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Working with a blank canvas

Date: February 27, 2008 **Section:** Progress

) On the record Richard Kuranda

Executive Director of Raue Center for the Arts

Richard Kuranda arrived at the Raue Center for the Arts a little more than a year ago from the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Conn., **with** an impressive arts management pedigree and a plan.

Kuranda, 38, said the opportunity to become Raue's executive director seemed predestined. The former resident of Mystic, Conn., grew up in Carbondale, Pa., 35 miles from Scranton and next door to another Crystal Lake.

"My family has a lake house on Crystal Lake in Pennsylvania," Kuranda said. "It was sort of an omen when this job came through."

Kuranda wanted a less hectic, less pretentious atmosphere in which he and his wife, Alicia, could raise their two daughters. Illinois offered that, as well as a **blank** creative **canvas**.

"It's just good business," Kuranda said. "If people are like-minded in a certain objective, we're stronger as a community. Our community deserved great art. Sometimes it's just connecting the dots."

Kuranda spoke **with** reporter Kurt Begalka about what he plans for the Raue Center.

Begalka: Why come to the Raue Center?

Kuranda: The thing that attracted me the most is that it truly is an American theater that has the generational support of the community. It has a unique identity and its trying to reinvent itself.

Begalka: What do you bring to the table?

Kuranda: I have degrees in playwriting and directing from the New School University in New York and a decade of acting on stage and in independent films. I think I appreciate what goes into a performance more than anything else.

I found a niche producing and supporting, rather than actually being in it. It's such a huge commitment, you really have to be all or nothing. ... [Nevertheless] it's the best job. I get bored very quickly.

Begalka: How are things going?

Kuranda: We've found that about 7 to 8 percent of the audience is traveling from 500 miles away. ... We've been floored by the purchases. We've verified that 600 new customers, who have come to the Raue in the first two quarters, have purchased multiple tickets. It's starting to pick up some attention.

Begalka: To what do you attribute this success?

Kuranda: When we got here, I wanted to create something around the American art form - from jazz, the American musical, cabaret festival and an American songbook compilation. We started a summer program of variety acts - family friendly entertainment.

A cultural arts festival is planned this summer. Starting in May, two hours on eight Sundays will be dedicated to the original music of local artists in a songwriters' collective. ...

If you bring fun, quality entertainment at an economical price, people will come.

Begalka: Tell me about Rate the Raue?

Kuranda: We needed to develop a more comprehensive digital plan. Everything looks good on paper, but you need an online presence to which people can send information. Now people can send in information and give immediate feedback. The Raue's Web site - www.rauecenter.org - includes opportunities to "Rate the Raue" and to sign up for a new monthly newsletter, the Raue Insider.

Begalka: Is this a large enough niche to be successful?

Kuranda: We can't compete **with** the Sears Center, but we can afford quality performers **with** name recognition. We want artists who are defining their craft, someone who is really evolving.

Begalka: Are there opportunities to network **with** other venues to

boost attendance more?

Kuranda: We've worked **with** the College of DuPage. We've also developed **a** partnership **with** the Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra. ... There is enough for everyone. If you look at the population base and how much it's grown, there is **a** large untapped market.

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