

Summer 2026

BACKSTAGE BULLETIN

Dear Friends, Summer at Paramount has been filled with creativity, connection, and opportunity—and it has all been made possible by you.

From welcoming audiences to Broadway productions like *South Pacific*, celebrating neighborhood events, filling classrooms with aspiring performers, and reopening the beautifully renovated RiverEdge Park, your generosity helps ensure the arts remain vibrant, accessible, and welcoming to everyone.

At the Paramount School of the Arts, students took the stage for our fifth annual *The Stage Is Ours!* Spring Showcase, energized audiences with *Disney's Camp Rock: The Musical*, and represented Paramount at Juneteenth and Pride celebrations. Along the way, they built identity, community, and a lifelong appreciation for the arts—lessons that will serve the students well far beyond the stage.

As Paramount's new Chief Development Officer, it has been a pleasure meeting many of you already. Your passion for this organization is inspiring, and I look forward to connecting with even more of you at an upcoming performance, event, or behind-the-scenes gathering.

Thank you for believing that theatre is for everyone. Because of your generosity, Paramount continues to create unforgettable experiences, strengthen our community, and inspire the next generation of artists, audiences, and dreamers.

Best wishes,



Amy Kaczmarek
Chief Development Officer

A recent study by Arts Alliance Illinois found that Illinois' creative economy is the state's sixth-largest industry, highlighting the important role arts organizations play in strengthening communities and driving economic growth. Paramount is proud to be part of that story as Broadway subscriptions continue to grow, RiverEdge Park welcomes thousands of visitors, and audiences travel from across the region to experience all we have to offer.

STANDOUT STATS

- **Creative sector jobs represent Chicago's 3rd largest industry**
- **Creative Economy generates \$148.1 billion in impact annually statewide**
- **\$1 turns into \$1.95: Every \$1 generated by the Illinois creative economy produces an additional \$0.95 in economic activity elsewhere in the state's economy.**

5TH ANNUAL SPRING SHOWCASE

On May 4, Paramount School of the Arts presented its fifth annual Spring Showcase on the Paramount Theatre stage. After weeks of collaboration, more than 130 students came together to perform *The Stage Is Ours!*, an original jukebox musical celebrating their creativity, talent, and imagination.

This year's showcase was especially meaningful, featuring six graduating seniors and a script written entirely by the students themselves. Centered on themes of joy, friendship, and celebration, the production came to life with fewer than 20 hours of rehearsal—a remarkable testament to the students' dedication and teamwork. Behind the scenes, the atmosphere was just as inspiring, with laughter, singing, dancing, and constant encouragement as students cheered one another on. They described the experience as "fun," "magical," "exciting," and "full of friendship."

More than 1,000 audience members attended the free community performance, celebrating artists of all ages and witnessing firsthand the transformative power of arts education. It was an unforgettable evening that showcased how the arts build confidence, foster connection, and give young people a platform to share their unique voices.

For many students, performing on the Paramount stage is a dream come true. Opportunities like this are made possible because of generous supporters like you. Thank you for helping us inspire creativity, nurture confidence, and create life-changing arts experiences for students and our entire community.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNER: THE RICH FOUNDATION



NEW BOARD MEMBERS APPOINTED

This summer, Paramount welcomed four new board members to the Aurora Civic Center Authority Board, rounding out appointees from earlier this year. New members include Juan Sifuentes, the current Chairman of the East Aurora School District 131 Board; Diane Lantz, the former Executive Director of the Illinois Government Finance Officers Association; Nastasha Prunty, the President of Gospel Morale and Entertainment; and Christopher Childress, co-founder of Progressive Energy Group and the former President of Nicor Gas Services.

Previous appointees include Brian Caputo, City of Aurora's Chief Operating Officer, and Phillip Van Lear, professional actor and director. Remaining board members include director Tim Hoppa, Jonathan Hylton, Chairman of the Board, and Gina Moga, Vice Chairman.



City of Aurora. L to R: Chris Childress, Juan Sifuentes, Nastasha Prunty, Mayor John Laesch, Gina Moga

DONOR DIGEST



MEET THE WRENNS

Years ago, Paramount established a scholarship fund to help students at Paramount School of the Arts access transformative arts education. Passionate about theatre and music, Kris and Kent Wrenn became annual supporters of the fund, hoping their gifts would help bridge the gap between talent and opportunity.

To better understand the impact of their support, Paramount Major Gift Officer Mary Pat Griswold arranged a tour of the School that included meeting the staff. During their visit, Kris and Kent had the opportunity to watch a live rehearsal in the McKee Theatre at PSA. Standing in the balcony, they were inspired by the dedication of the creative team and the raw talent of the students.

"That visit moved us," they shared. "We were incredibly impressed by the excitement, motivation, and thoughtfulness shared by Jessica Duplessis, Director of Education and Community Engagement. We were blown away by the state-of-the-art classrooms, recording studio, rehearsal spaces, and dance studios. Seeing this vibrant environment firsthand solidified our commitment to opening these doors for students who might otherwise never experience it."

Compelled by what they experienced, the Wrenns expanded their support to include the School's general fund. Reflecting on the importance of that investment, they said, "It's clear to us that without dedicated funding for these

classes and productions, these students would have very few alternatives for specialized arts education and personal development."



"We know our donations are making the School a more inclusive place and granting students the accessibility they truly desire," they said. "We want to ensure that every student who wishes to express themselves, hone their craft, and explore their creative talents has the financial freedom to do so." - Kris and Kent Wrenn



Recognizing that the arts shape creativity, confidence, and identity, Kris and Kent see their support of Paramount School of the Arts as an investment in the next generation. As they put it, supporting PSA means "gifting them a community—and sending a powerful message that their artistic talents deserve just as much investment and celebration as any other."

RIVEREDGE PARK REOPENS WITH BLUES HEADLINER TROMBONE SHORTY

After a break last summer, Thomas J. Weisner RiverEdge Park is back with a full season of concerts, movies, and community events following an extensive transformation.

The excitement was evident on June 18 as community members gathered for the official ribbon-cutting celebration. Guests enjoyed live bluesy music while exploring the Park's new amenities. Speakers included Paramount President & CEO Tim Rater, Aurora Mayor John Laesch, Second Ward Alderwoman Juany Garcia, and Colette Rozanski, President of RC Wegman Construction. RC Wegman, which managed the redesign and construction of the Park's infrastructure, represents one of Paramount's longstanding community partners.



The renovations include the addition of a new open-air Skydeck featuring private restrooms, a built-in bar, video screens, and sweeping views of both the Park and the Fox River. The original Skydeck continues to serve show and season sponsors, while the new space is available to book private events during concerts.



Guests will also discover a new beverage pavilion, Strawberries BBQ, space for food trucks and the craft beer tent. On the south end of the Park is a sprawling green space where families can relax for concerts and Movies in the Park shown on the giant video screens. A new restroom facility further enhances the Park's comfort and convenience.

Behind the scenes, significant improvements were made to attract top talent and artists. The new Artist Care building includes flexible and spacious greenrooms, a meet-and-greet space, dining area, offices, and an outdoor balcony overlooking the Fox River, ensuring artists and their crews enjoy an exceptional experience from arrival through encore.

The new amenities were enjoyed on opening day of the park with Blues on the Fox, our 27th annual blues festival in Aurora. This year's headliner featured Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, who absolutely brought down the house with their energetic blend of rock, funk, and blues.



We can't wait to welcome you back to RiverEdge Park this summer. Please visit RiverEdgeAurora.com to learn more.