



Arts All Year

By **STEPHANIE N. GRIMOLDBY**

McHenry County's arts and entertainment scene is about to get a huge upgrade.

Crystal Lake's Raue Center for the Arts is expanding its summer programming for one simple reason: To keep up with consumer demand.

Patrons have been absolutely clamoring for more, and Raue Center is ready to deliver, says Richard Kuranda, executive director.

What exactly does "more" entail?

More outdoor programs, more theater, more big-name acts — all available in the heart of McHenry County.

"When Raue Center first came into being 15 years ago, [it] didn't do any programming in the summer — it essentially took the summer off," says Melissa Thomfohrda, director of marketing.

But in the summer of 2014, Williams Street

Michael Smith



Repertory — Raue Center's in-house theater company — produced "Suds," and the jukebox musical was a smash hit.

"We didn't know what to expect, and it really took off. It was probably one of the most successful shows they had done up to that point," Thomfohrda says. "Since then, we've been trying to program more and more [summer activities]. It's a lot of programming, but there's a little something for everyone, so I think we'll see a good turnout."

JUNE

To kick off its summer programs, Raue Center will host its inaugural Williams Street Festival: In part a concert, in part a fundraiser for Williams Street Repertory.

Modern Day Romeos, a popular Chicago-area cover/party band, will headline the free outdoor festival on June 4, and Kuranda already anticipates

between 2,000 and 4,000 patrons.

Raue Center's annual gala, the Stargazer's Ball, will move from its traditional fall slot to June 24, specifically so the celebration can take place outside. Hosted at Bull Valley Country Club, the red, white and blue theme will fit in nicely with the outdoor venue, Kuranda says.

The very next night, on June 25, rock legend Jim Peterik will grace the stage

of Raue Center as a solo act, performing as part of Raue's annual National Piano Conference.

Peterik, who founded the band Survivor, still is touring with his band, Ides of March, a regional favorite group best known for its horn-driven classic "Vehicle," Kuranda says.

Throughout the month, several area dance companies will host their year reviews at Raue Center.

"Most studios don't have enough space to hold all the people who want to come see the kids do their thing," Thomfohrda says. "It's kind of a cool time at the theater. We've got all these local people and community members coming in to watch [our] local dancers."

JULY

In July, Williams Street Repertory will produce its inaugural Theater Fest at Raue Center. Multiple shows will run simultaneously for the very first time, all under a new professional contract that will place Williams Street Repertory under the same designation as Chicago-based theatres such as Steppenwolf, Theatre WIT and

Victory Gardens Theatre.

The fest will run July 8 through August 6 with two main stage shows rotating dates on Raue Center's stage.

In the midst of the rotating shows, Williams Street Repertory Comedy will host late night comedy routines on select Saturdays in July, with 10 p.m. curtains. Locations will be determined at a later date.

Two ancillary acts will round out Theater

Fest, including a late-month visit from comic Louie Anderson and a comedic performance by Jeff Sweet of New York.

AUGUST

For more than seven years, Raue Center has tried to collaborate with contemporary Christian singer/songwriter Michael W. Smith.

On Aug. 20, Smith finally will debut on the Raue Center stage.

"He's an icon," Kuranda says. "He's sold 15 million albums; the guy is just prolific."

"We think it's a really eclectic way to spend the summer," Kuranda says of the new programming. "You can spread it out over several weekends if you want."

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— Melissa Thomfohrda,
Raue Center director of marketing





SEPTEMBER

The third annual Rautoberfest — which will extend Raue Center’s reach beyond its doors on Williams Street — officially will close out Raue Center’s summer activities.

Hosted Sept. 9 and 10 at Beyond Stable Farms on routes 47 and 176, the family-focused event typically draws between 4,000 and 6,000 patrons.

“We have traditional German food from Cafe 20 out of Marengo ... we have great beer, contests and activities, a kids’ area where they can hang out and do fun activities geared just toward kids — it’s just a fun celebration: Good music, good friends, good food,” Thomfohrda says.

Theatre and live entertainment have never been more affordable at Raue Center, even amidst all of the new programming, Thomfohrda says. Raue Center launched its RaueNOW membership program in May 2014, which has been a huge success. Members enjoy deep discounts on tickets, plus special perks, such as access to Raue

Center’s private upstairs member lounge, 26 North.

Memberships start at \$50 and increase from there. Higher-level memberships include invitations to special programs, such as Wine and Line events with Williams Street Repertory; scotch and wine tastings; and private lectures.

Raue Center also recently launched a new fundraising campaign called the Next Generation Fund to help propel Raue Center into the future, providing stable ground for new programming and new audiences, Thomfohrda says.

“If these new programs provide insight or active involvement with people, we love it,” Kuranda says. “We’re so proud [to be] here in McHenry County. You don’t have to drive down to Chicago. You don’t have to spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars. [You can stay right here].”

DID YOU KNOW?

- Last year, Raue Center drew **patrons from 300 unique zip codes.**
- Between **35,000 to 40,000 adults** visit **Raue Center** each year. An additional **18,000 to 20,000 children** visit the Raue and participate in various programming.
- Last year, Raue Center hosted **320 days of activity.**
- Each year, Raue Center generates between **\$100,000 and \$120,000 in tax revenue** and provides a boost to the Crystal Lake economy of \$3.4 million,



RAUE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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