

Spring 2026

# BACKSTAGE BULLETIN

## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



Dear Friends,

Welcome to a new volume of Backstage Bulletin! We aim to keep you, our partners and donors, up to date on the artistic, educational, and community work happening at Paramount, made possible through your support. Your confidence in our mission and the essential work of the arts fuels the impact we see every day, and we are excited to share real stories that reflect that impact.

This year began with whirlwind success at our third gala in January (inside). With a sold-out crowd, the gala drew hundreds of patrons and donors for an evening of headlining comedy entertainment. The after party featured a stunning display of portraits, costumes, and props from beloved productions in the Paramount Experience, connecting guests with the artistry happening behind the scenes.

Paramount proudly produced the Chicago area premiere of *Dear Evan Hansen*, bringing to life a work that has captivated audiences for more than a decade. Opening in February, the show's powerful themes created meaningful opportunities to collaborate with local organizations that serve young people. Through community partnerships and donor support for REACH, Paramount offered engagement programming at a special student matinee to help students process their experience of the show (back).

Our Stolp Island Theatre and Copley Theatre are buzzing with regular programming through the end of May. *Million Dollar Quartet* is back with fresh energy and new faces in its stunning, immersive setting. Professional stand-up comedians who call Chicagoland home are taking the stage at Copley Theatre, bringing new patrons and big laughs to audiences. In May, Paramount School of the Arts will also host its fifth annual student showcase, *The Stage is Ours*, performed by more than 100 students.

This work would not be possible without dedicated supporters like you. We are grateful for your partnership as we witness transformative moments onstage, backstage, and out in the community.

On behalf of everyone at Paramount—thank you!

With Gratitude, Tim Rater

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**NOW THROUGH  
MAY 31**

*Million Dollar Quartet*  
at Stolp Island Theatre

**APRIL 18 – MAY 2**  
Copley Comedy Series  
8pm at Copley Theatre

**APRIL 29 – JUNE 14**  
Rodgers & Hammerstein's  
South Pacific  
at Paramount Theatre

**MAY 4**  
Paramount School of the  
Arts Spring Showcase  
7:30pm at Paramount Theatre

**MAY 28 - JUNE 20**  
The Second City  
at Copley Theatre

**JUNE 20**  
Blues on the Fox  
at RiverEdge Park

**JUNE 16**  
26/27 Broadway  
single tickets on sale



PARAMOUNT  
THEATRE

# DONOR DIGEST

DuPage Foundation funds  
REACH Program

DuPage  
Foundation **DF**  
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Arts  
DuPage  
A DuPage Foundation Initiative

DuPage Foundation works to enhance quality of life in DuPage County and do “a world of good in our own backyard.” Through its Arts DuPage initiative, the Foundation has built a strong partnership with Paramount Theatre, supporting projects that expand access to the arts and reach new audiences.

Through Paramount’s R.E.A.C.H. Initiative (Resources Expanding the Arts and Connecting Humanity), that mission comes to life. The program creates affordable and accessible opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to experience the arts.

“Arts DuPage invests in projects that expand access to the arts because the future of the arts depends on it. By reaching new audiences, we not only ensure the longevity of our cultural ecosystem, but we also strengthen the vibrancy and economy of our community.”

With the support of a \$21,000 grant from DuPage Foundation, Paramount will provide accessible programming during the 2026 Broadway season, including ASL interpretation, open-captioned performances, and live audio description. Paramount will also present high-impact community

engagement events, offering quality arts education at no cost to community members.

As Debbie Venezia, Director of Arts DuPage, shared, “Accessible arts experiences enlighten us, inspire us, and unite us—regardless of background, ability, or economic status. Through shared creative moments, we open ourselves to new ideas, explore unfamiliar territory, and imagine worlds far beyond our own physical boundaries.”

Together, we move our shared vision for the community forward through the power of live performing arts, encouraging expansive imaginations and broad views of people and the world. If you would like to learn more about Arts DuPage, visit [ArtsDuPage.org](https://ArtsDuPage.org)

*“Investing in Paramount Theatre is an investment that yields dividends now and for years to come. With its exceptional production quality, Broadway-caliber artistry, and strong commitment to accessibility, Paramount has become a nationally recognized cultural leader—and a tremendous asset to the community.” - Debbie Venezia, Arts DuPage*



# 2026 ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GALA

Paramount kicked off the new year with its third gala on January 18, 2026, welcoming many first-time donors into its community of supporters. Fueled by a sold-out crowd, generous sponsors, and enthusiastic paddle raise giving, the event brought in \$820,000 in gross revenue to support Paramount's artistic work and general fund.

The evening began with a reception featuring performances from Paramount School of the Arts (PSA). Students presented a mix of group and solo acts, allowing donors to connect meaningfully with young artists who are supported through gifts to the school. Following the headlining comedy show, donors experienced the story of Paramount's growth and impact through the lives of two people: Andrea Prestinario, who starred in both *Come From Away* and Paramount's first production, *My Fair Lady*; and Kayla Mroz, a PSA student who shared how being part of the school has supported her mental health and sense of belonging. We are deeply grateful to Andrea and Kayla for sharing their stories and inspiring incredible generosity during the paddle raise.

Gala attendees made their way to the afterparty at the North Island Center, where guests enjoyed dancing, themed food, and entertainment throughout the building. In the Copley Theatre, the Paramount Experience showcased the creativity of Paramount's artists through an immersive exhibit of puppets, scenic renderings, wigs and facial molds, costumes, props, and more. Guided by artists Trent Stork, Jessica

Duplessis, Kelly Steimel, Aimee Plant, and Matt Guthier, the exhibit offered guests a deeper look into the craftsmanship behind the magic onstage. To cap off the night, Artistic Director Jim Corti and Artistic Producer and Casting Director Trent Stork unveiled a dramatic sneak preview of the 2026–2027 Broadway season.

We are so grateful to every sponsor, donor, and guest who helped make the evening such a success. Thank you for believing in Paramount and in the power of the arts to transform lives in Aurora.

Thank you to our Marquee Sponsor

**DUNHAM**  
FOUNDATION



To find out how you can support Paramount, visit [ParamountAurora.com/support](https://ParamountAurora.com/support)



# Students Find Support and Connection Through Dear Evan Hansen

In March, Paramount Theatre created two meaningful opportunities for students to engage more deeply with the themes of *Dear Evan Hansen* through its REACH initiative, combining arts education, mental health awareness, and community connection.

On March 6, Paramount partnered with Aurora University to host a free University Day for student performers. Led by sports and performance psychologist Demi Agaiby of Beyond Horizon Performance, students began the day with a mental health workshop focused on mindset and the values that shape their work as artists.

After the workshop, students traveled to Paramount for a special pre-show talkback with the actors and director of *Dear Evan Hansen*. The artists reflected on the emotional weight of the production and shared their process of getting in and out of vulnerable characters. They also spoke candidly about the risks, rewards, and realities of building a professional life in the arts, giving students an inspiring look at the many paths a creative career can take. The day concluded with dinner in the Grand Gallery before students attended that evening's performance.

The following week, Paramount welcomed more than 700 local high school students and chaperones for a special student matinee. Because *Dear Evan Hansen* explores

powerful topics including teen suicide, social anxiety, loneliness, and the pressures of online life, Paramount partnered with Enso Wellness Center for a post-show talkback and resource table. Opening a new western suburban location this fall, Enso Wellness Center provides specialized mental health services for youth ages 8–18. Their team shared information about therapy services and summer camp programming, while also offering small comfort items like fidgets, chocolates, and resources for students to take with them.

The post-show discussion was led by Jaime Monaco, Joe Rahman, and Rivka Benjamin of Enso Wellness Center, and moderated by Jessica Duplessis from Paramount School of the Arts. Together, they helped students process the emotional themes of the show, reminded them that struggling is part of being human, and encouraged them to seek support from trusted adults and local mental health resources.

These events were made possible through support from the DuPage Foundation and from the generous individual donors who give directly to Paramount's community outreach efforts through REACH. We are deeply grateful to every donor and partner who helps make this work possible.



## Join Us in New York City!

- October 23–26
- December 11–14

PARAMOUNT  
— ON TOUR —

For more information reach out to Paula Rae Brown at [paularaeb@paramountarts.com](mailto:paularaeb@paramountarts.com)