

## **League of Historic American Theatres Gives Awards to Paramount in Charlottesville and Activist, Hillsman Wright**

(July 2017) The 1931 Paramount Theater of Charlottesville, Virginia took home the 2017 Outstanding Historic Theatre Award during the League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT) 41st Annual Conference, the largest gathering of historic theatre professionals in the nation. The conference took place in downtown Los Angeles just blocks away from one of the nation's largest collection of historic theatres. The event was attended by nearly 300 historic theatre operators and service providers from across the country. Activist and long-time historic theatre champion, Hillsman Wright, was honored with the 2017 Outstanding Individual Contribution Award, honoring his life-long career in advocacy for the restoration of historic theatres.

"The Paramount Charlottesville stood out among an impressive list of nominations to claim the award this year," said Ken Stein, LHAT President and CEO, as he presented the award to the Paramount's Executive Director, Chris Eure. The Outstanding Historic Theatre Award is given each year by LHAT to a historic theatre that has demonstrated excellence in community impact, quality of programs and services, and quality of physical restoration.

The Paramount Charlottesville first opened in 1931. Created by Chicago architectural firm Rapp & Rapp, architects of The Paramount-Publix chain and its flagship theater in New York City's Times Square, Charlottesville's Paramount was part of the golden age of cinema. The Paramount remained Charlottesville's crown jewel until 1974 when its doors closed for nearly 40 years.

"The amazing restoration that reopened the Paramount in 2004 stands as a model in the industry," Stein reports. "The community of Charlottesville should be very proud of the Paramount's accomplishments." Former winners include the Fabulous Fox in Atlanta, New York City Center and Playhouse Square in Cleveland to name a few.

Hillsman Wright has a long career within the industry, managing his first historic theatre in NYC in the mid-70s. He also has roots in Memphis Tennessee, his hometown,

where he fulfilled a lifelong dream of saving his favorite downtown theatre for use as a performing arts center. He served as Project Manager for the Orpheum Theatre, a 1928, 2800 seat vaudeville movie palace. Among his many accomplishments, Wright might be best known as co-founder of the Los Angeles Historic Theatre Foundation, a non-profit tax-exempt organization dedicated to protecting, preserving, restoring and sustaining the operation of Southern California's historic theatres.

Wright, a self-proclaimed activist, admits his efforts to protect historic theatres in Los Angeles at times made him less than popular with theatre owners and city leaders who might have chosen a different future for the theatres if not for Wright's efforts. Downtown Los Angeles has the first and largest historic theater district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With twelve movie palaces located along a six-block stretch of Broadway, it is the largest concentration of movie palaces left in the United States.

The League's annual conference is the largest annual gathering of historic theatre professionals, community leaders, and service providers and suppliers, attracting participants from across the U.S. as well as Canada and the United Kingdom for idea sharing and network building. Professionals, volunteers and devotees join together for four days of networking and peer information exchange, tools & techniques sessions, and tours of local historic theatres, plus events, banquets and receptions.

By defining our field, creating a shared vocabulary and identifying best practices, the educational components of the League's annual conference strengthen efforts to sustain historic theatres of various sizes, operating structures and programming philosophies. During theatre tours, docents emphasize how each venue has dealt with the specific challenges of sustaining their operations to serve their communities, now and in the future. The conference takes place in different locations across North America each year.

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