

**WASHINGTON
BUSINESS JOURNAL****Curtain rises on new theater companies in D.C. area**

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by Missy Frederick - Staff Reporter

When Helen Pafumi and Maggie Ulmer, longtime acquaintances in the Washington-area theater scene, ran into each other on the street one day, they stumbled upon a coincidence. Turns out they both were trying to start their own theater companies.

Pafumi and Ulmer joined forces and started working as early as August 2008 toward the eventual creation of The Hub Theatre, staging small readings, raising funds, assembling a board of directors and figuring out their mission. Along the way, the economy tanked. That didn't stop them.

"The way we thought about it, we didn't have anything to lose," Pafumi said.

Turns out they weren't alone. As more than 70 local professional theater companies begin their fall season, they will be joined by at least five new ones, including The Hub, theHegira, Doorway Arts Ensemble, Ambassador Theater Company and Factory 449.

For most, their first productions came after months or even years of work behind the scenes — work that in many cases started before the economic woes really hit the nonprofit world. Those theater organizations toil long and hard, away from the glitz of the Kennedy Center, Arena Stage or the Signature Theatre. Although they are professional companies, they are nonprofits that struggle to make ends meet. They pay their actors from tight budgets, operate through donated space or their own homes and rely on tiny staffs — sometimes even a single person — to lead fundraising efforts and handle administrative duties. And this year, they've defied the recession by growing in number.

When Pafumi and Ulmer started The Hub, they aimed to fill a void — a lack of professional theater in Fairfax County (which has the demographics to support it). The company held its first main-stage production, "Pavilion," in May at McLean's 1st Stage.

The Hub, which received nonprofit status the same month it debuted "Pavilion," has found that forming partnerships with groups like ArtsSpace Falls Church and the Greater Reston Arts Center is helping it move forward when starting with limited funds by providing cheaper or even free access to space. Its second show, "We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay," opens Oct. 30.

The company declined to disclose its budget but said The Hub is on track to double the budget this year from its initial efforts.

A goal for the organization is to be a driving force in creating an arts community in Fairfax County. Pafumi said the company's mission is to "tell honest stories," with some focus on children's theater as well. "We want to continually bind together with other groups out there, be the hub of arts culture," she said. Hence the name.



Joanne S. Lawton

Artistic directors Maggie Ulmer, left, and Helen Pafumi joined forces to open The Hub Theatre