

WELCOME HOME, WELCOME HERE

Profile: Jason Rome,
Executive Director,
Fischer Theatre



We recently caught up with the Fischer Theatre’s new Executive Director, Jason Rome. His vision and enthusiasm for what this community treasure will become are infectious! Rome began his role just ahead of the theatre’s grand reopening on September 21st. His office is located on the theatre’s second floor.

Tell us about your role as the theatre’s first Executive Director.

Jason Rome: This is an opportunity of a lifetime! Not just because of what this

theater has meant and continues to mean to our community, but because it really does combine my passions and allows me to apply what skills I have to the service of our community professionally.

As the Executive Director I am tasked with the overall operation of the theater. At the start, establishing a relationship with production companies to begin licensing films, setting up basic business operations like accounting software and email, and beginning to reach out to members of the entertainment business to both promote our

venue and solicit future events were all crucial to get up and running. In addition to the day-to-day tasks, I am focused on increasing the quality and quantity of our programming and services.

Growing our amazing group of volunteers and developing a foundation to better solicit the support of our community are keys to moving forward.

What excites you most about your new position?

Rome: Simply having an opportunity to

play a role in bringing this part of our community back to life and knowing the potential for the impact we can have is really special.

Tell us about the history of the theatre.

Rome: The Fischer Theatre was originally built in 1884 as The Grand Opera House. Live theatrical and musical performances were the primary focus through the Vaudeville era. In 1912 ownership of the Grand Opera House transitioned to Mr. Louis F. Fischer. After much renovation and investment, the grand opening of the “new” Fischer Theatre took place in 1913. The doors of the theater were eventually closed in 1981. This brought us to what was until very recently feared to be the last chapter in the theater’s story.

But since 1983, our community carried on fundraising efforts to restore the theater. From the efforts of Gene Hackman, Jerry Van Dyke, Dick Van Dyke, Donald O’Connor and Bobby Short raising funds together on stage to your friends and neighbors bagging groceries for donations, the decades rolled by without much progress. That is until the generosity of a beloved local philanthropist, Mr. Julius Hegeler II, chose to make our community’s dream a reality. With Mr. Hegeler’s vision and determination, and the skilled craftsmen who took up the project, the Fischer Theatre is open once again to our community. The Lady waits no longer.

Tell us more about what Mr. Hegeler’s gift meant for the theatre.

Rome: The fact that if it weren’t for his generosity this theater, and frankly this piece of our community’s history, wouldn’t be where it is today is not lost on me. There is still work to be done, and I believe we

owe it to his memory to see it through and make this theater everything it can be - anything less would be a waste of this great gift.

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Tell us about your background.

Rome: I studied Instrumental Music at Millikin University. While there I was a House Manager at Kirkland Fine Arts Center, covering the box office, patron relations, and running events for the theater. After college I worked in politics for a short time, specifically for the campaign of Illinois Supreme Court Justice Rita B. Garman. Following the campaign, I began working in banking and finance.

What is your vision for the theatre’s future?

Rome: Ultimately my goal is to develop the Fischer into a performing arts center that provides access to all members of our community. Early on, my focus will be on creating a successful business model that ensures our continued growth. Increasing

the quantity and quality of our programming, developing local and regional partnerships, and completing the necessary improvements that remain unfinished will follow as rapidly as we are able.

What events are coming?

Rome: We hosted several movies throughout December, as well as a Christmas concert by the Barbershop Chorus which was a fundraiser for Fair Hope Ministries. We have several events booked for January, February, and March which consist of a combination of live theater and concerts, movies, and some other unique experiences!

How can the community support the theatre?

Rome: One of the easiest and most enjoyable ways you can support our theater is to regularly attend our events! On top of that, consider becoming a Friend of the Fischer (our program for annual giving) or there are opportunities for individual and business event sponsorships. The Fischer Theatre is held by the Vermilion Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit, 501(c)3 charitable organization. In addition to our beautiful auditorium we have a Community Event Space on our Mezzanine level that can also be booked for gatherings and smaller events. I am open to special requests for companies or other groups in the community and happy to find a way to host an event.

We rely on our patrons, volunteers, donors, and sponsors to bring these experiences to the community!

To learn more visit www.fischertheatre.com; follow them on Facebook @FischerTheatre or reach out to Rome directly at: jason@fischertheatre.com

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