

Marquee Theatrical Productions marks 20 years of fostering young talent



Joseph of Technicolor Dream Coat fame had more than his fair share of patches on the garment so well-known theatre-goers but the sum total of these small swatches and stripes paled in comparison to the number of young lives touched by Aurora's Marquee Theatrical Productions over the last 20 years.

Marquee, which is located on Industrial Parkway North, opened its latest show, Andrew Lloyd Weber's Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat at Newmarket's NewRoads Performing Arts Centre Monday night. But this was no ordinary opening night; it was also a celebration of Marquee's milestone anniversary.

"This is certainly a special day," said Newmarket Mayor John Taylor on stage before the curtain rose. "20 years of Marquee is pretty incredible."

Paying tribute to Marquee founder Sheryl Thomas as a "force of nature," he said the Company has not only provided opportunity for youngsters to learn all about theatre, but built a community at the same time.

"You have built a community of parents, volunteers and kids who have gone through for 20 years," Mayor Taylor continued, recounting his own love for live theatre that was honed in high school, university, and now as a regular theatre-goer. "Sheryl is providing children not just an opportunity to have fun, to meet and watch each other and to build relationships, but to really embrace creativity, to build confidence, to understand what it is like to stand without a net almost, and deliver? as you may do one day in other forms, venues and work.

"To everyone in your community and on your team, thank you for what you are doing. The arts are the heartbeat of any community and you are part of that heartbeat, keeping that heartbeat strong."

Thanks were also offered on stage by Mayor Tom Mrakas, who said Marquee is "near and dear to my heart."

"What you do not only for Newmarket but the Town of Aurora is incredible for our youth, for the adults and everyone," said Mayor Mrakas, who previously served as a Marquee board member. "The Town is a partner willing to help in any which way we can. That is why we're building Town Square. Arts and Culture is important to the Town of Aurora and that's why we want to make sure we have areas we can grow and flourish and continue to promote the arts and culture for all our kids, adults and residents.

"We're looking forward to another 20 years of success."

Looking over Marquee's first two decades, Thomas said she was inspired by a quote she found from the late Colin Powell that, "There are no secrets to success. It's the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure."

'That part is part of how Marquee came to be - not everything goes as planned,' she said. 'Boy, when I hit those hard steps, it was like, 'Wow, I'm not going to let that happen again,' and I didn't. I kept building up and building up. Learning from failure is such a huge, huge piece of life and you have to embrace it - and I feel like I did that?. Our failures might not be the same failures you might experience; it's the recovery that matters. It's not an easy hill to climb, but the journey to get there is what really matters and is so worthwhile.

'The outcome of where we went from a summer camp of serving 15 children and no school stuff, and now we're at 700-plus kids a year. It never gets old. I still continue to learn every single day. I learn from my experiences, my mistakes. I learn from the greatest little kids who is saying something really silly but, ah, it makes you think. All these neat little things that happened along the way.'

Theatre, she added, is 'magic' and makes you feel and build special friendships - many of whom were in the audience to celebrate Marquee.

'You all have something in common. You are all very kind and giving people; people who care about our community. You care about arts and culture and it is just so important. There is a lot of focus on sports, there are a lot of focus on a lot of other things, but arts and culture is so, so important and we need you to care. Thank you for doing that. You see the value of what it brings to the community and beyond simply teaching just the show, it brings people together. It builds life skills and I take great pride in all we have accomplished at Marquee' but, as they say, it takes a village. I am just the drum-beater.'

A further drum beat was added by Alyssa Spear, who recently joined the Marquee team as its Director of Program Development. Although only in the position for two-plus months so far, she said she has already witnessed the 'profound impact' Marquee has had on the community.

'It is truly awe-inspiring to observe how deeply Marquee resonates with individuals in this community,' she said. 'We gather today to celebrate 20 years of Marquee, but to do so without expressing a profound appreciation for Sheryl Thomas, our extraordinary Founder and Executive Director would be an utter tragedy. Sheryl's journey has transformed a modest church fundraiser into the premier musical theatre school for children in York Region. Her entrepreneurial spirit has propelled Marquee to become an award-winning charitable institution, fostering a deep appreciation for the arts and motivating countless young performers to strive for excellence.

'Sheryl's impact extends beyond the stage as a community leader. She has woven a tapestry of creativity through these programs that not only teach the art of musical theatre but also instill essential life skills in students. It's an immense honour for me to collaborate closely with Sheryl on a day-to-day basis. I have the privilege of witnessing firsthand the dedication she pours into every facet of marquee. Her events to performances and to her interactions with every single student who comes through our doors. Sheryl invests not only time and effort but also her whole heart into making every experience at Marquee memorable and impactful. Her unwavering commitment reflects the genuine care she holds for our students and the community that we serve. In celebrating Sheryl Thomas, we celebrate a leader, an inspiring teacher, a community builder, whose legacy will continue to resonate through the halls of Marquee Theatrical Productions and in the hearts of those touched by her passion for the arts.'

By Brock Weir
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