$183,000 right now, and we hope to have all \$200,000 in by October."

To ensure the deadline is met, the theater is doubling its grant-writing efforts, organizing a golf tournament and sending out direct-mail appeals, he said. They also hope to benefit from an event hosted by Peoria Mayor John Keegan in October.

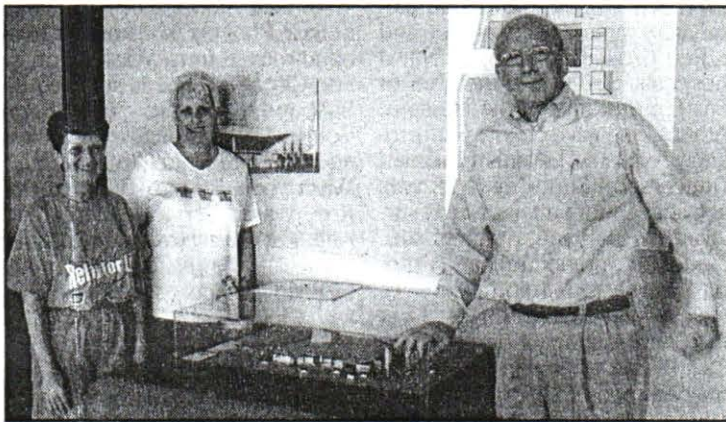
Artists displaying their work in Theater Works' lobby also are contributing, splitting with Theater Works revenue profits from the sale of the work.

Some of Theater Works' contributions include \$15,000 from Bank One in June, followed by \$50,000 from Arizona Public Service in July.

Two of the campaign's most recent boosts were a \$2,000 donation from Peoria City Councilwoman Vicki Hunt, who also serves on Theater Works Board of Directors, and her husband, Tom, in early August.

Ms. Hunt also serves on the capital fundraising committee for the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts.

"I am on the Peoria City Council



Independent Newspapers/Julie Andreen

From left, Mary Cress, Theater Works' volunteer coordinator, box office manager Sandy Langlotz and Theater Works Board President, Jack Lytle, stand beside an architects' model of the future Peoria Center for the Performing Arts, Theater Works' future home.

and the downtown is in my district, so I have a vested interest in seeing our downtown grow to its potential, both culturally and economically," said Councilwoman Hunt.

Peoria businessman Thom Gyder, the president of Wilhelm Automotive, 8245 Grand Ave., has offered to match any contributions coming in, and ponied up \$2,000 in response to the Hunts' donation.

Phase II of the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts will start when Peoria receives \$1 million in capital contributions from Theater Works. An additional \$150,000 in operating reserve costs and other miscellaneous costs also must be raised.

A final \$50,000 to cover pre-opening expenses will ensure that Theater Works can take over operation of the Peoria Performing Arts Center.

With the reality of a new home closer, Theater Works hopes the permanence of their new building will draw back former patrons.

According to Mr. Lytle, many stopped supporting Theater Works in the midst of relocations from The Barn, a facility at 67th Avenue and Thunderbird, in 1996, to a strip mall at 99th Avenue and Peoria, and then to their current location at the former Sun City Lakes Club building.

"Last year it was a make or break year," he said. "A lot of season ticketholders dropped out because there was confusion about where we were going to be. A lot of them thought we had gone out of business."

That confusion resulted from a

quick move out of the strip mall ordered by Peoria's fire marshal. Mr. Lytle admits much of the blame for the sudden uprooting is directly on Theater Works' shoulders.

"We did things we should not have done...there were problems with our electrical (system) and there were too many extension cords being used, for instance. We brought it on ourselves."

As a nonprofit business with expenses such as \$350 a day for rent, Theater Works needs to generate more public support, Mr. Lytle said.

"We're always trying to come up with a way to get people through the door. We just want to provide a high-quality product to the community. We don't want to make a billion dollars — we just want to break even at the end of the day."

Once Theater Works makes it move, Mr. Lytle said while the company's core mission of educating children and adults interested in the performing arts and providing a high-quality service to the community will remain in place, Theater Works' infrastructure — most notably the organizational side — is already changing.

"We have always been the friendly, community theater, but things have to change," Mr. Lytle said. "We have to operate like we belong in a \$6 million building. I hasn't been terribly painful, but it hasn't been painless either."

"We have to follow through and be accountable."

© THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2003

Theater viewed as vital to Peoria

City, drama group OK agreement on facility

By David Madrid
The Arizona Republic

A downtown Peoria community theater will help bring businesses and homes to the area and revitalize the core of the city, which badly needs some help, city officials say.

The theater is expected to open around August 2005, though the City Council would like to see it open sooner.

The council approved an agreement with Theater Works last week that allows the performance company to begin a fund-raising campaign to build the theater.

Grady Miller, Peoria communications and public affairs director, says the \$5.6 million community theater will attract people to downtown, which in turn will lead to economic growth in the area.

"There's several benefits to having the theater downtown," Miller said. "First and foremost, the theater will attract other desirable pieces to downtown, such as retail, restaurants and other types of uses we currently do not have in the downtown area.

"It will also allow the city to experience some economic activities during the evenings and weekends. Right now,

when you come downtown on evenings and weekends, there's nothing going on."

Steve Prokopek, Peoria's economic development director, said the theater will help the city meet its economic redevelopment goals and create a unique environment.

"I think it (theater) is important because it's a cultural amenity and what we're trying to do is create a pedestrian urban living environment in the downtown area," he said. "The more types of cultural-type a-

OVER

menities you can have that people can walk to, it just really helps.”

Pokopek said the theater will ultimately become a piece of a cultural, commercial and residential mix downtown.

Part of Peoria’s goal downtown is to attract more residential development. He points out that two single-family developments south of City Hall now have some homes in the \$200,000 range.

With about 100 acres still available, there is room for more residential growth. Then, commercial development will follow, Prokopek said.

Although the area won’t be able to compete with the city’s commercial center near 83rd Avenue and Bell Road, it can make the original town site a vibrant and desirable place to live and visit, he said.

The city could potentially use a portion of its half-cent sales tax to help Theater Works with some of the lease payments in the first four years. The sales tax money is meant

for economic development, which is in keeping with what the city is trying to accomplish with the theater, Miller told the City Council.

“We are banking a lot on this facility to do a lot of attracting,” he said. “We know that the theater itself, we will not be really making money on. It’s a non-profit, and it’s going to be our own property, so we’re not going to receive property taxes off it obviously.”

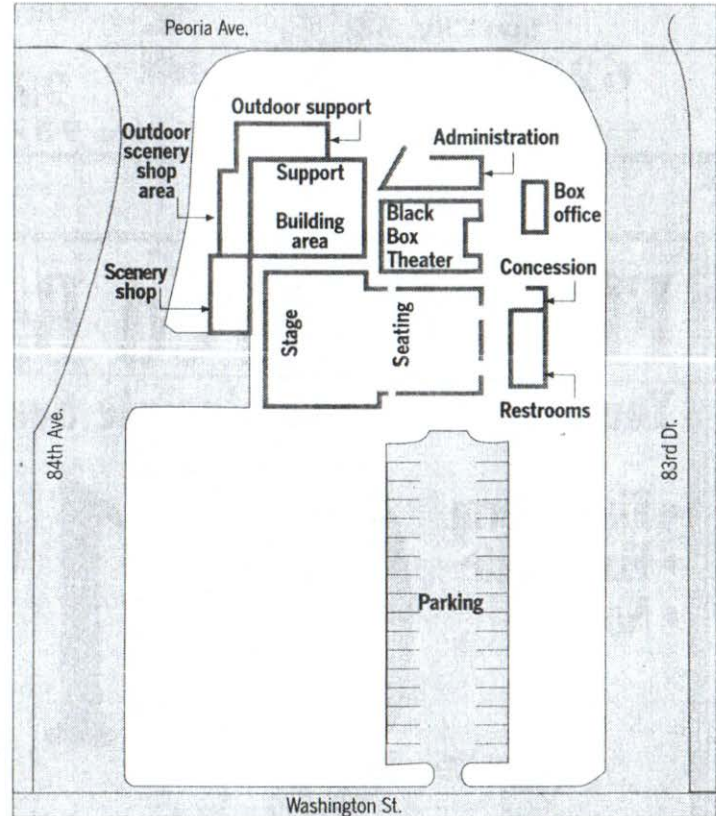
Mike Guida, Theater Works board president, said downtown businesses are very supportive of the community theater. Typically, those who attend theater tend to be affluent. When they go to a show, they usually have dinner, he said.

“I would like to see a steakhouse go there,” Guida said. “I know the city is counting on that.”

Reach the reporter at david.madrid@arizonarepublic.com or (602) 444-6926.

Proposed Peoria Community theater

Peoria has approved an agreement with Theater Works that allows the performance company to begin raising money for the community theater.



DAILY NEWS-SUN THURSDAY, AUG. 21, 2003

Theater Works docking at Lakes Club for next 2 seasons

RICH OTT
DAILY NEWS-SUN

What was a temporary home for Theater Works in Sun City has become the official one.

The 18-year-old community-theater troupe will perform all its shows for at least the next two seasons at The Lakes Club, 10484 W. Thunderbird Blvd.

"People were used to the old space (at 9850 W. Peoria Ave. in Peoria)," said Theater Works Artistic Director Scott Campbell, "but I think they will find it comfortable here."

Theater Works lost its former building on March 19,

when Peoria Fire Marshal Howard Munding deemed it unsafe for public gatherings.

The nonprofit organization scrambled to find temporary facilities for its four remaining shows of the 2002-03 season, two of which were productions of Wonder Works, the children's branch of the community theater.

The Wonder Works shows ran at Peoria High School and Phoenix's Holiday Park Elementary School, while the two main stage productions — "A Delicate Balance" and "Parade" — docked at The Lakes Club.

"Our patrons were telling us they sure enjoyed the

experience of The Lakes Club," said Theater Works CEO Jack Lytle.

The 35,000-square-foot facility, which overlooks Viewpoint Lake, has been empty since the club closed in March 2002. In January, Roskamp/Sun Health Management Services became The Lakes Club's new owner, said Bill Molloy, managing member of DevMan Company LC, its property manager and leasing agent. Even while Theater Works was strictly a temporary tenant, Molloy made it no secret that the landlord would like the

See THEATER WORKS, A5

From A1

community theater to move in full time.

With the cost of fixing the safety hazards at the theater's old building exceeding \$100,000, the wish of The Lakes Club landlord was granted.

Theater Works is using most of the facility's space, though within three months the community theater will share The Lakes Club with the Sun Health School of Nursing, Lytle said. The entrance to Theater Works then will be moved to the east doors, though currently the west doors mark the company's box office.

The community theater has a slew of shows lined up to run at the Sun City facility, including five Wonder Works productions, beginning with "Bye Bye Birdie" at

7 p.m. Friday.

Campbell said the positives of the new digs are that they seat 30 more than the troupe's previous home, offers drop-off lanes by the doors, has the scenic view of the lake out back, has restrooms located in the front, and overall ambiance.

One negative that has already been corrected is the seating. For "A Delicate Balance" and "Parade," most of the seats were folding chairs or lawn chairs. The company's movie-theater seats from its Peoria building have since been brought over to The Lakes Club.

"It looks like it is going to work out just fine," Lytle said.

Once the next two seasons are over, Theater Works hopes that Peoria's performing-arts building downtown will be ready for

use.

"The city of Peoria is ready to go — the ball is in Theater Works' court," Lytle said. "Once we have raised our first \$100,000, the city of Peoria triggers a series of events that consists of the design stage, bidding, etc. Once we hit the \$200,000 mark, they start the ground-breaking phase."

"(The city of Peoria) has been incredibly supportive," Campbell said of Theater Works finding a temporary home in Sun City. "It's not like we are running away forever."

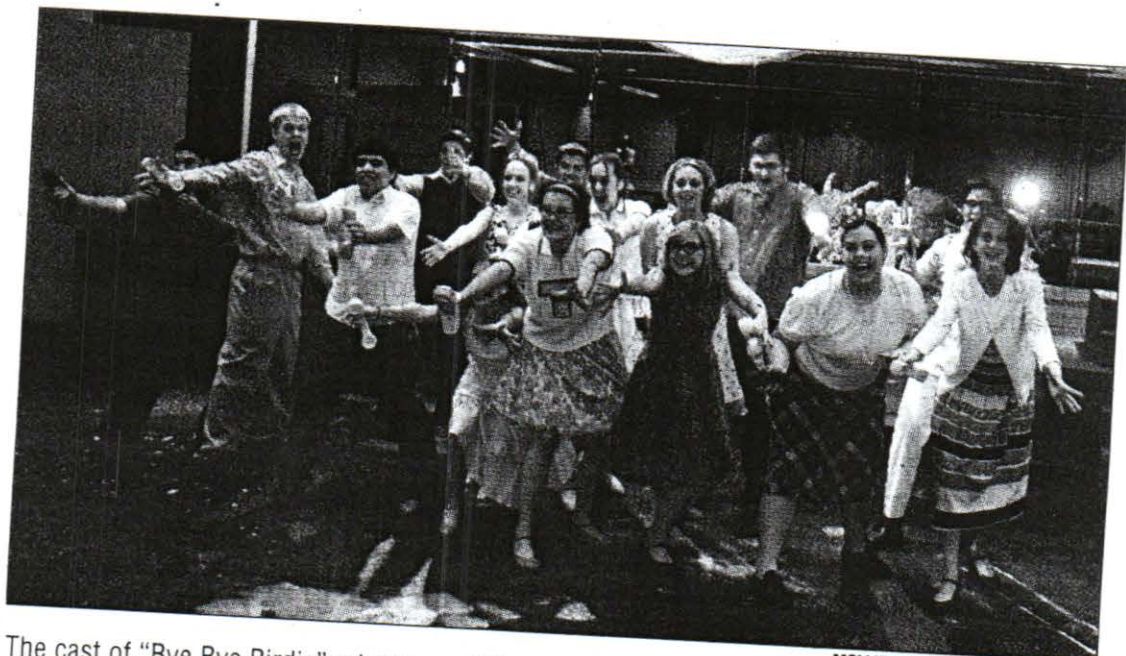
Lytle and fund-raising consultant Kristy Nordby are in the planning stages of the company's first fund-raising

gala, tentatively set for Oct. 27 at The Lakes Club.

"Theater Works has been challenged over the last several months, and we would not be where we are today if not for the partnerships we have," Lytle said. "There is a tremendous ground-swell of support that says 'we like the product, let's get over these bumps in the road and get on to the bigger and better venue,' which is not too far away, really."

"It's hard to stay optimistic after having a year like we had," Campbell said. "Not only are we still here, but we are still growing and getting better."

Contact Rich Ott at 876-2554 or rott@aztrib.com.



The cast of "Bye Bye Birdie" rehearses at The Lakes Club in Sun City, where the Wonder Works show opens Friday. Wonder Works is the children's branch of Theater Works, which will call The Lakes Club its home for at least the next two seasons. For a review of the play, see Page A8.

MOLLIE J. HOPPE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Theater Works docks at Lakes Club

TEMPORARY DIGS: Director pulls off 'Delicate Balance'

RICH OTT
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Theater Works has found a temporary home for its last two shows of the season.

The Lakes Club, 10484 W. Thunderbird Blvd. in Sun City, will be the site for the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama "A Delicate Balance," opening at 8 p.m. Friday, and "Parade," running May 9 to June 1.

"For a last-minute replacement, it's fabulous," said "A Delicate Balance" director David Barker. "It could have been worse; we could be in a warehouse, somebody's basement or a restaurant banquet hall. It's as good as any emergency relocation one could expect."

Theater Works Peoria facility at 9850 W. Peoria Ave. was shut down by Fire Marshal Howard Munding on March 19 because he said the building was unsafe for public gatherings.

That left artistic director Scott Campbell with the task of finding a replacement stage for all of Theater Works' programming (four shows total).

One production, "Pinocchio," will be presented at Holiday Park Elementary, 4530 N. 67th Ave. in Phoenix

from April 18 to 27.

Another show, "The Mayflower Revue," originally scheduled to start March 27, was canceled because its actors were unavailable for the remainder of the season. Theater Works plans to run that show next season in late September or early October.

The final two main-stage productions have both found the same home. Campbell was able to rent the Lakes Club for the next two months because the establishment has been empty since closing a year ago.

"It's empty room after empty room," Barker said. "It's very eerie."

But the director loves the club's cleanliness and vast space, especially the old employee lounge, which has been converted into dressing rooms for the actors.

Ironically, "A Delicate Balance" is about a well-to-do family that belongs to a country club, which is mentioned often in the story. So it almost seems appropriate that the show will be performed in an abandoned country club.

The 35,000-square-foot Lakes Club, which overlooks Viewpoint Lake, was built more than 30 years ago by Del Webb to help market Sun City.

In January, Roskamp/Sun Health Management Services (no relation to Sun Health)



MOLLIE J. HOPPE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

became the facility's new owner, said Bill Molloy, managing member of DevMan Company LC, the property manager and leasing agent.

Molloy said plans for the site include building a 33,000-square-foot, two-story medical building, which still leaves space to keep the existing building.

"We are trying to find compatible uses for it, because it's such a great facility," Molloy said. "When Theater Works came along just recently, what the landlord said was 'Even though we're trying to lease it, if we can help them in the interim, let's work around it.'"

So Theater Works found its temporary home. Campbell said he hopes his theater patrons don't get smitten by the club's lavish acoutrements, as the community troupe still plans on having its Peoria building open in time for its 2003/2004 season premiere: "Picasso at the

The Lakes Club in Sun City will serve as a temporary home for Theater Works, whose facility was closed by the Peoria fire marshal in March for code violations.

Lapin Agile" on Sept. 19.

"A lot of people think we are not going to survive this," Campbell said. "We are definitely going to survive this."

Initial estimates were \$100,000 to bring Theater Works' home up to code, with the two major issues being the sprinkler system and electrical wiring.

Campbell expects to reduce that amount.

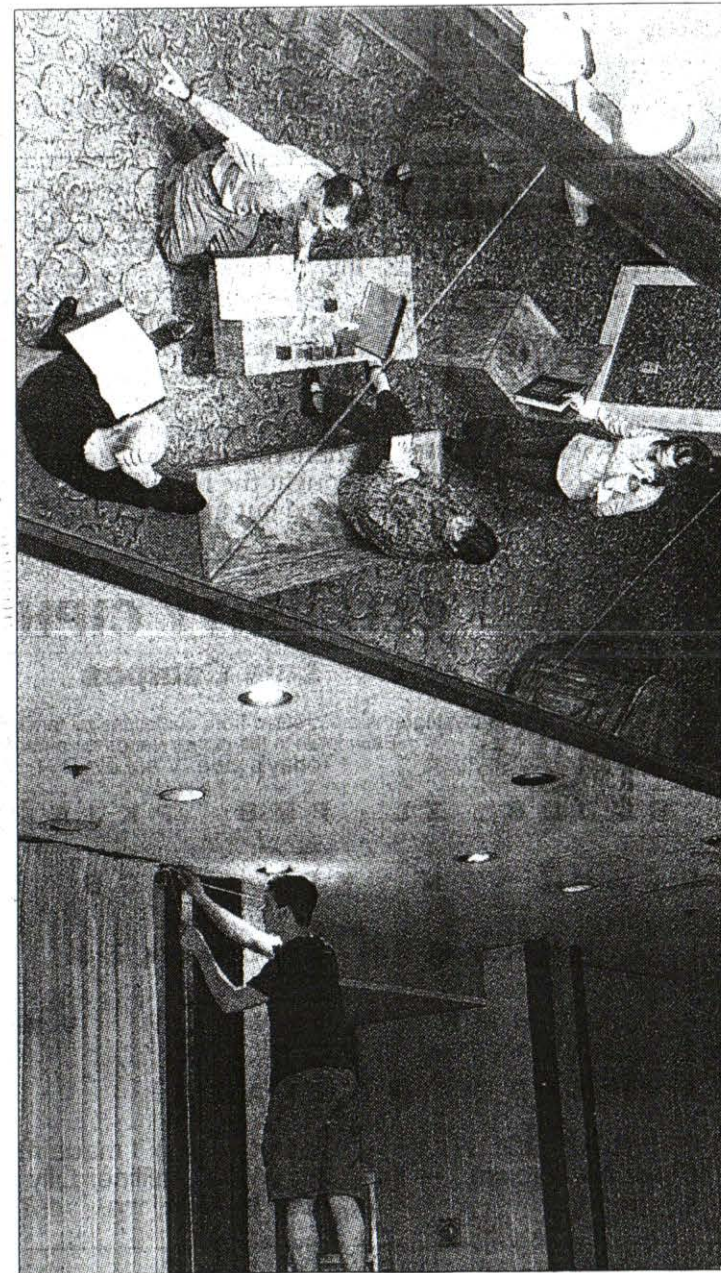
"When you need a car, you need a car," he said. "It doesn't mean you are going to run out and buy a Lexus."

The same architects who will design Theater Works' future home in downtown Peoria are looking at ways to fix the troupe's closed location.

"They are trying to come up with a means where it is not quite \$100,000," Campbell said.

Even if the total doesn't reach that mark, the

See THEATER, A5



JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

The cast and crew of "A Delicate Balance" are reflected in the ceiling mirrors at the Lakes Club, where the show will open Friday.

OVER



JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Terri Scullin of Scottsdale, who plays Julia in "A Delicate Balance," puts on her shoes in the what was the employees' lounge at the Lakes Club, and now serves as Theater Works' dressing room.

From A1

community theater still needs a tremendous amount of financial support.

Peoria city council member Michael Patino is prepared to do his part. The Acacia District (mainly downtown Peoria) member is trying to get approval for anywhere from \$4,000 to \$5,000 of discretionary funds to give to the nonprofit organization.

"It's our discretion as a council member on how we would like to use our discretionary funds," Patino said. "I would hate to see Theater Works close their doors. It's a nonprofit organization that helps the community."

Patino — whose district is the site of Theater Works' future building — said even though the current location

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** "A Delicate Balance"
- **WHEN:** Through April 27 at 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays
- **WHERE:** Lakes Club, 10484 W. Thunderbird Road, Sun City
- **COST:** \$17.50, \$15.50 for seniors and military, \$14 for students
- **BOX OFFICE:** 815-7930

doesn't rest in his district (it's in the Pine District), he knows people from throughout the city, and even state, participate in the troupe's programs as well as attend performances.

"It is truly an organization that touches many lives, both young and old," he said. "I would like to take action quickly. I know every day is vital to them."

Patino hopes to get

approval by the end of the week on how much discretionary funds he can allocate to Theater Works. In the meantime, the councilman advises everyone interested in the arts to contribute, whether it be \$5, \$10 or \$20.

"Any and all contributions would be welcomed," Patino said. "It's not the sum of the money that matters, all of it will be useful and benefit hundreds of people."

And if one can't afford a financial donation, Theater Works is also accepting donations in sweat. On Tuesday about 15 volunteers helped with the process of cleaning

out the theater's prop and costume rooms, two items on the fire marshal's list that needs addressing before the building is allowed to reopen.

Volunteers are welcomed weekdays from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. to help staff with the numerous things that need attention. Volunteers are also needed on Saturdays, though the building won't be open as late.

The thing that worries Campbell the most is the lack of season ticket sales for next season since the building has been closed down.

The 2003/2004 lineup consists of "Picasso at the

Lapin Agile" (Sept. 19 to Oct. 12), "Sweet Charity" (Nov. 14 to Dec. 7), "Songs for a New World" (Jan. 9 to Feb. 1), "Landlocked" (Feb. 13 to March 7), "All My Sons" (March 19 to April 11) and "A New Brain" (April 23 to May 16).

To order season tickets, call 815-7930. And at the same time, donations for the nonprofit troupe would be accepted.

"Last season we had 1,400 season ticket holders," Campbell said. "If each gave a \$100 donation, we'd be at \$140,000 in no time."

'No' vote expected on Mt. View

Critics' 'ballot-stuffing' a sore point with board

By TIFFANY M. ENGELMANN
Independent Newspapers

The people have spoken. The people have voted.

Through the whispers, yells, votes and petitions it appears that the majority of those speaking don't want a theater built at the Mountain View Recreation Center, or anywhere.

But will the whispers, yells, votes and petitions matter?

'No' vote likely

The members of the Recreation Centers of Sun City board of directors, who arranged the public opinion balloting in May, and residents expect the "No" votes to far outnumber those in favor of the theater project. Results from the ballot boxes placed at rec facilities are expected to be announced this week.

"Originally, I thought it would pass," says Ed Anderson, president of the rec board. "But now I assume it will probably be a 'No.'"

Opponents of the board's support of the plan to construct a \$2 million performing arts center at Mountain View Recreation Center agree.

"I think it will fail because of bad, improper wording," resident Joe Tomazitis says. "From what I hear, the consensus of opinion is that most people don't want a theater at Mountain View."

The wording of the ballots has been questioned since the beginning and many, like Mr. Tomazitis, suggest that the "confusing" language caused the people to vote no.

W.R. Grace, who was involved in a failed petitioning effort against the theater project, says the ballots were too confusing and therefore an accurate opinion of the people cannot be attained. He does, however, expect the vote to be "No."

"I would say on a scale of one to 10, I would give it a six that the people will vote no," he says. "That ballot is just so confusing."

Surprisingly, Chuck Chadbourn, a rec board member, echoes that view.

"The opinion poll doesn't tell anything. It has no validity statistically," he says. "I would like to get the opinion of the people. That is not what we will be getting."

Early-morning canvassing

The primary question in the minds of many is, Why this result?

The reasons for the expected response range from accusations of ballot stuffing by opponents to poor management of the situation by the rec board.

Resident Bob Nutting, who has been a leader in the opposition camp, says he expects a 5-to-1 vote against the project.

His involvement in the issue, however, is a sore point with the board.

Mr. Nutting says in the last few weeks he walked through the neighborhoods near Mountain View "as soon as it was bright enough to see" and inserted a flyer into newspapers delivered to the residents.

The flyer read:

"Please note that the ballot wording was designed to con-

■ MT. VIEW

From Page 1

fuse the voters. Please sign in ink and mark an X in the "No" blank. Drop completed ballot in envelope provided, stamp, and mail immediately, since polling will end on June 15th, as far as we know at this moment. Thanks for you help to preserve Mountain View. Bob Nutting."

Mr. Nutting attached an envelope with his home address marked for those to return the ballots that he provided.

He does not think his actions were deceptive or harmful. The 400 to 500 ballots he received with a "No" vote, he placed in a ballot box at one of the rec centers, he says.

The four "Yes" votes, he says he received, were discarded.

"I had no intention of turning in 'Yes' votes. If they want to vote yes, they can go to the rec center," he says. "I am doing this for those who want to save Mountain View."

Mr. Nutting and his wife, Ellie, decided that this was their own personal "crusade" to save their recreation center.

Mr. Anderson, however, doesn't believe Mr. Nutting's "crusade" was noble or honest.

"The opinion poll is no longer unbiased," he says. "The playing field is not level."

Mr. Chadbourn believes the board handled the issue improperly from the beginning.

"This whole thing was handled very poorly from a public-relations standpoint," he says. "We can't just ignore the people. And that is what happened."

What happens next

Regardless of the results, the board now must decide what action to take.

Mr. Anderson admits that the board has not looked into anything specific at this time, but will soon. Several options exist, he says.

The board could abandon the issue, continue the project as planned, or could take complete control of the project by eliminating the role of the Sun City Foundation in raising funds for the theater, he says.

Abandoning the project is what some residents advocate.

"The opinion poll is the opinion of members, and if a 'No' vote is the majority, then they should abide



Photo by Tiffany M. Engelmann/Independent Newspapers

Ellie and Bob Nutting await the results of the opinion poll regarding the Mountain View theater controversy. Mr. and Mrs. Nutting have invested many hours distributing flyers urging a "No" vote and hope the results reflect that effort.

by the members' opinions," Mr. Tomazitis says. "If it fails, abandon it."

Mr. Grace suggests the board hold off on any decision until the situation can be put to an official vote, on the December ballot.

Mr. Chadbourn says he and the other board members will investigate other options. The first thing the board should do, however, is to remove the Foundation, a not-for-profit arm of the board, from the situation, he says.

"We need to move it back to the way it should be," he says, alluding to the rec board's responsibility for capital projects, like the construction of softball fields or new facilities.

Until the board meeting at 9 a.m. June 27 at the Sundial Recreation Center, nobody will know what the board will do with the theater project.

But, according to Mr. Chadbourn, "For now, it is dead."

Meeker backs theater

By J.J. McCORMACK
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The man who oversaw the development of Sun City says a performing-arts theater is an unmet need in the retirement community.

John Meeker, former president of Del Webb Development Co., said a campaign now under way to raise \$5 million for a Sun City theater is not overly ambitious.

"Really, this is nothing unusual for Sun City. I'm surprised it took so long (for the campaign to begin)," Meeker said in a telephone interview from his home in Paradise Valley.

"The naysayers have always been there. They would naysay anything you would propose as ambitions because they feel that somehow it will cost you some money for operations."

"But Sun City is still prospering. The houses are being resold. ... There is a need there (for a theater). There always was a need there. It just never got met."

The Sun City Foundation, the fund-raising arm of the Recreation Centers of Sun City, is heading up the theater campaign with manage-

See Backers kick in, A5

Backers kick in \$130,000

—From A1
ment assistance from a private consulting firm.

The first phase of the campaign, the formation of an executive steering committee composed of local civic, business and cultural leaders, is winding down. The second phase of the campaign, soliciting financial contributions and volunteer commitments from leaders and members of Sun City performing-arts groups, kicked off last month.

Meeker is one of 39 people recruited to date to serve on the executive steering committee. Sid Menk, a retired Presbyterian minister, is the committee chairman.

Menk said steering committee members have pledged in excess of \$130,000 to the campaign.

"\$5 million isn't a lot of money in this town," he said.

"If the people of Sun City want something like this, we can get it," Menk said.

Meeker said he agreed to serve on the steering committee because he still has a "strong feeling for Sun City" and believes that residents have "demonstrated they really and truly need such a facility.

We thought so in the '70s, it just wasn't possible then because of budget constraints," he said.

A multi-use theater was originally part of the design for the Bell Recreation Center, but the \$4- to \$5-million price tag proved too steep, Meeker said.

"It can happen. The hospital is a perfect example. They (Sun City residents) don't have to have everything handed to them. The people there are very self-sufficient. It's a tribute to them that they've operated the hospital and the rec centers — albeit with a few arguments along the way — and they've done a good job. They've kept them up."

Meeker said he will do his part for the theater project by soliciting contributions from corporations and foundations.

Joining Menk and Meeker on the executive steering committee for the theater project are: Ed Anderson, Lynn Arend, Alfred Barker, Marjorie Boone, Mary Ellen Danley, Quillian Ditto, Mildred Engleberg, Nancy Gilkeson, Tanya Griffith, Byron Healy, Sue Irons, Dr. Richard Jaynes, Rebecca Johnson, Bernard Kligfeld, Scharlott and F. Lapham, Esta Mandell, Sam Marocco, Ken Meade, Alice Muehl, Robert Norris, Lynn Ormandy, Charlie Outman, Floyd Parker, Dee Parsons, Mildred Pederson, the Rev. James Reaves, Glen Sanberg, Frank Smith, Ron Stetzel, Gerald Unger, Irma Zillessen, the Rev. Fran Park, Grace Chamberlain, Mary Jane Bowen, Henry Fokens, Robert Harris and Dixon Wightman.

Bell Center chosen site for proposed arts theater

Rec board approves 'tentative' location for new facility

Bell Recreation Center at the corner of 99th Avenue and Bell Road is home to some of the community's most prominent landmarks: a replica of the Liberty Bell and a statue honoring the founder of Sun City.

And now the facility may soon add to its list of amenities a small performing arts theater.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City Board of Directors last week

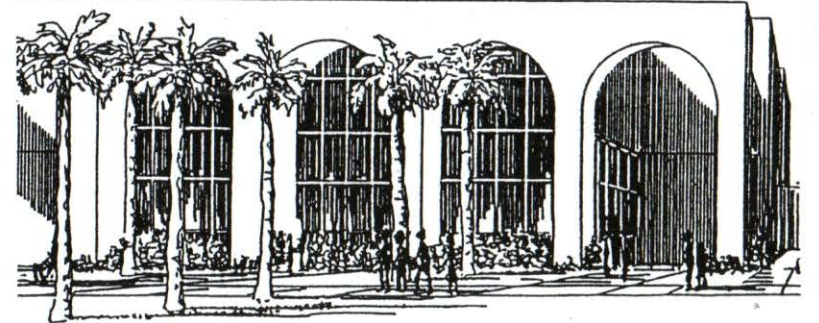
designated an area located on the south side of Bell Center as the home of a proposed performing arts theater.

Backers of the theater have recently undertaken a fund drive in an effort to gain financial support for such a facility. According to Ed Anderson, president of the board, selecting a tentative site for the theater answers one of the most frequently asked questions: where

will the facility be located?

"The board approved the Bell location as a tentative site, with the understanding that should plans regarding the performing arts center alter in the next two years, the site could be changed by a future board," he adds.

The Bell site was one of two locations considered. The board also considered a site north of the Sun Bowl.



The Rec Centers Board of Directors has agreed to allow backers of a performing arts theater to build the facility near Bell Recreation Center.

Drive for Sun City theater renewed

By Lori Baker
Staff writer

SUN CITY — A fund-raising drive to build a performing arts theater in Sun City has officially started.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City reactivated its nonprofit Sun City Foundation so that tax-deductible donations can be made for the theater.

"For years, performing arts groups and others have been somewhat handicapped in their efforts to promote the arts in Sun City," said George Hartman, Sun City Theatre 2000 Committee spokesman.

"There is a die-hard nucleus of people who have been hoping that someday they would have a place of their own similar to those who

are bowlers, golfers, and arts and crafts enthusiasts."

While its neighbor — Sun City West — has the Stardust Theatre and the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, Sun City does not have an indoor performing arts theater.

The effort to build a theater was revived earlier this year when Gerry Unger, president of the Recreation Centers of Sun City board, requested a survey on proposals for the Sun Bowl, which is an outdoor amphitheater.

Many people responding to the survey said they wanted a theater or to convert the Sun Bowl property to a theater.

The rec centers board decided to encourage a theater group to be formed to obtain contributions

from Sun City residents and businesses for a theater.

A group of about 50 Sun Citians have created the Sun City Theatre 2000 Committee. Committee members have toured performing arts facilities throughout the Valley to get ideas on how the Sun City theater should be designed.

The size, location and cost of the theater have not been determined.

Possible locations are the Sun Bowl, 107th Avenue and Claire Drive, and the Bell Recreation Center, 99th Avenue and Bell Road. Both properties are owned by the Recreation Centers of Sun City.

Hartman said he hopes an architect will donate design services for the theater.

The theater not only would give

Sun Citians a new entertainment venue but it would help generate business for Sun City merchants too, Hartman said.

He said Sun City retailers will be hurt when the new Arrowhead Towne Center at 83rd Avenue and Bell Road opens this fall.

"The community must find a solution to that problem," Hartman said. "With the proper programming of theater events — particularly those attractions from outside the community — it will certainly act as an offset to any loss of business of retailers."

Individuals wishing to make a donation may send a check to the Sun City Foundation, 10626 W. Thunderbird Blvd., Sun City 85351.

Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz. Monday, July 12, 1993

Theater project enters new stage

By BRITT KENNERLY
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The group's name, at least for now, is Sun City Theater 2000, but members are hoping to see ground broken for a performing arts theater in Sun City in late 1994.

And in the interim, the group, composed of members of Sun City performing arts groups, is considering a name change, poring over architectural plans and proposing fund-raising ideas for the theater.

In a Saturday meeting at Lakeview Recreation Center, the group's performance subcommittee met with architect Duane Von Fange to study Von Fange's proposal for a theater.

Those in attendance also discussed changing the name of the project to the Sun City Theater Project, said Alice Muehl, president of the Sun City Players theater group and a member of the proposed theater's design and performance committees.

"We haven't taken any official action, but some people have the mistaken impression that we mean 2,000 seats or that we won't be building until the year 2000," she said. "Originally, that was our time frame, but things are going much faster than we expected."

How big and where the theater will be, as well as how much it will cost, is still up in the air.

"But we're definitely on the road," said Sue Irons, chairwoman of the performance committee. "We're looking at a lot of options and would hope that we can break ground in the next year or

year and a half."

Before the project can actually begin to take shape, several things must be decided, Irons said.

While some Sun Citians want a theater with around 600 seats, which would cost about \$2 million, others want a larger venue, with about 1,500 seats — one that could, for example, have retractable walls and cost up to \$4 million or more.

In the meantime, Muehl said, members of Theater 2000 have "at least a dozen" venues they'd like to examine for ideas, and that "many" architectural designs will be examined.

On July 22, members of the Theater 2000 group will glean ideas for design during a bus tour of theaters in the greater Phoenix area.

Stops will include the Chandler Center for the Arts and the Red River Opry in Tempe, as well as several high school theaters.

Interested parties are invited to sign up for the bus tour; riders will pay individual expenses.

For information, call Alice Muehl at 972-6605.

Under consideration for the Sun City theater site, Irons said, are Bell Recreation Center and the Sun Bowl, where members say the theater could be built without destroying the existing amphitheater.

Residents wishing to donate to Theater 2000's development fund may send checks, earmarked for the Sun City Theater Project, to the Sun City Foundation, 10626 Thunderbird Blvd., Sun City, 85351.



Stephen Chermek/Daily News-Sun

Marge Murphy, of the Sun Cities Television Production Club, takes notes during a meeting of the Sun City Theater 2000 project.

Architect puts new spin on Sun City theater plan

Compromise design could solve concern over arts center size

By IAN MITCHELL
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Some local performing arts groups want a small theater, others want a large auditorium. One architect says he can make them both happy.

Saturday the design committee of the Sun City Theater 2000 group heard an innovative compromise — building a single theater which fits both size descriptions.

Architect Chip Shay, with the firm of Rossman, Schnieder, Gadbery and Shay, discussed building a turntable theater, in which a portion of the seats in a large auditorium are built on a turntable similar to a gigantic Lazy Susan.

The turntable has its own rear wall, so that when it turns 180 degrees, seats on the turning portion are cut off from the main auditorium and form their own, smaller theater.

With a turntable theater, "you have the ability to carry on several programs at the same time," Shay said, demonstrating the concept with a model.

The costs of a turntable theater vary greatly with size, Shay said, adding that a good estimate would be between \$3,500 and \$4,000 a seat.

Shay said his company has designed about 35 theaters using the turntable concept, including the auditorium at Agua Fria High School in Avondale and the Chandler Center for the Arts.

His firm has also designed traditional, non-turntable theaters, including the auditorium at Dysart High School. In Sun City, Shay's company was responsible for the re-roofing of the Sundial Recreation Center pool in the late 1980s.

Committee members who visited the Chandler Center for the Arts were enthusiastic about the turntable concept, but Ed Victor, a director with of the Sun City Players, said he was concerned that it would be difficult to raise the money necessary to build a large theater.

The Sun City groups who want a large theater hire outside performers, Victor said. "Of the ten groups that put on performances, none of them require a very large audience."

Design Committee Chairwoman Rebecca Johnson said the group was planning a series of visits to theaters around the Valley and would hear presentations from a number of different architectural firms.

The turntable has its own rear wall, so that when it turns 180 degrees, seats on the turning portion are cut off from the main auditorium and form their own, smaller theater.

"We are not making decisions yet, we are putting input in," she said.

Johnson said the committee would conduct a survey of performing arts clubs, including non-chartered groups, to determine what size theater the groups would prefer and how often they would use it.

Art Williams, vice president of the Recreation Centers of Sun City and secretary of the theater committee, spoke before Shay's presentation about the proposed theater's size.

The Sun City Players and some other performing arts groups have called for a 500-600 seat theater, while members of the Sun City Organ Club have said a theater of about 1,500 seats is necessary for their productions.

Williams said the Organ Club's productions did not require seeing the organist and could take place in Sundial Auditorium.

"I would not like to see us get bogged down on this one problem," he said. "Let's compromise."

After the meeting, Organ Club Vice President Ray Danford said using Sundial Auditorium would be unacceptable to his group because people attending organ recitals like to see the organist. The portable seats in the auditorium are uncomfortable and the acoustics are poor, he added.

During the meeting, Williams said converting Mountain View auditorium, which had been proposed as one solution, would not be practical because of public opposition to changing the existing facility and the cost of upgrading the facility.

"Please don't anyone ever think about converting Mountain View into a theater," he said.

George Hartman, recreation centers board member, announced that the Sun City Foundation is being reactivated to accept donations in the theater fund-raising effort. Unlike the recreation centers, the foundation has 501-c-3 tax status, which makes contributions to the foundation tax-deductible.



Rick D'Ella/Daily News-Sun

Architect Chip Shay uses a model to explain a multi-use theater concept to the Sun City Theater 2000

Design Committee. The committee met Saturday to discuss plans for a proposed theater.

Panel forms to push theater

By J.J. McCORMACK
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — A proposal to build a performing arts theater for Sun City's retirement community gained momentum Saturday with the establishment of Sun City Theater Committee 2000.

During a meeting sponsored by the Sun City Players, a performing arts club, about 30 representatives of other local performing arts groups volunteered to work on different aspects of the theater project.

Gerald Unger, president of the Recreation Centers of Sun City, agreed to serve as the committee's president until a permanent chairman is selected at a future meeting.

Art Williams volunteered to serve as committee secretary.

A committee vice president and treasurer were not named and subsequent meetings were not scheduled.

Performing group representatives chose chairmen for each of four subcommittees

formed Saturday.

Rebecca Johnson will chair the Theater Design panel, Art Williams will chair the Construction panel. Charles Outman will chair the Finance panel and Sue Irons will chair the Performance Groups panel.

Represented at Saturday's meeting were the Sun City Choraliers, the Sun City Musicians Club, the Sun City Chamber Music Society, the Sun City Organ Club, the Sun City Male Chorus, the Sun City Women's Chorus, the Sun City Harmony Organ Club and the Desert-Aires.

Sun City Theater Committee 2000 grew out of a recreation centers survey in January seeking members' input about the Sun Bowl, the community's seldom-used outdoor auditorium at 107th Avenue and Claire Drive.

In addition to overwhelming support for keeping the Sun Bowl, the survey generated a flurry of calls, letters and petitions in support of an indoor theater.

Unger determined a committee was needed

to steer the project with help from the centers.

"I know it's summer, but we can't wait. We have to organize and get started," he said.

Unger said the design and finance subcommittees are critical to the project. The design subcommittee must determine an optimal size for the theater, while the finance committee will be charged with determining how to pay for it.

"I can see us raising a couple million dollars in memorials, commitments and gifts. ... There are all kinds of ways that we can finance theaters," he said.

The design subcommittee's task may prove most difficult, because some local performing arts groups want a large theater, others are thinking small.

The Sun City Players, for example, want a "small, congenial," theater with between 500 and 600 seats, said Ed Victor, a past president of the group.

"We want a theater that's more or less in-

See Size to, A5

Size to play key role

—From A1

imate and viewable," he said.

Victor expressed hope the theater committee won't get bogged down in details too early and wind up foundering. That was the fate of two previous groups that attempted to get a theater project off the ground, he said.

A 1,500-seat theater is projected to cost \$4 million; a 600-seat theater \$2 million. The theater committee also may explore refurbishing the

550-seat Mountain View Auditorium at a projected cost of \$500,000.

Outman, a former finance officer for the Chicago Opera and a Midwest musical theater consultant, warned against building a small theater. He said a 600-seat theater will not support itself.

A larger theater, with 1,200 to 1,400 seats, "is the only way you can make these things support themselves," he said.

Theater proposal recalls earlier effort

Daily News-Sun staff

The plan to build a theater in Sun City has a familiar ring to Vincent De Francis.

De Francis was vice president of the Recreation Centers of Sun City Board of Directors and president of the Sun City Foundation in 1987 when he organized a meeting of Sun City clubs to discuss the construction of a

performing arts center.

The theater was to be built on land owned by the recreation centers without the financial support of the centers.

The planned arts center never materialized, and De Francis said Sunday he wasn't sure if the newly proposed theater would succeed.

"I question whether it would be for the same reason that I didn't find it a success," he said. "People say 'Yes, yes, yes, we need it!' but nobody wants to help."

The Sun City Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, was formed in 1986. The foundation was originally intended to sup-

port recreation centers activities, but became independent of the centers in 1989.

One of the foundation's major causes was the construction of a performing arts center, but the group has been inactive for several years — it was unable to raise funds or recruit volunteers, De Francis said.