

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SIGNATURE ANNOUNCES \$7 MILLION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN AND UNVEILS DESIGNS FOR A NEW THEATRE COMPLEX TO OPEN IN JANUARY 2006.

- **Stephen Sondheim named as Honorary Chair of Capital Campaign**
- **James A. Johnson & Maxine Isaacs and Arlene & Robert Kogod announced as lead donors to the Capital Campaign**
- **Signature and Arlington County join forces for the first ever private-public partnership**

Arlington, VA — Signature Theatre is taking another gutsy step forward, constructing a **new theatre complex** with state-of-the-art equipment, expansive office space, and top-notch technical facilities. Most importantly, it will have **two fully-equipped, flexible black box theatres**, providing a launch pad for ever-greater artistic achievement and community service. Under Artistic Director and Co-Founder Eric Schaeffer, Signature’s new home in Shirlington Village will nurture its artistic and organizational expansion while maintaining the uniquely intimate environment that artists and audiences have come to value. The new Signature will still be daring and surprising, but with room for the Signature spirit to grow and thrive.

“Fifteen years ago co-Founder Donna Migliaccio, architect Dick Gommersall, and I had the vision for Signature Theatre and took the first bold step,” reflected **Eric Schaeffer**. “Today it’s amazing to realize how Signature has not only succeeded, but thrived and surpassed what any of us ever could have imagined. We transformed a rundown automobile bumper-plating factory into a theatrical home with a reputation as a leading producer of groundbreaking musical theatre and innovative contemporary work. Signature continues to make the implausible possible. The inventive “theatre-in-a-garage” spirit infuses all that we do. However, our current physical space and technical limitations have become a hindrance, which utilize energy that should be spent on creative work. The new complex will provide Signature the muscles it needs to focus solely on the art and not obstacles. I promise it will be the same Signature you’ve known and loved — only better!”

Signature Theatre has outgrown its current home. As the theatre’s artistic and community agendas expand, its creative juices are often squandered on overcoming obstacles. One stage, one rehearsal room, and a cramped administrative office have become strikingly inadequate for Signature’s ambitious standards for artistic quality, intensifying artistic vision, deepening service to the community, and enormous audience growth. Consider some of the realities of how shows must be produced in the current building:

- Dressing rooms and backstage areas are cramped and unsuitable for our world-class performers. Cast, crew, and orchestra must share a common greenroom often resulting in noise that makes concentration on lines impossible. Narrow passageways to the stage require carefully choreographing even the most simple of entrances and exits.

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- The hanging of lighting instruments, which should require no more than two days for most theatres, takes seven at Signature, consuming precious on-stage rehearsal time.
- Sets must currently be built in sections off-site and moved in, piece by piece, for assembly.
- The only way to provide the extremely popular cabaret series is to stage it in the theatre lobby during “tech week” (the final week of rehearsal). While audiences are jammed into the Signature lobby, carpenters, electricians, designers, and actors continue to rehearse just yards away.
- Rehearsals frequently spill over into the lobby when the theatre is occupied by tech week. This arrangement thwarts all operations. Administrative staff, whose offices are located off the lobby, struggle to handle box office, donor, and press phone calls while musicians and singers work on just the other side of the wall.

There is growing demand for Signature’s educational programs, but the current facility limits the ability to meet the community’s desires. For example, Signature’s location between a series of auto body shops makes weekday student or senior matinees impossible due to the noise and lack of parking. There is also no space for ongoing classes or youth development programs.

Financially there is no room for audience, revenue or program growth. The current theater is active year-round with almost every seat sold. How can Signature continue to grow and increase artistic, educational, and community programming as our audience demands?

Arlington County has invited Signature Theatre to join them and become an economic and cultural anchor in the first public-private partnership in county history. A new space for Signature is included as part of a Shirlington neighborhood expansion that calls for development of a new office building, a hotel, expanded retail space, and 650 new apartment units. **In the new four-story building, a branch of the county library will occupy the first floor, and Signature will occupy the second, third and fourth floors. Located at the end of S. 28th Street, the new theatre/library complex will open onto an art-filled, public plaza. It will be adjacent to a 750-car free parking garage for our patrons.** The county will construct the shell and provide its infrastructure with a total investment of \$5.5 million. Signature is responsible for raising an additional \$7 million for building-out and equipping its space — scheduled for a grand opening in January 2006.

Stephen Sondheim has been named Honorary Chair of Signature’s Capital Campaign for the new complex. “In fifteen short years, Signature Theatre has changed the musical theatre landscape in Washington,” Sondheim stated. “I’ve been astonished and delighted with the annual productions of my shows there and proud to be not only part of the theatre, but also to serve as Honorary Chair of this new endeavor. If Signature’s work over the last fifteen years is any indication of where the theatre is going, this new building will only enhance its continuing artistry as well as its ability to reach new audiences. The future of the American theatre will have a new home that provides a create environment for writers, directors and performers in the presentations of challenging new work.”

Signature’s new facility reflects the theatre’s energy and creativity. Audiences will find more comfort and convenience, but Signature’s ongoing spirit of intensity and intimacy will ultimately define the new spaces. The building itself — a focal point of Shirlington — will have a stunning glass façade attracting the public by making theatergoers visible from the street and plaza below. The interior space will express Signature’s personality:

- **Two intimate performance areas** – a 299-seat black box Mainstage Theatre and a smaller 99-seat black box Stage Two Theatre will share a dramatic lobby.
- **The Mainstage Theatre will house a vestibule**, replicating the current hallway that leads patrons from the reality outside to the magic that waits within the theatre itself.

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- **Flexible stages and seating** in both theatres will allow for innovative and unexpected theatrical experiences — a Signature trademark.
- **State-of-the-art technical capabilities** will enhance productions on both stages.

The rest of the theatre complex is designed to accommodate:

- Three rehearsal/classroom spaces
- Scenery and costume shops
- Full-service dressing rooms
- Administrative offices and meeting spaces
- A dramatic, welcoming, full-service lobby
- A street-accessible box office

In the new facility, time and energy spent addressing current building limitations will be invested in enriching and refining the work. With new muscle, Signature will be able to:

- **Increase revenue:** 398 seats in two houses allows for a 150% revenue increase projected by 2008.
- **Enhance the artistic product:** a new theatre complex will solve logistic problems to free up time for creative work; state-of-the-art technical features will enhance artistic efforts; rehearsal space and classrooms will enable artists to collaborate, try out new ideas, and engage in creative interchange among disciplines; and a second performance space will provide artistic flexibility and a home for:
 - New theatre projects and productions as well as works in development
 - The *Cabaret* series
 - The *Stages* series and other free programs
 - Additional project opportunities
- **Expand educational opportunities:** weekday matinees will be added, enabling student and senior attendance; more students can participate behind-the-scenes through the expansion of programs like the award-winning *Signature in the Schools*.
- **Improve audience services:** a convenient parking garage; the same intimate “Signature” experience but better with a dramatic, welcoming lobby with accessible concession areas and merchandise kiosks; flexible theatre seating to maintain the “surprise” factor when entering every show; new theatre seats in a larger space for increased comfort — but still no further than eight rows from the stage, maintaining that uniquely intense interaction between actors and audience.

To secure the future of Signature Theatre and ensure its continued artistic excellence and service to the community, Signature is undertaking a \$7 million Capital Campaign.

TOTAL PROJECT: \$12.5 million

TOTAL COUNTY/PUBLIC GOAL: \$5.5 million

TOTAL SIGNATURE/PRIVATE SECTOR GOAL: \$7 million

Fund for a Bold New Signature - \$4.5 million

- Supports the design, interior construction and outfitting of the state-of-the art facility
- Provides a home for Signature’s programs and advances its mission
- Includes hard and soft costs as well as transition funds for the project

Fund for a Capital Base - \$2.5 million

- Provides a permanent endowment and a working capital reserve to ensure stable operations and to safeguard Signature’s unique artistic, educational, and community programs

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“It’s very exciting to be at a launching point for the next stage of Signature’s growth,” expressed **Managing Director Sam Sweet**. “It does however reflect a lot of hard work and a lot of careful planning. I’m so grateful to all who have participated in the effort so far. We are especially grateful to the lead donors to our campaign, and we are honored that the two theatres in the new complex will bear their names in recognition of their generous support. Thank you, **James A. Johnson and Maxine Isaacs**, and thank you, **Arlene and Robert Kogod**. Eric and I look forward to growing the ranks of those involved in the expansion project so that Signature’s new home will not only become a reality, but more importantly, Signature will truly be a major force for musical theatre in our community and the nation.”

Signature Theatre

Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theatre dedicated to producing contemporary plays and musicals and to the development of new work. Now in its 15th season under Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 176 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theatre and has been honored with 37 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2004 and Outstanding Play in 1999. Signature Theatre is a member of the Theatre Communications Group, The League of Washington Theatres, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, the Arlington Arts Alliance, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

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