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The Andrew Carnegie Free Library and Music Hall in Carnegie, just a short drive from Mt. Lebanon, is home to a concert hall (foyer pictured center and bottom), library (bottom right) and a Civil War room. The building attracts history buffs, theater aficionados and those who love grand architecture.



# OUT OF BOUNDS

... VENTURES AWAY FROM HOME

## CARNEGIE CARNEGIE

### A LOCAL TREASURE RESTORED

**Y**ou don't need to go to New York City or Pittsburgh's cultural district to see a good play or performance. One of the South Hills' best-kept secrets is its proximity to a wonderful theater that presents concerts, musicals, stage plays and other events.

Patterned after Carnegie Music Hall in New York City and known for its wonderful acoustics, the Andrew Carnegie Free Library and Music Hall sits above the Carnegie business district on Beechwood Avenue just past the intersection of Broadway and Main streets. Carnegie Carnegie—as it has been nicknamed—opened in 1901 as a cultural center for the town and surrounding Chartiers Valley; the local high school once used it for concerts and graduations.

To distinguish the hall from its better-known sibling in Oakland, Maggie Forbes, the facility's executive director, has branded the hall as “where Broadway meets Main Street.” Local jazzman Joe Negri, Cuarteto Latininoamericano, an award-

winning ensemble from Mexico and NPR *Splendid Table* host Lynn Rossetto Kasper are just a few of the luminaries who have graced the stage this year. The music hall also is home to Stage 62, a community theater group; the Carnegie Performing Arts Center, a nonprofit dance and drama school; and the Pittsburgh Savoyards, a theatrical troupe that specializes in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.

“[The music hall is] a revolving door of outstanding performances,” Forbes says, “and a true regional asset.”

So why isn't it better known?

Designed by Struthers & Hannah in 1899 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the grand orange brick Italianate building with its embellished columns, arched windows and entryways and rolling grass lawn speaks of Carnegie Borough's former glory. But after an economic downturn in the 1970s, the facility received little community support and quickly depleted its \$93,000 endowment. The result was general neglect and bubbling plaster and peeling paint from water



damage. While the facility never closed, programs and attendance dropped off.

But then in November 2003, Carnegie Carnegie kicked off an ambitious \$8.6 million capital campaign to restore and renovate the building and an anonymous foundation had promised \$500,000, if a dollar-for-dollar match could be raised by September 30, 2004. The challenge was two weeks from its deadline and just \$45,000 short of its goal when Hurricane Ivan hit, devastating the town.

"I thought that was it," Forbes says of the campaign. Instead, the community rallied around its "beacon on the hill," raising \$60,000 in two weeks. Since then, renovations and refurbishments have been ongoing.

Phase I, completed in November 2005, brought ADA upgrades, new bathrooms and updates to the electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems. Phase II, completed in December 2006, included weatherproofing, French drains, new double-pane thermal windows, fixing leaks, sealing the foundation and restoring the roof, eaves and masonry. In 2007, painters completed work on the building's exterior.

Phase III is ongoing. Already complete is the music hall's entryway/lobby, which was transformed from a dark and dreary space to a cheery and bright area thanks to the restoration of the wonderful egg and dart and dentil moldings, painting the walls light blue and replacing solid wooden entry doors with glass paneled ones. A second-floor reception area used for fundraisers, science fairs, classes and Civil War expositions is nearly complete. Upcoming projects include converting an old gym into rooms for public programming, replastering the music hall, replacing the hall's old, uncomfortable wooden seats and air conditioning and HVAC improvements. Great care has been and will be taken to preserve the building's architecture during the renovations.

Phase IV, the final phase, will address parking and landscaping. Forbes, the former director of the Pittsburgh Children's Museum, envisions a serpentine walking path through a lawn dotted with sculptures based animals from popular children's literature—Babar the elephant or Alice in Wonderland's white rabbit.

She also would like to add a bus service to shuttle people between the business district and the library. The bus would, naturally, be painted with the Carnegie tartan.

In addition to the library and music hall, the building is home to another hidden treasure—the Capt. Thomas Espy Grand Army of the Republic Post #153. Located on the second floor and open by appointment only, this room is one of only a handful that remain of the more than 8,000 similar posts that once existed around the country. GAR posts were used by Civil War veterans for meetings and storage; the Carnegie post was open between 1906 and the early 1930s. But when the post closed, the room was locked and remained closed for half a century.

"That's 50 years of mold, mildew, water damage and vermin," Forbes says, estimating it will cost about \$100,000 to restore the room.

Once restored, however, the post will offer people the rare opportunity to visit a virtually untouched GAR meeting post and see the documents, photographs, musical instruments, flags, weapons, clothing and other relics it contains.

Members of Co. A, 9<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves, a local re-enactment group, are working with the library to restore and preserve the room's artifacts, and Library Director Diane Ragan, who has written two books about the Civil War, is the perfect person to request as a tour leader.

If you stop by, don't miss the library, which occupies 25 percent of the building and contains 30,000 volumes. Featuring a Roman brick fireplace topped by a large portrait of Andrew Carnegie, the library also has original oak moldings, ceiling-high arched windows, imposing columns that echo those at the front entrance and a leaded glass skylight.

So far, the capital campaign has raised \$5.75 million of the \$8.6 million needed to complete the project—\$1.2 million of that came from Carnegie residents and businesses. Forbes credits the facility's board (which includes vice president Bob Moll, a Mt. Lebanon resident) with the great strides that have been made in such a short time and hopes the efforts will revitalize the town as well.

"If we can do it, anyone can do it," she says. 📍



Cammi Mesa

**Pictured in the Civil War room, Maggie Forbes, Carnegie Carnegie's executive director and capital campaign manager, has spent the last four years working tirelessly to restore the 107-year-old facility.**

## programs

Carnegie Carnegie will hold its annual benefit at 8 P.M., Friday, October 10. "Songs that Oscar Taught Me" features contralto Daphne Alderson singing Oscar Hammerstein selections. Tickets are \$125. The concert will be followed by a reception held throughout the library and music hall. Here's a glimpse at some other upcoming events. For the most up-to-date information, log on to [www.carnegiecarnegie.com](http://www.carnegiecarnegie.com).

### LIBRARY AND MUSIC HALL

Once Upon a Toon, RADical Week, October 3

Songs of Industrial History, the NewLanders, November 20

Mass of Hope, with Joe Negri, Bach Choir, Stage 62, December 20

Civil War Concert, April 4, 2009

### CARNEGIE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Nutcracker, December 5-7, 12-14

Swan Lake, March 27-29, 2009

Peter Pan, April 17-19, 2009

### STAGE 62

Oliver!, November 7-9, 14-16, 20-21

Alice in Wonderland, February 6-8, 13-15, 2009

Noises Off, May 8-10, 15-17, 2009

Little Shop of Horrors, July 16-19, 23-26, 2009

### OTHER

Shimmy 3, Belly Dance Performance, October 11

Last Set at the Hurricane, October 18