

Capitol Theatre holds its official opening

KAREN ROBINET
Chatham This Week

Hundreds of people gathered in front of the Chatham Capitol Theatre Friday morning for its official opening.

"This is a day a lot of people have been waiting a long time for," said Dan Donaldson, the theatre's general manager.

Calling it "the birth of a new era," Mayor Randy Hope called on all residents of the community

to pull together and lend their support to the theatre.

Hope said the facility has the potential to greatly aid in the revitalization of Chatham's downtown and to improve the economy of the entire municipality. He called on Chatham-Kent residents to "carry the message far and wide," that the theatre is open for business.

He also thanked the provincial and federal governments for their assistance

with the project, as well as the many people who have volunteered their time over the years.

Chatham-Kent Essex MPP Pat Hoy also applauded the many volunteers who donated their "time and labour and talents to this project," and said all involved could be justifiably proud of the end result.

Hoy said he is confident that the Capitol Theatre will attract people from outside of Chatham-Kent

and that it will become a destination for those seeking top-calibre entertainment.

He thanked Fox for his "unwavering belief in the project. He donated part of a lifetime towards this."

Julian Belanger delivered a message of congratulations from Chatham-Kent Essex MP Dave Van Kesteren who is in China.

“**It was an arduous birth, but the resulant baby is unbelievably beautiful.**”

— Kevin McMillan

McMillan was originally inspired to save the former movie theatre back in 1995 and noted that when it originally opened in 1930, the 'Palace of Pastime,' was considered one of the most lavish theatres of its time.

And, McMillan said, it was officially opened six months after the 1929 stock market crash, which heralded the Great Depression.

"Those were courageous people," he said of the original owners.

Since embarking on the project to restore the Capitol, McMillan said thousands of people have been involved.

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Karen Robinet/Chatham This Week

Kevin McMillan (second from left), president of the Chatham Capitol Theatre Association was all smiles Friday morning as he prepared to cut the ribbon at the official dedication of the new theatre. He is seen here with, from left: Julian Belanger of Chatham-Kent Essex MP Dave Van Kesteren's office, Chatham-Kent Essex MPP Pat Hoy and Chatham-Kent Mayor Randy Hope.

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"There has been no donation too small, no act of the volunteer too short and no sacrifice too small to be noticed," he said.

He said everyone who has been involved in any way should take "enormous pride and ownership," in their efforts.

McMillan spoke particularly of the 300 people who worked on the project through the JCP program and were entirely responsible for the theatre's interior décor.

"They could have collected their (unemployment) cheques and stayed at home waiting for fate to deal them another blow," he said, but rather they went to work at the Capitol and the end result of their work is "breathtakingly beautiful."

He said their work was successful on another level as well, as 70 per cent of them went on to find full-time employment.

McMillan also credited Fox for his efforts on the theatre's behalf over the years, and said, "Without Robert Fox, there would be no Capitol Theatre."

By working together, McMillan said, "our community has achieved something that is nothing less than spectacular."

Fox was called up to officially light the theatre marquee to tremendous applause.

Donaldson concluded the official portion of the ceremony by saying that completing the building was "just our beginning," and that the real magic will come as audiences and artists come together within it.

The ceremony concluded with tours of the theatre.

Toastmasters open house Sept. 23

QMI Agency

The three Toastmasters clubs in Chatham-Kent are holding a membership drive.

An open house is planned for Sept. 23 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Union Gas Education Centre on Riverview Drive.

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