

## Dinner theater owner transforms former movie house into multi-venue complex

**BY STACY NICK** • StacyNick@coloradoan.com • October 24, 2010

Although the economy is still flopping, Carousel Dinner Theatre owner Kurt Terrio is betting that the theater business in Northern Colorado will be booming with his new Midtown Arts Center preparing for its close-up.

Though delayed from its original Sept. 10 opening due to a late change in contractors, the new performing arts center will open its doors Nov. 19 for the Carousel Dinner Theatre's holiday production of "White Christmas."

As the hub of the MAC, the dinner theater will be the first phase of the multi-venue project; Carousel has been at its old home, just three blocks north of the center, for the past 20 years.

The MAC, located at 3750 S. Mason St. in Fort Collins, is the former Mann 4 Movie Theater; since the theater's closing in 1999, it has been used by the neighboring Lithia car dealership to store equipment and tires.

"It's been really exciting to watch the transformation," said Terrio, who co-owns the MAC with his wife, Kate. "Just three weeks ago, they were still pouring concrete."

In spite of the economic downturn, Carousel saw its its two largest grossing seasons in 2008 and 2009, he said. And season ticket sales are up 25 percent for the 2010 season.

"To me, this project signifies that the economy is turning around," said Terrio, who received a \$460,000 bank loan guaranteed by the Small Business Administration, a key factor in his decision to go forward with the project, he said.

Terrio purchased the building for \$600,000 and estimates that he's made about \$1 million in renovations. For Carousel's regular audiences, those changes will mean more bathrooms, more parking and more seating. Carousel's current location seats 200; between the main seating area

and the upper mezzanine, the new theater will seat approximately 260. Additionally, the MAC will feature a black-box studio classroom, a 200-seat performance hall and a 225-seat banquet/convention ballroom.

The additional theater and studio spaces, which are slated for completion in 2011, will be rented out to local theater and music groups, as well as youth arts groups and school productions. Terrio said the additional stages also might serve as a place where Carousel can perform more "edgy" works that might not work for typical dinner theater audiences.

The new venue also will feature an eight-player orchestra pit and a stage that is more than double the height of the current stage.

"I think patrons are going to be truly astounded by how much 18 feet of overhead space and a proscenium stage will change the way our actors are perceived on stage," Carousel Artistic Director Kenneth Moten said.

However, patrons still will be able to appreciate Carousel's up-close-and-personal feel as no seat will be more than 45 feet from the stage, Terrio said.

The theater is also expanding from one to three kitchens - one main kitchen for the dinner theater and two smaller auxiliary units to support the banquet hall and the mezzanine area. It's a far cry from the two ovens, one holding unit and two hotplates the theater has been subsisting on for the last 20 years, said Carousel's new house manager Marissa Walters.

"The MAC's kitchen capabilities will allow us to truly address the fine dining aspect of Carousel Dinner Theatre," said Walters, adding that the new kitchen was designed to allow staff to cater to both the dinner theater and the banquet hall at the same time.

The center also will feature a full sit-down bar and two lounges.

The new digs also mean new staffing; Carousel has added three executive positions: Moten, Walters and Food and Beverage Director Chris Walters, as well as two additional full-time staff positions.



An artist rendering shows the new Carousel Dinner Theatre lobby at the Midtown Arts Center, which is slated to open Nov. 19. (Courtesy of Randy Shortridge, RB & B Architects)



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Kurt Terrio, owner and producer of Carousel Dinner Theatre, stands on the stage of the theater's new location at 3750 S. Mason St., in Fort Collins. Formerly the Mann 4 Movie Theater, the Midtown Arts Center will be completed and host its first musical, 'White Christmas' on Nov. 19. The center's dinner theater will seat 260 people. (Dawn Madura/The Coloradoan)

**By the numbers**

**Carousel Dinner Theatre**

>Address:  
3509 S. Mason St., Fort Collins  
>Size:  
7,500 square feet  
Closing date (at its current location):  
Nov. 13

>Features:  
a 200-seat dinner theater  
>History:  
Purchased by Kurt and Kate Terrio in 2001, prior to that, the Carousel Dinner Theatre ran for 10 seasons under the ownership of local sisters Vandi Holter-Deines and Sandra Holter.

**Midtown Arts Center**

>Address:  
**3750 S. Mason St., Fort Collins**  
>Size:  
**22,000 square feet**



An artist rendering shows the new Carousel Dinner Theatre stage at the Midtown Arts Center, which is slated to open Nov. 19. (Courtesy of Randy Shortridge, RB & B Architects)