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SIGNATURE OPENS ITS NEW \$16 MILLION TWO-THEATER BUILDING IN SHIRLINGTON VILLAGE

*Arlington, VA — Signature Theatre has taken another gutsy step forward in its brief 17 year history: construction of a **new theater complex** with state-of-the-art equipment, expansive office space, and top-notch technical facilities. Most importantly, it houses **two fully-equipped, acoustically-sound, flexible black box theaters**, providing a launch pad for ever-greater artistic achievement and community service. Under Artistic Director and Co-Founder Eric Schaeffer, Signature's new home in Shirlington Village will nurture its artistic and organizational expansion while maintaining the uniquely intimate environment that artists and audiences have come to value. The new Signature is still daring and surprising, but with room for the Signature spirit to grow and thrive. Various opening events are planned kicking off with a weekend-long Open House on January 13 and 14.*

*"Seventeen years ago Co-Founder Donna Migliaccio, architect Dick Gommersall, and I had the vision for Signature Theatre and took the first bold step," reflected **Eric Schaeffer**. "Today it's amazing to realize how Signature has not only succeeded, but thrived and surpassed what any of us ever could have imagined. We transformed a rundown automobile bumper-plating factory into a theatrical home with a reputation as a leading producer of groundbreaking musical theater and innovative contemporary work. Signature continues to make the implausible possible and that inventive 'theater-in-a-garage' spirit infuses all that we do. The new facility will allow Signature to continue its leading role in developing new works for the American stage. It provides with opportunities to present and develop more work as well as provide artists a creative outlet to see their talents grow and flourish. The possibilities are endless as we embark on this new phase of Signature."*

Signature Theatre had outgrown its converted-garage space that it called home for 13 years. As Signature's artistic and community agendas expanded, its creative juices were often squandered on overcoming obstacles. One stage, one rehearsal room, and a cramped administrative office had become strikingly inadequate for Signature's ambitious standards for artistic quality, intensifying artistic vision, deepening service to the community, and

enormous audience growth. Consider some of the realities of how shows had to be produced in the old building:

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- *Steel beams and girders combined with a low ceiling height (11') limited set design options.*
- *Sets had to be built in sections off-site and moved in, piece by piece, for assembly.*
- *The hanging of lighting instruments, which should require no more than two days for most theaters, took seven at Signature's garage, consuming on-stage rehearsal time.*
- *The one small rehearsal room was only big enough for taping out half of the actual set size, causing precious rehearsal time to be lost working on restaging and re-blocking scenes once on set.*
- *Dressing rooms and backstage areas were cramped and unsuitable for Signature's world-class performers. Signature only had adequate dressing room space to accommodate 10 performers, when most musicals average a cast size of 15-17. Cast, crew, and orchestra had to share a common greenroom often resulting in noise that made concentration on lines impossible. Narrow passageways to the stage required carefully choreographing even the most simple of entrances and exits.*
- *Rehearsals frequently spilled over into the lobby when the theater was occupied by "tech week" (the final week of rehearsal). This arrangement thwarted all operations. Administrative staff, whose offices were located off the lobby, struggled to handle box office, donor, and media calls while performers worked on just the other side of the wall.*
- *The only way to provide the extremely popular cabaret series was to stage it in the lobby during "tech week" While audiences were jammed into the Signature lobby, carpenters, electricians, designers, and actors continued to rehearse just yards away.*

In addition to the limitations and extra work put upon artistic and production personnel, Signature's organizational growth was also limited by the garage space:

- *There is growing demand for Signature's educational programs, but the converted garage facility limited the ability to meet the community's desires. For example, Signature's previous location between a series of auto body shops made weekday student or senior matinees impossible due to the noise and lack of parking.*
- *There was also no space for ongoing classes or youth development programs.*
- *Financially, there was no room for audience, revenue, or program growth. The garage space was active year-round with almost every seat sold. Signature could not continue to grow and increase artistic, educational, and community programming as the audience demanded in the confines of the converted garage.*

Signature's entire staff, artists, and operations were bursting from the seams of the 12,000 square foot space of the garage.

Arlington County invited Signature Theatre to join them by becoming an economic and cultural anchor in the first public-private partnership in county history. A new two-theater building for Signature became a central part of the Shirlington neighborhood expansion that included development of expanded retail space and 800 new residential condominium units, with a new office building, hotel, and grocery store still under construction. The county constructed the shell of Signature's new building and provided the infrastructure with a total investment of \$5.5 million. Signature was responsible for raising additional funding for building-out and equipping its interior space.

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*"I am delighted that Signature — a home-grown theater with a national reputation — is moving into its new Arlington home," stated **Chris Zimmerman, Arlington County Board Chair**. "Having Signature in Shirlington is good for the Theatre, good for theater-goers, good for Arlington, and the region. Signature's presence here will seal Shirlington's reputation as a destination spot for the entire Metropolitan region. We are proud that Arlington incubated this theater, helped it grow, and now has partnered with Signature on its wonderful new home that showcases Arlington's commitment to the arts."*

Signature's new 48,000 square foot facility reflects the Theatre's energy and creativity. Audiences will find more comfort and convenience, but Signature's spirit of intensity and intimacy ultimately defined the new spaces. The building itself — a focal point of Shirlington — has a stunning, two-story high glass façade attracting the public by making theatergoers visible from the street and plaza below. The new complex not only addresses the many needs not met in the garage, but also expresses Signature's personality:

- *A new four-story building with a branch of the county library occupying the first floor and Signature occupying the second, third, and fourth floors.*
- *Located at the corner of S. 28th and S. Stafford Streets in the heart of the expanded Shirlington Village, the new theater/library complex opens onto a public plaza complete with decorative fountain and seating areas.*
- *Building is adjacent to a 550-car free parking garage for patrons.*
- *The interior, designed by VOA Inc., architects of the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre located on the revitalized Navy Pier, is a refined industrial aesthetic that pays homage to Signature's garage roots.*
- *Two intimate performance spaces: the 299-seat black box mainstage named The MAX Theatre in recognition of lead donors Maxine Isaacs and James A. Johnson, and a smaller 99-seat black box space named The ARK Theatre in recognition of lead donors Arlene and Robert Kogod.*
- *With 398 seats in two houses, Signature anticipates a 150% revenue increase projected*

by 2008.

- *The MAX Theatre houses a vestibule, replicating the hallway in the garage that led patrons from the reality outside to the magic that waits within the theater itself.*
- *The ceiling height of the MAX more than doubled to 29' including six catwalks that function as both fly-space for scenery and access-ways to the lighting grid.*
- *Flexible stages and seating in both theaters maintains the "surprise" factor when entering every show and allows for innovative and unexpected theatrical experiences — a Signature trademark.*
- *New theater seats with more leg room in a larger space for increased comfort, but still no further than eight rows from the stage, maintaining that uniquely intense interaction between actors and audience.*
- *A dramatic, welcoming, full-service main lobby named The Mead Lobby in recognition of lead donors Gilbert and Jaylee Mead in honor of Rob Mead.*
- *The Mead Lobby will have a pianist playing one-hour prior to every show and includes a concessions and wine bar that will be open one hour prior, during intermission, and one hour after every show; a coat check room; and a retail store.*
- *State-of-the-art technical capabilities enhance productions on both stages.*
- *Three rehearsal rooms — The Shen, The Sondheim, and The Zickler — allowing for the three major elements of musical theater — scene work, vocal/music work, and choreography — to be worked on simultaneously.*

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- *The Shen rehearsal room, the largest of the three spaces allows directors and actors to be able to tape out the entire set on the floor for the first time in Signature history.*
- *Scenery and costume shops.*
- *Dressing rooms to house up to 41 performers.*
- *Two green rooms: one for cast members and one for orchestra members.*
- *Professional administrative offices and meeting spaces.*
- *A street-accessible, walk-up box office.*
- *Signature will be able to expand educational opportunities to include weekday matinees for student and senior attendance.*

*"It's very exciting to be at a launching point for the next stage of Signature's growth," expressed **Managing Director Sam Sweet**. "It does however reflect a lot of hard work and a lot of careful planning. I'm so grateful to all who have participated in the effort so far. We are especially grateful to the lead donors to our capital campaign, and we are honored that the two theaters and lobby spaces in the new complex will bear their names in recognition of their generous support. Thank you to **Arlene and Robert Kogod, Maxine Isaacs and James A. Johnson, and Jaylee and Gilbert Mead**. Signature's new home has not only become a reality, but more importantly, Signature will truly be a major force for musical theater in our community and the nation."*

ABOUT SIGNATURE

Signature is a non-profit professional theater dedicated to producing contemporary plays and musicals, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. To date, Signature has presented over 20 world premiere productions. The works of Stephen Sondheim, however, remain Signature's signature. Signature is renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions with an intimate playing space, and using live orchestras with unamplified performers. In addition to the finest

*talent from the D.C. metro-area, Signature has been a home to such luminaries as Cameron Mackintosh, Stephen Sondheim, Terrence McNally, John Kander and Fred Ebb. Now in its 17th season under Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 209 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theater (18 nominations in 2006) and has been honored with 50 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2006, and Outstanding Play in 1999. Signature was also recognized by the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation for “its artistic vision and commitment to the support and development of musical theatre artists.” Signature was recently awarded a \$1 million grant from The Shen Family Foundation for the creation of *The American Musical Voices Project*, a two-pronged program consisting of Musical Theatre Composer Grants and Musical Theatre Leadership Awards. The Composer Grants support the commissioning and presentation of three emerging composers’ new musicals over the course of the next four theater seasons. Commissions were awarded to Ricky Ian Gordon, Michael John LaChiusa, and Joseph Thalken. The Leadership Awards, presented on May 1, 2006, recognized Bruce Coughlin, Adam Guettel, Audra McDonald, and Ted Sperling for their extraordinary influence on and contribution to the advancement of new musical theater. This fall Signature moves into a new \$16 million two-theater complex in Shirlington Village with a grand opening scheduled for January 2007. Signature is a member of the Theatre Communications Group, The League of Washington Theatres, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, the Arlington Arts Alliance, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Washington Board of Trade.*

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