

The Roxy Theater

Ah, wonderful air conditioning! This is what people thought as they filed through the door of the old Roxy Theater fishing dimes or quarters out of their pockets to pay for tickets. They would then gather in the auditorium in front of the giant movie screen to see what would happen to Superman next or to watch the Disney movie, *Fantasia*. But just as often, people were just trying to escape the terrible August heat. The Roxy Theater was the first ever air conditioned building in all of Franklin, Kentucky. Located just off the city square and built in 1938 by the Crescent Amusement Company, it was flooded with hot, tired visitors ready for popcorn and a movie. In its prime, the building's interior held over 800 seats set up in three different sections. A big stage used for live performances was positioned at the front of the room with the huge screen for showing movies hanging just above it. Near the entrance of the building was the ticket booth and a small concession stand. The theater was open until 1958. After that, movies were shown only part time. In 1964, the theater was closed down permanently, and the city of Franklin bought the building. County offices were placed inside. In the 1990s, the county offices were moved to a new location, and the building sat empty and forgotten.

In 2009, Brad Gregory, a local businessman, bought the building and found it in such a state of disrepair that sunlight could be seen filtering through cracks in the roof. He partnered with his cousin in Texas to have the Roxy Theater restored to its old self. Now, in 2010, the Roxy is still under construction, but will be done in a short time. Mr.

Gregory's love for history and Franklin's need of a multipurpose entertainment center inspired him to rebuild the theater. Something noteworthy is that no state or federal money was used for this project. It was payed for privately, with the exception of a grant from the Franklin Renaissance Committee for the building's facade.

Some of the materials found in the old building are illegal to use now, such as lead and asbestos. In my interview with Mr. Gregory, he mentioned blending the old with the new. This is what he has done with the reconstruction of the Roxy. For example, the old paint from the auditorium which contained dangerous material was removed. But when repainting he used safe, modern paints of the exact same colors. His nickname for the auditorium is "the room of a dozen colors" due to the use of twelve different colors of paint.

The Roxy Theater not only helps Franklin preserve its history, but it also helps people find jobs and contributes to the local economy. Almost all the people or businesses hired to work or build are local. For example, Mr. Gregory hired a local building company, Brown Builders, to help rebuild the Roxy, as well as an architect, an engineer, and an inspector, all of these being local. All products for the Sweet Shoppe, a small cafe inside the theater building, are to be Kentucky based products whenever possible. A local Amish family was hired to supply dried organic apples for fried apple pies for the cafe. Mr. Gregory also partnered with Chaney's Dairy Barn, a local dairy farm, to sell their homemade ice cream! Oh yum! Brad also hired his own son as general manager, and two local women to manage the cafe. But they're not the only ones getting

jobs. The Roxy Theater has also supplied a job for me and my family! Our family band was asked to play a concert at the new Roxy Theater and open for Mike Snider, a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

So as you can see, the Roxy Theater isn't just some old building. It has an amazing history. The Roxy makes a difference in people's lives, and it has made a difference in my life, too. Who knew that I would be one of the first people to play music on its stage in almost sixty years? And, of course, it serves an important place in the community. It has offered many people jobs, and grandparents can now take their grandchildren there and remember what it was like when they went with friends and family long ago. And all of this happened because of the opening of the Roxy Theater.