

NEWS

Youth Theatre Northwest announces upcoming move in letter to supporters

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Dear YTN Families, Friends, Alumni and Supporters,

For 30 years, Youth Theatre Northwest (YTN) has partnered with the Mercer Island School District (MISD) for the education of our community's children. With great pride, we've enhanced the District's educational offerings by providing expert training in the performing arts for the children of Mercer Island and greater King County.

MISD has also been an accommodating landlord to the property YTN has always called home. MISD's generosity has allowed us to provide a second home to tens of thousands of children over the years. Our old, but homey, building has housed the creative development of youth; truly excellent theatre; the formation of lifelong friendships and memories; and provided a safe and accepting place for our children to express their individuality, and gain confidence.

We congratulate the Mercer Island community for passing the recent school bond, which will allow the district to fund three projects to address overcrowding in our schools, including the opportunity to build a new elementary school on the district's North Mercer Campus, where YTN currently resides.

Even while we share the victory with the MI community, we recognize that the time has come to move on and write the next chapter of YTN's story.

On behalf of our Staff and Board of Directors, we're announcing our plans to vacate the MISD property. This is a bittersweet time for our YTN community, especially our kids. Please take time to gently talk with them about this news and share with them the opportunities that lie ahead.

Our long-term vision is for a permanent home in Mercer Island's Town Center on City owned property adjacent to Mercerdale Park. This exciting plan is well under way. Led by respected community leader and Youth Theatre Director, John Gordon Hill, a separate Board of Directors and entity has been formed to focus on building the Mercer Island Center for Arts (MICA). YTN will serve as the anchor tenant in residence at MICA providing year-round vibrancy and activity in the building.

Support from the City of Mercer Island and the broader Mercer Island community is strong. MICA has been endorsed by several arts organizations across the region and has received \$105,000 in seed money. The MICA board is on a fast track timeline for fundraising and construction. Projects like these are complicated and dynamic. The MICA Board is working to create a timeline for the project and will share their schedule when these details become concrete. Track MICA's progress by visiting MercerIslandArts.org and sign up to receive email updates.

This brings us to YTN's short-term plan. The children and families we serve will be our utmost priority in the immediate months ahead. That's why a transition team has been formed, comprised of YTN staff, YTN Board Members, and community leaders, to locate a Temporary Home. We recognize that there will be many questions about YTN's transition. We will release details each step of the way. In the meantime, YTN maintains our unwavering commitment to supporting youth through performing arts. Both spring and summer 2014 programs and classes will continue, as will our productions of *The Dilemma of Humpty Dumpty*, *Spring Awakening* and *Peter Pan*. We are excited to announce our impending Summerstock productions at our upcoming Red Carpet Gala and our Summer Camp 2014 schedule may be found on our website.

Though some things at Youth Theatre are changing, in many areas it's business as usual. Please read below for additional answers to the questions you and your children may have. When do we have to

leave the building? YTN could be out of the building as early as June 30 or as late as October 31. The Mercer Island School District has allowed us a great degree of flexibility for the move. The transition team is actively determining the timeline, and will announce our confirmed move date soon.

Where will YTN relocate until MICA is built? The Transition Team has been working diligently to identify a temporary home to serve our needs for at least 3-5 years. After vetting several options, we are down to two viable locations with additional performance venues. What can you tell us about our temporary home? It will be located on Mercer Island and plans are coming together nicely. As soon as details are firm, we will share this information. Will there be summer camps, classes and performances? Absolutely! YTN has a summer program planned.

Location details are being worked out, but all classes, camps and performances will be on the island. Parents may review our 2014 summer camps on our website (YouthTheatre.org) and registration has begun. Where will our Summerstock shows be held? Our three Summerstock shows will be held on Mercer Island.

The Transition Team is looking at different venues and will make an announcement soon. Thankfully, Mercer Island has a few theater options: including the High School's Performing Arts Center and the newly renovated theater at the Jewish Community Center. Also, after last year's successful and creative outdoor presentation of Godspell, we are actively considering performing outdoors to take advantage of the beautiful summer weather. Regardless of the location, we have excellent shows planned in the usual spirit of YTN.

How can you help? Along the way, there will be ample opportunities to help us. We welcome you to support YTN's transition, either through a donation to support our moving costs and helping us settle into our new home, or volunteering for one of our active committees. To donate, please click [here](#), or call our main office: 206-232-4145, ext. 100. Donation checks may also be mailed to YTN, P.O. Box 296, Mercer Island, WA 98040. To join a committee or volunteer your time, contact Kathryn Lerner and Martina Dalton, Co-Chairs, YTN Board of Directors: kathryn_nw@comcast.net and martinadalton@comcast.net

Where can I learn more? It's no coincidence that our upcoming Red Carpet Gala on March 1st at the Mercer Island Community Center is poised to be one of the most important events ever held benefitting YTN. In addition to celebrity host and alumni, Joel McHale, and a litany of special presentations and performances, we will also be revealing the next phase of our transition plan. You do not want to miss this event!

Though our future is certain and bright, we know our children have deep and sentimental connections to our old home. For 30 years, we have watched our children grow up in this building so we truly understand and share these feelings. Under this old roof, our many students discovered and nurtured their talents, made countless fun memories and found the strength, depth and clarity to express themselves. In that spirit, we ask that you encourage them to express their feelings about the upcoming move. Have them share their memories, stories and sentiments and remind them they can always talk to our staff about any concerns they have. Throughout our final months on 40th Street, we will have several opportunities to celebrate the amazing history of our home and the magic our children created here. Say goodbye and leave your mark! Starting with the Opening of The Dilemma of Humpty Dumpty on February 28th, we will dedicate walls in our lobby for the community to write and share their reflections, memories, gratitude and goodbyes for this building.

Please stop by and share your story or mail your message to YTN, P.O. Box 296, Mercer Island, WA 98040 or info@youththeatre.org.

With gratitude on behalf of YTN Staff and Board of Directors,

Manny Cawaling,
Northwest

Executive Director, Youth Theatre