Peace Center's still a

By Alan Ethridge

For the last 20 years, the Peace Center for the Performing Arts has not only been one of the Upstate's greatest assets but also a major catalyst in the revitalization of downtown Greenville and the West End district. Last year almost a quarter of a million people attended the 385 performances which had an estimated economic impact of $18.7 million on Greenville's metropolitan economy. The facility continues to operate efficiently and effectively while constantly cultivating new audiences and collaborating with other arts groups and nonprofit entities.

The Peace Center is responsible for bringing such mega-hit musicals as "Wicked," "Spring Awakening" and "Avenue Q" to Greenville along with such acts as violin virtuosos Itzhak Perlman and Joshua Bell, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Cheryl Crow and the Doobie Brothers. It has also been instrumental in ensuring that the arts are an integral part of local secondary schools' curricula through its Peace Outreach Program (POP). Serving over 70,000 students annually throughout the Upstate, western North Carolina and northeastern Georgia, POP helps students experience history, literature and science through the performing arts, giving them new methodologies to excel academically while learning in a new and exciting way.

On Monday evening, over 700 people sat in the Concert Hall, anxiously waiting to learn of the Peace Center's 20th anniversary season. The wait was not in vain, as the season announcement surpassed all expectations. The Greenville News Broadway Series will feature "Dreamgirls," "West Side Story" and "Young Frankenstein," to name a few. Popular music acts like Natalie Merchant and the Chieftains as well as comedians Bob Newhart and Lewis Black are superb compliments to classical music performances by Kronos Quartet and dance companies like the Dance Theatre of Harlem. With the outstanding performances by resident companies Carolina Ballet Theatre, Greenville Symphony Orchestra, International Ballet and South Carolina Children's Theat-

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place for everyone

re, the upcoming season has performing arts programming that will appeal to the widest variety of patrons possible.

Several new programming features will ensure the success of this excellent season. Most notable is The Place for Everyone program. Sponsored by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of South Carolina, this program offers $5 tickets to such phenomenal acts as Diavolo (part dance, part circus), Interpreti Veneziani (a modern strings interpretation of Baroque music), the Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Boston Brass and the Brass All-Stars Big Band and a Guitar Orchestra of Barcelona. It also allows the Peace Center to develop new audiences while providing an arts experience that is innovative and lasting.

Perfectly enhancing The Place for Everyone program is the new Peace Partner initiative. For the first time, ticket buyers and season subscribers can make small gifts that will help bring underserved community members to a performance. These gifts will provide complimentary tickets through accredited community service agencies and fund scholarships to the Peace Center's arts education programs.

Another new partnership for the 2010-2011 season is the Peace Center's collaboration with Emerging Pictures. This exciting program will allow us to experience broadcasts of operas from La Scala in Milan, Italy, as well as concerts by such famed and successful performers as Bruce Springsteen and the Grateful Dead. Also included will be current independent films as well as movie classics such as those by cinema masters Ingmar Bergman and Francois Truffaut. With the demand for independent and classic cinema growing steadily in the area, the Peace Center, along with the current offerings of the Upstate Film Society, will provide unique opportunities to experience these films on the big screen.

Peace Center CEO Megan Riegel, the staff and the board of trustees should be amazingly proud not only of the dynamite 20th anniversary season but also of the impact that the facility has had on the local economy and educational community for the past 20 years. As Greenville continues to grow and diversify, the community's roster of cultural offerings must also expand to accommodate the needs and tastes of an evolving population. The arts belong to everyone, and the leadership of the Peace Center is ensuring that art is both enriching and affordable.

The one factor that will continue to remain constant in our arts community is the extraordinary vision of the Peace Center's founding benefactors. The great American statesman, Adlai E. Stevenson, once said, "Every age needs men who will redeem the time by living with a vision of the things that are to be." Since 1990, the Peace Center has been Greenville's quintessential example of this quote. A place for everyone indeed.