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More diverse acts visiting county

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Progress

) Michael Marsico remembers a time when the entertainment options in McHenry **County** were limited. A 1995 graduate of Jacobs High School, Marsico said he and his friends spent hours watching films at the nearest local theater located in downtown Crystal Lake.

"We'd get out of school and that's where we'd go on a Friday night," said Marsico, who grew up in Algonquin. "Algonquin and Lake in the Hills had nothing going on. We had to go to Crystal Lake, which had very little as well."

How times have changed. These days Marsico, a filmmaker living in Los Angeles, frequently returns to McHenry **County** for **more** than visits with family. He also participates in what is becoming a thriving arts scene. In November, Marsico and fellow Jacobs graduate Kurt Larson premiered their film "Alpha Geek" on the same big screen they watched in high school. But the theater no longer is a hangout for bored teenagers looking to pass the time. It's been transformed into Raue Center for the Arts and is one of multiple McHenry **County** hotspots for culture and entertainment.

In last year's Progress edition, the Northwest Herald laid out a list of goals regarding arts and entertainment in McHenry **County**. We found there is much to do in the **county** for residents of all ages, but community support is vital to the success of local venues.

Fast forward to a year later, when facilities such as the Wood-stock Opera House and Raue Center are drawing big names and **diverse acts**. There also is much optimism about the future, with arts programming being expanded to involve **more** young residents.

"People [in McHenry **County**] are becoming **more** engaged, particularly when it comes to children," said Debra Roberts, events and gallery director for Lakeside Legacy Arts Park. "So much fine arts has been cut in school, and parents are looking for art programming. We have a wealth of local talent."

A culinary class that includes an "Iron Chef"-style cooking show, free concerts on the Dole Mansion lawn, and numerous workshops for both youngsters and adults are among the plans on the horizon for Lakeside Legacy in 2008.

As for the Raue Center, Executive Director Richard Kuranda said in 2007 that he wanted to bring independent films to the venue. The Raue Center met that goal, starting a digital film series that included a variety of independent films, documentaries and small-budget movies. The series, which took place every Sunday and Wednesday in the spring, summer and fall, was curated by the Sundance Channel and The New York Times, Kuranda said. The series is expected to resume this spring.

A theater camp was launched last summer in the Raue Center's new performing arts studio. The camp allowed 14 McHenry **County** students ranging in age from 11 to 17 learn the basics of stage mechanics and performance. At the end of the day camp, the group put on a performance that included monologues, sketches and theater games. The theater camp will return this year, along with acting classes taught by Emmy Award-winning actress Elaine Bromka. Kuranda said the Raue Center also will host a film "boot camp" this summer for about 20 students, as well as a musical-theater workshop.

The Woodstock Opera House last year hosted many events, such as the annual Mozart Festival and a performance by the popular musical group Asleep At the Wheel, Woodstock Opera House Director John Scharres said.

Woodstock District 200 students also performed at the Opera House last summer, with high schoolers putting on the show "Brigadoon." The younger students performed "No Strings Attached," a derivative version of the Pinocchio story. Scharres said one of the goals of the Opera House is to feature up-and-coming talent.

"I'm very proud of the kids here," Scharres said. "That's our next generation."

By late 2008 or early 2009, Scharres is hoping to bring famous singer and songwriter Judy Collins to the Opera House, as well as some other major **acts**.

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