

■ GRAND OPENING: Hundreds of people present as Capitol Theatre opens doors



DIANA MARTIN photo@chathamdailynews.ca

Hundreds of people filled King Street in front of the Capitol Theatre to witness the grand opening of the fully refurbished stage house Friday morning.

Curtain rises on new era

BOB BOUGHNER
The Daily News

Nearly 14 years and \$21 million later, the Chatham Capitol Theatre in historic downtown Chatham was officially opened Friday.

An estimated 500 people filled King Street in front of the re-constructed theatre to glimpse the opening ceremonies.

"Today is a day to celebrate," said Kevin McNeil, president of the Chatham Capitol Theatre Association. "The Capitol Theatre is ready. It may have been a somewhat arduous birth, but our baby is unbelievably beautiful."

He said that since the start of



the project in 1995, there have been thousands of people who have taken part in its completion.

"There has been no donation too small, no amount of time volunteered too short and no sacrifice too small to go unnoticed.

"Every last person who has committed anything to this project needs to be recognized as not only important for getting us to this point, but should also take enormous pride in the result of

their efforts," he said.

McMillan said in his humble opinion the community has achieved something nothing less than spectacular.

"Our world in Chatham-Kent is better because of what we are about to do this morning and the Capitol Theatre on King Street will stand for generations to come as a monument to the confidence and faith that has been placed in the community.

McMillan added that without Bob Fox, the project manager, there would be no Capitol Theatre.

Mayor Randy Hope said the theatre is part of a much bigger picture in which council is

encouraging creative and cultural activities that stimulate the local economy and help revitalize communities and downtowns in Chatham-Kent.

"This activity encourages newcomers and investors to join in, while also providing new opportunities and an improved quality of life for Chatham-Kent residents," he said.

Hope said the Historic Downtown Chatham Business Improvement Association is already reporting new interest and business activity in downtown Chatham thanks to the revitalization of the municipally-owned theatre.

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Hope said the Historic Downtown Chatham Business Improvement Area is already reporting new interest and business activity in downtown Chatham thanks to the revitalization of the municipally-owned theatre.

"In addition, this week's announcement of a new condo/hotel project in the area has created added interest while other heritage structures in the downtown are being renovated and adapted to new uses," he said.

Chatham-Kent Essex MPP Pat Hoy said the ribbon cutting was a celebration for everyone to enjoy.

He said the many volunteers associated with the project can be proud of what they achieved.

"The theatre will draw people not only from Chatham-Kent but from far and wide to see a state-of-the-art facility," he said.

Chatham-Kent Essex MP Dave Van Kesteren, in a prepared statement in his absence, said although the facility has been the centre of much debate over the years, he's hopeful the community will rally behind and support the Capitol.

The Capitol Theatre is launching its inaugural season with a host of entertainment from a variety of genres.

Coming attractions include comedians Bill Cosby, Howie Mandel and Lorne Elliott; music acts such as Great Big Sea, Josh Turner and Chantal Kreviazuk and family entertainment including the Nutcracker and Vienna Boys Choir.

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