

New Interactive Theater Coming To Downtown St. Paul

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Star Tribune

Published June 9, 2005

Downtown St. Paul will have a new theater featuring a new interactive show through a partnership between developer PAK Properties and Actors Theater of Minnesota. The producers hope "We Gotta Bingo" will bring crowds to the historic Lowry Building on St. Peter St. in much the same way that "Tony 'N' Tina's Wedding" did at Hey City Theatre in downtown Minneapolis.

PAK announced that the new Lowry Theater will open this fall and occupy approximately 4,200 square feet of space on the first floor of the building, next to the Pazzaluna restaurant. Meanwhile, Actors Theater is developing the bingo show, which will feature 19 actors mingling with audience members who become participants.

"This theater and this new production builds on the dramatic changes that are transforming our downtown into a place to live, work and play," said St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly in a prepared statement. "Today is another sign of the city's evolution into an entertainment destination for Twin Cities residents and beyond."

The theater is part of a larger redevelopment package for the building, envisioned by PAK. The company could not say Wednesday what the specific price tag is for the theater, which would have a capacity of about 230.

The Minneapolis-based Brave New Workshop in February closed its St. Paul operation at the Palace Theater on W. 7th Place. It had run the interactive shows "Minnesota! It's Not Just for Lutherans Anymore" and "Flanagan's Wake" for four years in the refurbished lobby of the theater. Although the shows were profitable, playing to about 12,500 patrons, the Workshop chose not to renew its lease.

Actors Theater has produced shows at the Fitzgerald Theatre, the Minnesota Centennial Showboat at the Wington Pavilion on Harriet Island in St. Paul. The nonprofit company has been

developing the "Bingo" show since last fall. It focuses on two small Catholic parishes — one Irish, one Italian — that join forces for a monthly bingo fundraiser. Managing director Bill Collins said the troupe is forming a separate for-profit entity that will raise private investment to mount the show.

Collins, an alumnus of "Tony 'N' Tina," said Mark Bergren, former artistic director for Dudley Riggs' Brave New Workshop, will direct the show's acting and writing. Bergren was also a show director for Disney Entertainment and currently operates Out of the Blue, a speaking, training and entertainment company. Jim Cunningham, who worked at the Workshop and in "Tony 'N' Tina," is Actors Theater's artistic director and musician Kevin Dutcher is musical director.

"People kept asking, 'When's the next one?' " Collins said of his experience in "Tony 'N' Tina." There's clearly a desire to have that sort of experience again."

Collins had considered the former Hey City space in Minneapolis because audiences could associate it with the long-running "Tony 'N' Tina" production. But, he said, Mayor Kelly and Rick Beeson of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, pushed the partnership with Rich Pakonen of PAK Properties.

Actors Theater will continue to produce at Harriet Island, Collins said, in addition to this show, which is targeted for four days a week beginning next fall. Group sales have begun and individual ticket sales will start Aug. 1 More information is at www.WeGottaBingo.com or 651-227-BINGO.

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