

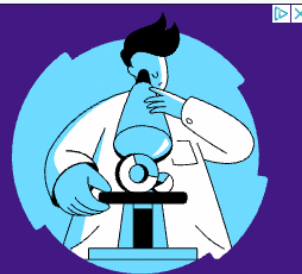
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It's the 'opportunity of a century'

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Panida officials are pictured outside the historic Panida Theater as the board launches the Panida Century Fund campaign to raise \$1.9 million over the course of the next five years, leading up to the 2027 centenary of the theater. Pictured, from left, are Foster Cline, Panida board member and fundraising chair; Veronica Knowlton, Panida managing director; and Jim Healey, Panida board chair.

(Courtesy photo)

By **CHRIS BESSLER** Contributing Writer

| October 13, 2022 1:00 AM

Starting today, the Panida is doing something audacious.

With its 100th year looming and the needs for the grand old theater accumulating, the Panida Theater is launching a major campaign to restore and renovate the historic building and adjacent Little Theater.

The goal of the aptly named Panida Century Fund campaign is to raise \$1.9 million over the course of the next five years, leading up to the 2027 centenary of the theater.

That large sum is the audacious part. But the deferred maintenance and

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restoration that the Century Fund will address is simply pragmatic: Stuff needs to get fixed and improved.

"In five years, the Panida will be celebrating its 100th anniversary," said Jim Healey, chair of the Panida board of directors. "Like anything 100 years old, whether it be a person or a building, it needs love and attention, and there is wear that needs to be addressed."

The urgent need, Healey said, is to replace the main theater roof. "We're heading into the winter months," he said. "The roof is a matter of concern that needs to be addressed right now. We've seen leaks. It could be because of improper drainage on the south side. It's going to need a new roof whether this winter or next winter. This is our top priority."

The Panida board, staff and volunteers have been working to lay the groundwork for this campaign over the course of the year. In July, the board approved a five-year strategic plan that lays out its mission, vision and goals. It's a plan, said Panida Managing Director Veronica Knowlton, that reflects the belief that the arts play a "pivotal part ... in creating inclusivity, collaboration, diversity" through shared community experiences.

"Our intended hopes for the Panida Theater are reflected in this strategic plan, which will be our roadmap heading towards the Panida centennial celebration," she said. "In establishing these specific objectives, we are united in our understanding of what is both possible and achievable as we work together."

Concurrent with approval of the strategic plan, the Panida board also in July approved a plan to conduct a major capital campaign for what is dubbed the Century Fund. The Century Fund plan itemizes all the maintenance needs for the main theater and estimates their costs – from the badly needed new roof, to a long-deferred sprinkler system, to major interior repairs and improvements for staging performances.

"The Panida over the decades has served well as a venue for a movie-going experience," observed board member and fundraising chair Foster Cline, "but it is woefully lacking in infrastructure needed in a modern performing 'theatre.' The lobby is small and crowded. The restrooms are cramped. The backstage area is inadequate. The acoustics need to be upgraded. The beautiful aged plaster is in need of replacement. More comfortable and updated seating is needed."

The needs are not only for the main Panida. The campaign, if successful, will also provide the funds that have long been needed to renovate the adjacent Little Theater, in order to create a state-of-the-art "black box" theater for smaller performances and community meetings as well as augment the main theater, including an adjacent lobby area with a pass-through between the two buildings.

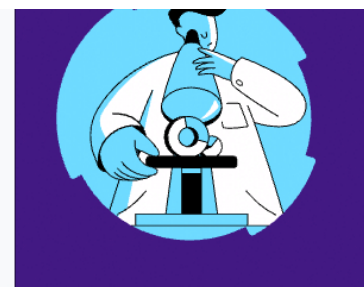
"All this is going to be costly but essential as our community-owned theater evolves to meet the needs of a thriving community for live performing arts," Cline said.

A plan in five phases

While the itemized list of needs adds up to the large, \$1.9 million goal of the Century Fund, the campaign is not a sprint. Rather, it's a five-year marathon.

"There are five phases and we are working on phase No. 1 right now," said Healey. "The five phases are spread out over the five years of the Century Fund campaign. Right now we're in the beginning steps."

In this first Phase I year, the goal is to raise \$273,000 to satisfy the most urgent needs, including approximately \$134,000 for the new main theater roof. The four ensuing years set fundraising targets as well with the bulk to be raised in



The SEMRUSH logo is at the top left. To its right is a small circular portrait of a man with a beard, wearing a black t-shirt with "Bright Burn" written on it. Below the portrait, the text reads: "Give your marketing strategies the power to grow" with an orange arrow pointing to the right.

that existing years set fundraising targets as high, that the goal is to raise in the third and fourth years.

And right from the very launch, there's good news. With early donations and grants, fundraising is almost half way to the Phase I goal.

And most remarkable: Ting Internet has made a huge commitment to the Century Fund, pledging to match up to \$200,000 in individual donations made during the campaign. The Ting pledge was made possible through the work of Ting's local market and marketing manager, Kari Saccomanno. (See sidebar.)

"This is so huge for our campaign," said Chris Bessler, who is the volunteer chair of the Century Fund steering committee. "Whether you give \$5 or \$5,000, that donation gets doubled by Ting's generous pledge."

"I'm calling Ting's commitment to the Century Fund our 'keystone donation,' that will unlock so many donations from individuals as well as be a motivation for other grantors and corporate partners."

Along with the detailed roadmap laid out in the Century Fund plan, the steering committee has recruited a Community Advisory Council for the campaign. With more than 30 individuals representing diverse interests in the community, the advisory council will provide key feedback, ideas, referrals and advocacy for the campaign over the next five years. The council held its first meeting in September, and will meet about once a quarter.

The Panida's storied history

All this enthusiasm for the Panida, and the Century Fund campaign, comes naturally from the long history of the theater as the "living room" of Sandpoint, the place where generations of residents have shared joyful and memorable experiences.

Built in 1927 by local entrepreneur Frank Clarence Weskil, the Panida Theater opened to great fanfare as "one of the most modern and up-to-date theaters in the Northwest," as local newspapers reported. It was designed in classic Spanish Colonial Revival style, with art deco flourishes inside.

The theater launched as the era of traveling live vaudeville shows was waning and the new "moving pictures" had captured the public's thrall. The Panida's first performance in November 1927 was a showing of the silent movie, "Now We're in the Air." But, just a month earlier, the very first "talking picture" had premiered in the U.S., and "the talkies" soon became the global phenomenon upon which the Panida built its business.

The Panida has since served multiple generations of North Idaho residents with movies, live hometown variety shows and touring acts from theater to dance to live concerts. But social and market conditions changed, and, by the 1980s, the theater had closed and faced possible demolition. In 1985, the community rallied to raise the funds for its purchase with the founding of a nonprofit group, the Panida Theater Committee, through the tireless efforts of three women, Susan Bates-Harbuck and the late Laurel Wagers and Jane Evans – a trio affectionately dubbed the "Panida Moms."

The Panida has achieved major milestones since, with its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and, in 2003, the purchase of the adjacent building now known as the "Little Theater."

Knowlton said she sees the Century Fund campaign as the way to carry forward the tradition of community enrichment the Panida has achieved.

"Our phenomenal team of staff and dedicated volunteers works tirelessly to offer engaging programming and enjoyable experiences for guests and artists

alike,” said Knowlton. “Together, with the Board of Directors, and Panida Century Fund Advisory Council, we will ensure that the Panida Theater continues to leave a legacy for generations to come.”

The Panida board is holding the Panida Annual Membership Meeting on Thursday, October 20, at 6 p.m. in the main theater. The agenda includes the introduction and voting on new board members and more details on the Century Fund campaign.

Copies of the Panida Strategic Plan and the detailed Century Fund plan are available on the Panida website at www.panida.org. Donations to the Panida Century Fund may be made via the “Donate” button on the website; donations by check can be dropped off at theater or mailed to Panida, PO Box 1981, Sandpoint ID, 83864.

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