

Our History



--**Homer Story**, a high school teacher who started Alpena Civic Theater in 1955, directed 11 of the group's 12 shows—in performances at Ella White School—until his resignation in 1961.

--**Carl Titus** and **Stanley Beck** presented the only program in 1962, a holiday concert featuring the Besser Chorus.

--**Don Heady**, Speech and Language instructor at Alpena Community College, arrived in 1963 and revived Alpena Civic Theater. A year later, ACT moved into its present quarters, the former Eagles Hall, on River Street.

--**Keith Titus** replaced Heady at ACC and as managing director of Alpena Civic Theater, in 1965. He was named producer when ACC began the Thunder Bay Summer Theatre in 1967. Titus managed both for the next three years, but they were always separate entities, with TBT paying rent for the use of ACT's facilities during the summer months.

Titus resigned as director of Alpena Civic Theater in 1970, but continued to direct and perform in many of its productions.

Clarence and **Joan Dailey**, along with **Keith** and **Sonya Titus** formed a non-profit corporation in 1977, following a period of five years during which there were no Thunder Bay Theatre productions of any kind, since Alpena Community College had withdrawn its financial support due to budget constraints.

B. J. Love was hired as Artistic Director in 1982, when TBT went to year round scheduling.

Keith Titus and his second wife **Ginny** continued to produce and direct. TBT purchased and moved into its present quarters in 1983, opening with *The King and I*. **Ginny** began the Creative Arts Center to provide training to young people.

Ralph Diethelm (manager of WATZ and member of TBT's Board of Directors) and **Roy Beard** (announcer) conducted a radiothon fund raiser in 1985, rescuing TBT from certain closure due to lack of operating funds.

Board members who have made significant contributions to one or more aspects of the operating of TBT are recognized annually. Their names are listed on two plaques in the entrance hallway, and can also be found in this booklet.

Following purchase of our building in 1983, it was converted to provide the proper setting for theatre activities—stage and backstage areas, seating, lobby and office, costume and prop storage, set construction, sewing room, dressing rooms and a warehouse.

In 1993, facing debts of over \$16,000, a building in need of major repairs and very limited financial backing, the Board struggled with the decision of whether to close the theatre. A decision was made to move forward. The Board was restructured and streamlined, shrinking in size from 25 'advisors' to a maximum of 15 active 'directors'. Board members are very involved in the theatre's operation, serving on several committees as well as staffing the box office, performing office duties and managing TBT's finances and helping maintain the building.

Sound and tightly supervised fiscal management have enabled the Theatre to survive, though not without severe struggles. The mortgage was renegotiated in 1996. All debts were repaid, and in August, 2011, our mortgage was paid off in full!

In recent years grant sources have helped finance a new roof over the entire facility, heating and air conditioning systems, energy conservation through additional insulation and replacement of doors, and so on. Wiring and plumbing have been replaced in much of the facility. The ceiling in the theatre has been cleaned up and painted. There are new controls for the lighting on the stage. A new sound system was installed in late spring, 2013, paid for in full through generous gifts of individual, corporate and grant funding sources.

Thunder Bay Theatre is currently celebrating our 47th year. Located at 400 North Second Avenue in Old Town Alpena, TBT occupies a century-old building. Originally Spens Drug and Wallpaper, and later Alpena Candy and Cigar Company, our building has undergone a series of updates and conversions to enable it to provide a proper setting for a variety of theatre activities. The cigar humidor remains intact and can be seen in the lobby. Thanks to a generous memorial donation, the stage was rebuilt, strengthened and soundproofed in 2010.

Below the lobby, office, theatre and stage is an extensive area which houses TBT's collection of costumes and props. Occasional donations have complemented the costumes made by theatre staff and volunteers. A large collection of costumes has been painstakingly assembled and carefully maintained over the years. TBT lends many costumes and props to other theatre groups—schools—in the area. Costumes are rented to area residents year round.

A vital part of the building is the second floor where six apartments are located for use by the resident professional company. Housing (furnished, with utilities) is provided as part of the compensation for working at TBT, and is an incentive for actors to come to Alpena which is far from most theatre markets.

Thunder Bay Theatre is a 501c3 non-profit corporation and is the only year-round professional theatre in northern Michigan. TBT provides a valuable theatre opportunity to many young people who are actively pursuing a career on stage. It provides wonderful learning experiences for local performers and volunteers who have a chance to work with the resident professional company.

In addition to its year round stage productions, TBT provides one or more opportunities each year for area youth to perform alongside our resident professional company and local actors.

While Thunder Bay Theatre is a professional theatre, it is run by local volunteer Board of Directors who oversee the direction of the theatre and work diligently to ensure the future of this valuable asset to northeast Michigan.

Your presence in the audience is greatly appreciated, especially in these times of high fuel prices and a struggling economy. We rely on our patrons for nearly all of our operating revenue, and we're glad you're here!

On with the show...!