

The Washington Post

Reston's Hub Theatre finds a home at Fairfax private school

By Gregg MacDonald, Fairfax County Times

Thursday, July 1, 2010

Establishing a professional theater at a private school in Fairfax has proved to be an education for everyone involved. The Hub Theatre is a Reston-based nonprofit theater company dedicated to providing a venue for the area's professional actors, playwrights, set designers and musicians. It was founded in 2008 by three Fairfax County women who believed the area lacked opportunities for theater professionals. Until recently, it staged productions without the benefit of having its own venue. Now, though, it has found a home at the New School of Northern Virginia, in Fairfax.

"The Washington metropolitan area is a great theater town," said Maggie Ulmer, 32, Hub co-founder and marketing director, who graduated from South Lakes High School in Reston. "What it lacks however, is venue space available for unestablished groups. [Co-founders] Helen Pafumi, Mary Oakes and I felt that it was time to create an entity to provide an artistic home for local theater professionals." Although the Hub Theatre established an administrative office at Isaac Newton Square in Reston in fall 2008, it has had to rent theater space in which to stage its productions. "We have led a pretty nomadic existence for two years, and it has been really tough to establish a following and build up an audience that way," said Artistic Director Helen Pafumi.

Recently, the Hub Theatre officially found a home at the John Swayze Theatre at the New School of Northern Virginia, a private school founded in 1989 by its current headmaster, John Potter. It has an enrollment of about 150 students in grades four to 12. In 2007, the school built a professional-caliber theater with a capacity of 70, complete with stadium seating and a two-level stage. "We could not be happier with the partnership that has been established with the New School," Pafumi said. "The theater space has so many possibilities with its dual levels. At the same time, it has an intimacy that will serve the kinds of stories that the Hub likes to tell."

"Obviously, theater is for the public," Potter said. "When we first built the school, we noticed that there was a very natural landscape on the property for an amphitheater-style theater, and I originally envisioned that outside groups might use it to hold productions." The New School has its own award-winning theater department composed of students. "It's not every day that a great high school theater company gets to share its theater space with a great professional theater company," Potter said. "They will work around our student production schedule and be able to produce three productions a year."



John Potter, founder and headmaster of the New School of Northern Virginia, and Helen Pafumi, artistic director of the Hub Theatre, have a partnership allowing the troupe to use the school's theater. (Ian Fatzinger/fairfax County Times)

To celebrate the Hub's new home, the group will present Summer Nights Cabaret -- featuring musical theater, pop and standards -- for three nights beginning July 16. It also will conduct an open house at the John Swayze Theatre from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. July 17.

"It is so nice to have a home," Pafumi said.