

Give My Regards to Broadway

Mary C. DeFeudis

On September 9th, The Hanover Theatre & Conservatory held a special event in celebration of its 15th anniversary: the world premiere of a documentary about the birth of the theatre. As an original board member and one of the founders of the theatre, I am extremely proud and happy that our dream to create a successful, world-class theatre in Downtown Worcester became a reality.

The decision to memorialize our work and leave a mark in the history book of Worcester started about a year ago. I was unpacking an enormous box of memorabilia from the renovation project following a recent move. I just could not throw any of it away, as it represented a significant part of my life and the lives of all of those who worked on the project. I called former senator Harriette Chandler and asked her opinion about making a documentary celebrating the theatre's 15th anniversary and telling the story of the theatre's revival. She was clearly excited at the idea of capturing the words of the original founders on film, so I called Nel Lazour, our Director of Development. Nel's enthusiasm matched Harriette's, and so we began.

A little later, we arranged a reunion of our original board members and founders. Accompanied by accomplished filmmaker John Stimpson, a little wine, hors d'oeuvres, and a microphone, we set about the task of documenting the history of the organization. This board, which I began working with in 2005, was the most dedicated, interested, passionate board I have ever been on (and I have been on many). From the day I began, I was taken with the enormous, wonderful, all-encompassing job ahead. A vast amount of credit goes to Paul Demoga and Ed Madaus for their vision, unwavering dedication, and grit. They attained all the necessary tax credits and maintained the building with their own personal credit cards, and I am so grateful that they did.

As I spoke on the night of the documentary premier, I borrowed a phrase from Norman Vincent Peale. He said that, when you are faced with a difficult task and you are looking for the courage to go forward, you must, "throw your heart over the fence, and the rest will follow." His were the words I took to heart when I joined this small group of believers. Not many believed in the task we had undertaken. We had many naysayers. They thought we couldn't resurrect this broken-down building. They thought we could never raise the money here in Worcester. They thought we could not have Broadway in Worcester. They thought we were crazy! I was undaunted. I had fallen in love.

When you are in love, you do not look back. You "throw your heart over the fence". You put your doubts aside and work the plan. You don't entertain the idea of failure.

Even in its state of disrepair, the theatre was beautiful. It had a grandeur that called out to us, through the ups and downs, the meetings, the sleepless nights, the doubts and fears. We

watched as this beautiful old building began its transformation. We met in Frank Carroll's office across the street from the theatre at night. We could see the progress. We fundraised all day. We were all tireless in our efforts. We were all friends then, and still are, bonded by this experience. We were a great team.

The theatre is blessed with a spectacular staff, many whom have been with the theatre since its inception. We have great supporters in our Franklin Square Society, who got us through the pandemic. We are fortunate to have a group of selfless volunteers who are knowledgeable and welcoming and make going to the theatre a pleasure. We are blessed also by you, the Worcester community, who have supported and embraced the theatre since its opening. We are so proud of what this cultural landmark has done to revitalize Worcester.

We continue to add dimensions to this landmark. Our conservatory was added in 2017, and it is absolutely beautiful. This branch of the theatre has touched so many young people as they learn to act, dance, and perform on stage. Meghan Montaner is a strong and capable leader who has been with the theatre since its early beginnings. She is joined by Jennifer Agbay, a talented teacher of dance. The theatre has continued to grow and thrive, enlivening Downtown Worcester and attracting new audiences. The recent completion of the Francis Carroll Plaza offers a beautiful outdoor venue for performance and community engagement. The addition of THT Rep, The Hanover Theatre's new repertory theatre, is an important step towards building a thriving professional theatre scene in downtown Worcester and makes fantastic use of our stewardship of the BrickBox Theatre at the Jean McDonough Arts Center.

If you have not yet been to the theatre, please go to our [website](https://thehanovertheatre.org/event/) [https://thehanovertheatre.org/event/]. You will be amazed at the shows and our lineup for this season. Pick a show and explore the magic of The Hanover Theatre. You will be awed by the beauty of the building, knowing that it has stood watch over Worcester for 100 years and was nearly lost to a wrecking ball but for a small group of people who dared to defy the odds.

The documentary, entitled "On a Wing and a Prayer: Achieving the Impossible Dream", is artfully created by John Stimpson. By interweaving interviews and photographs, he has created a beautiful story and record for all of Worcester to enjoy.

Please take the time to watch the documentary. In its short 36-minute runtime, it tells an inspirational story that reminds us of the power of perseverance by a small few and a community's ability to create meaningful and lasting change. The film is available to view on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-qMTMiT8H4) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-qMTMiT8H4] as well as on the theatre's [website](https://thehanovertheatre.org/about-the-documentary/) [https://thehanovertheatre.org/about-the-documentary/].

Mary DeFeudis is an activist, philanthropist, and Worcester native. She has been actively involved with The Hanover Theatre since its inception as the project's first major benefactor. Her support and enthusiasm were instrumental in the success of the revitalization of the theatre. Since then, she has been invaluable to the organization as a supporter, ambassador and advocate.