



## **City Council Annual Report Monday, January 23, 2023**

*Prepared by: Jeff D. Larson, Executive Director*

The Sheldon Theatre entertains, educates, and enlightens the community and its visitors through the transformative power of the performing arts.

### **Overview of the Sheldon Staff:**

*The Sheldon consists of 5 full-time staff members, along with 12 casual employees who work in Front of House (box office, lobby management) and backstage. Core staff includes Executive & Artistic Director Jeff Larson, Associate Director- Marketing & Communications Brenda Stewart, Associate Director- Development & Community Relations Samantha Whipple, Director of Production Russell Johnson, and Audience Services Manager Leah Adams.*

### **Accomplishments in 2022:**

#### **Beating National Trends**

*The New York Times and other national press have reported continued dire post-COVID conditions for performing arts venues nationwide, with average attendance down over 40% from pre-pandemic levels. Thanks to exceptional community support and a new programming direction dedicated to getting people back out of their houses with fun, accessible shows for the whole family, that has not been the case for the Sheldon. We're seeing a 10% attendance **increase** from pre-COVID times.*

#### **Continued Financial Stability**

*With the help of considerable community support, the second year of Federal Shuttered Venues funding, and a new ticket pricing model that offered more affordable tickets while also increasing revenue by 30%, we were able to continue building on last year's operational, infrastructure, and marketing upgrades while achieving a projected budget surplus of over \$125,000.*

#### **Closer Friendships**

*In 2022 we brought the work of the Friends of the Sheldon, a previously independent nonprofit organization that was formed to support the theater when it didn't have staff capacity to handle individual fundraising and memberships, in-house. Our membership program and advertising*

*partnerships with local businesses are now run by core staff member Samantha Whipple, allowing better service to, and closer relationships with, both groups. We've hosted two Friends-only parties before shows already, with plans for more in the upcoming season. Our membership has been pleased with the change, and our closer relationships have led to increased donations.*

### **The Kids are Back**

*In 2022, we were able to resume school show partnerships bringing over 600 students and 50 teachers back into the theater after 2 years. The family shows also saw a significant increase of 130% over 2021 and student tickets for other shows grew 450% (from 150 in 2021 to 820 in 2022). We've programmed more family friendly events and created family pricing to make the theater more accessible to the community.*

### **SUMMARY**

The Sheldon continues to be in a financial and artistic position that is the envy of performing arts venues across North America, with no pandemic hangover and able to look ahead to future growth in audience size, community impact, and artistic ambition. This is due, in large part, to the unique and vibrant public-private partnership which leverages support and enthusiasm from diverse stakeholders. The result is a Sheldon that is moving confidently into bolder, more impactful, community-centered programming that sets it and Red Wing apart as a leader in small-town, Midwest performance presenting.