Stoughton Food Pantry Update

1) Mission statement – to provide food assistance (5-7 days worth of food) Pantry Usage Typical family averages about 80 pounds of food per visit.
2) Vouchers in addition to food – valid at Pick n Save – Believe we are the only pantry in Dane Cty to provide additional vouchers.
   i) Vouchers each visit ($20 or $30) depending on family size
   ii) Produce Vouchers with each visit ($10)
   iii) Vouchers for Holidays and Thanksgiving ($25 or $50 each holiday) depending on family age
3) Dealing with Covid – contactless delivery – taking orders over the phone – thus still allowing for clients selection of foods. Client comes to door and cart with their order placed between sets of doors. TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) requires contactless delivery.
4) Pantry Policies Moves
   i) Greatly increase allotments of food especially meats
   ii) Delivery of food to those without transportation
   iii) Allow each family to come in 2x per month
   iv) Senior box program from the Federal government (individuals over 60 years of age)
5) Usage at the pantry
   i) Pre pandemic 175 households per month - 12,000 pounds of food (average)
   ii) Post pandemic 75 households - 6,000 pounds of food (average in 2021)
   iii) Usage is very typical with most pantries seeing drastic declines in usage as per discussion with CAC and other pantries
6) Pantry Challenges
   i) Space – things are crowded but manageable. To accommodate more meat we have moved freezers into the hallway. Wrote a grant for additional freezer. Storage room that years ago was shared with the theater, is now entirely ours
   ii) Volunteers – generally adequate approx 25 active volunteers to work shifts, bring in foodstuffs from local stores, bring in large orders from Aldi, and bring in orders from Community Action Coalition and from TEFAP. Lots of roles to fill, but community has always stepped up.
   iii) Pantry finances
      (1) overwhelming to have such a large balance in spite of vouchers, greater food allotments etc.
      (2) We have no longer applied for Walmart and Stoughton Area Foundation grants hoping that other local charities can use these funds.
      (3) Some large donations from individuals and other groups and some from money willed to us. This past Jan. I wrote and sent out 63 thank you letters for monetary donation. ($27,000) A year ago with the pandemic rolling, it was about 125 monetary donations in Dec (our biggest month by far)

7) We are working to look at possible long term plans for the future of the pantry
8) Very grateful for help from city with managing monetary donations – and providing a site for the pantry.

To: CACP Committee
From: William Brehm, Opera House Director
RE: 2021 Opera House Update
Dec 31st, 2021

For all the problems of 2020, 2021 turned out to be the most challenging year we have every navigated at the Opera House. As the year ends, I am extremely proud of the way the Opera House staff met these challenges. I can say without hesitation that the state of the Opera House personnel, facility, and finances are better than anyone could have hoped a year ago.
Here are just some of the highlights of the last year.

Ticketing System:
During the course of the pandemic we have changed ticketing systems twice. This involved migrating all of our patron and sales data as far back as January of 2014. In addition, we had 7500 individual active tickets and nearly $350,000 in ticket revenues that needed to be moved between multiple databases. There were also 1500 Gift Card balances and $30,000 in Customer Credit liability that needed to be moved and associated with the correct accounts.
In January we had nearly completed the first migration, only to discover that there were major inconsistencies and accessibility problems with our data. We entered into a dispute with the new ticketing company – who had purchased our original ticketing company during the fall of 2020. Simultaneous, we were able to identify a third ticketing company that purchased the software used by the original company and discover the location of the server farm that still contained all of our original ticketing data. We proceeded to connect the third and final ticketing company with our data while moving forward with terminating our agreement with the second ticketing company.
By the end of the first week of March 2021 we had restored our data, rebuilt the ticketing system, and were ready to proceed with business as usual, but for 8 weeks our patron data and nearly $400,000 in revenue was tied up in a contract dispute and data limbo – it was an exciting time.

Show Date Migrations and Ticket On-Sales:
Every time an individual show is moved there are a number of challenges. The first point of contact is the booking agency, then an artist management company, then the artists themselves. The first step is identifying potential windows for a new date and to place holds on those dates – on my booking calendar there are frequently as many as four holds on a single date in 1st through 4th positions. It is then the job of the booking agent to find a window of routed holds for a region and to further route the regional windows into a multi-month schedule for their artist. Those routes then need to be sent to artist management and ultimately to the artist. Once approved the agent must turn back to the venues and confirm each of the dates – if any of the dates are in something other than 1st hold position then the agent can request that the venue challenge the other holds. The venue then contacts the agents for the acts in the other hold positions and gives them an ultimatum to confirm or pass on their holds. Once a date has cleared we are able to confirm that show. The agency then reissues contracts, production riders, hospitality riders, etc.
In our case we moved 25 shows from the spring of 2020 into the fall of 2020 where they were intermixed with an additional 13 shows that had already been confirmed for the ’20-‘21 season. During the early summer of 2020 it became apparent that all of those shows would need to be moved again, so

all three dozen shows were rescheduled into the spring of 2021 and added to a handful of shows that had been previously confirmed.
Beyond the actual scheduling of show dates, each time a show is moved there are dozens of data points within out ticketing system as well as on our website, ticketing website, and social media calendars that need to be adjusted. Tracking this data is difficult in the best of times – in our case the difficulty was compounded by actively transitioning between multiple ticketing platforms. In addition, each show has associated bio write-ups and photos based on who is actually in the band at that point and what album they are touring to support. With the concert industry in crisis, booking agencies were changing ownership and agents were changing agencies or taking their clients and going independent. This resulted in constantly evolving sets of advertising materials and billing change requests that needed to be adjusted in our systems.
In late Summer of 2020 we re-announced the 2021 spring line-up of shows and put all the shows back on-sale to the public. Up to this point we had been in an open refund window for the shows. Putting them all back on-sale allowed us to close that window, actually sell an additional $75,000 in tickets, and raise $50,000 in membership donations during Sept, Oct, and Nov of 2020.
In January of 2021 it became clear that the early spring shows would need to be moved to the '21-'22 season, but we were in the awkward position of being engaged in a dispute with out ticketing company and temporarily unable to manage any rescheduled shows if we were to announce that they were moving.
In the first week of March of 2021 we were scrambling to complete our final data migration as the realization set in that all remaining spring shows would also need to be moved into '21-'22. For the rest of that month and into April we worked rescheduling and realigning all of the data in our systems.
In mid-April we began to prepare materials for our '21-'22 season announce and membership drive which involved creating and proofing a variety of print and electronic materials over the course of 8-10 weeks. Simultaneous, as I worked to schedule fall dates I pursued and confirmed new bookings for the spring of 2022.

Patron Engagement
The difficulty of maintaining contact with our existing ticket-holders and broader patron base throughout this time while also sending a concise and clear message cannot be overstated – for reasons which are probably apparent. The idea was to hold onto as much of the revenue we had already brought in as possible and also meet our fundraising goals.
I'm pleased to say that we were able to keep 80% of the ticket revenues that were in-hand just before the pandemic hit and gain those losses back prior to our August 2021 on-sale. We were also able to match our 2019 mark for membership donations during our 2021 membership campaign.

Fundraising and Grants
In late 2020 the Save Our Stages (SOS) Act passed in congress. This lead to the creation of the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) which the SBA was tasked with administrating. The SOS Act came to exist through the lobbying efforts of the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA). The Opera House worked closely with NIVA Wisconsin in that effort and it was nice to see Tammy Baldwin as a sponsor of the bill that included the SOS funds.
The SVOG roll-out by the SBA turned out to be a huge challenge. The NIVA implementation team worked closely with the SBA staff through February and March 2021, but no funding had been included in the

original legislation to fund the program administrator at the SBA – funding for that position was included in the American Rescue Plan which passed in March. The original application portal launched on April 8th, but quickly crashed. A new SBA administrator took over the program and the portal re-launched April 26th. After a series of delays, grant awards began to roll-out mid-summer and on July 14th the Opera House received its full eligibility of $325,000. In addition, the Opera House applied during the supplemental phase of the grant in early September. As a result, we received an additional $162,000 in SVOG funds in October. The SVOG funds are restricted to uses outlined in both the SOS Act as well as in a budget submitted by the Opera House to the SBA in early April for expenses incurred between March of 2020 and December of 2021. Eligible uses include equipment purchases, contracted workers (including production crews and performers), advertising, etc. I expect to be able to close out reporting for that grant with the SBA by the end of January 2022.

Our 2021 membership campaign raised $117,000 as compared with $88,000 in 2020. We also saw increased general donation levels from $7,000 in 2020 to $21,000 in 2021.

In addition, I have continued to work with the Stoughton Opera House Friends Association (SOHFA) on Fundraising for capital improvements. In 2021 they received $40,000 in grants and donations towards the first floor renovation project. They also received two additional anonymous donations totally $40,000 that are to be used as matching funds in an upcoming chair improvement fundraising campaign.

First Floor Renovations

As 2021 began the ceilings, floors, walls, and light fixtures had been renovated in the three rooms on the east side of the first floor – those rooms are now known collectively as the Ghostlight Lounge. Those renovations were paid for by grants received in 2019 and 2020 by the Stoughton Opera House Friends Association (SOHFA).

Between January and August of 2021 additional grant dollars and donation were received by SOHFA to complete the lounge project with furnishings, a custom bar made out of reclaimed piano pieces, water and electrical fixtures, additional lighting elements, and tech components – screens on the walls to present the shows happening upstairs, a small PA for the lounge stage, and a mini stage-lighting setup. Implementation was a group effort and doors were able to be opened to the public for the first time on September 16th, 2021.

During the same timeframe, SOHFA acquired licensing from the City and State to sell alcohol. Per a rental agreement with the Opera House, SOHFA has been selling beer, wine, and cider along with coffee, tea, sparkling water, juices, etc. in the lounge during Opera House shows. SOHFA has invested $40-$50k annually towards capital improvements in the big theater since 2014. Any profits from sales in the lounge are expected to go towards further improvements.

Concessions are restricted to the lounge and not permitted in the theater.

Streaming Technology

The components to build a professional level video & audio recording studio into the Opera House space were purchased in late 2020. The purchase of that equipment was possible due to the reimbursement of certain lost 2020 ticket revenues by a State of Wisconsin grant funded through the CARES Act. The installation of the equipment was a major project during January and February of 2021.

After some limited testing we were able to get everything running properly early afternoon on February 22nd, 2021 – later that evening we went live to the world with our first multi-camera streaming event -

which coincided with the 120 year anniversary of the first ever performance at the Opera House on February 22nd, 1901.
From the first Thursday of March through the first week of June we produced a weekly live streaming program from the Opera House stage called Almost Live. The program was hosted by Bob Batyko of the Four Lakes Traditional Music Collective and featured regional performers playing to an all virtual audience.
Almost Live was well received and was a big part of our increase in donations in 2021. Producing the program also gave us opportunity to calibrate the equipment and prepare our stage crew for the 2021-2022 performance season. We also used the space during that time to help record events for virtual Syttende Mai, virtual dance recitals, and host hybrid performances during the Stoughton Chamber Music Festival in August.
Beginning in September of 2021, all of the performances in the Opera House have been ticketed as hybrid events thanks to streaming addendums negotiated for each of the shows. Video and audio has been streamed to the lounge to offer a physical distancing option in the building and also been offered remotely through an integration with our ticketing system and a Wowza server.
I expect hybrid events to continue through the pandemic and beyond. I am also pursuing national media distribution of a series of live performances from the Opera House stage in the fall of 2022.
In addition, I expect demand for facility rentals by performers and performance organizations to continue and grow in 2022 due to the recording capabilities we now have in place.

Personnel
Full-time staff changes were also a challenge. Our full-time House Manager position had been filled by a new person in September of 2019, so when March 2020 came around she had only been in the spot for about 6 months. By the end of May 2020 she had decided to pursue other passions and left the position.
In September of 2020 we hired a temporary assistant to help with the organization of rescheduled shows and also prepare for the on-sale of spring 2021 shows. We continued to use that person to assist in reprogramming the ticketing system and rescheduling our reschedules from the spring into the fall of 2021.
In March of 2021 we relisted the full-time House Manager position with some minor changes to better align the position with our Box Office Manager/Volunteer Coordinator position. The position was filled the last week of April, 11 months after the resignation of the previous House Manager – which saved us some money and presented the opportunity to find parity in the two full-time hourly positions.
Contracted production and stage crew are also a big part of making the Opera House work. Spring 2021 and the Almost Live series were key in finding a reliable and talented pool of freelance sound engineers, lighting designers, video engineers, and stagehands. It was a great opportunity to develop new relationships and create greater depth in those areas.
Volunteers are an often overlooked piece of the puzzle. We were fortunate to keep all four of our head ushers for the fall of 2021 and over half of our previous ushers. A very small number of ushers declined to come back due to our vaccination policy – a much larger chunk were not willing to attend indoor events at all yet. We did our best to put safety measures in place and convince the ushers still on the fence. We also amped up our volunteer recruitment efforts. In the end, we were able to staff all fall events – just barely – including four vaccination card checkers at the front doors for each show.

2021 Performances

On August 4th, with indoor events still untested and Delta cases beginning, the Opera House was the first concert venue in Dane County to announce that we would be requiring proof of vaccination as well as masking in the theater during performances. Announcements from several other area venues followed soon after and on August 14th Live Nation announced the requirement for all of their shows and venues nationally.

My thinking at the time was that the requirement was inevitable and that it was better to announce it prior to our ticket on-sale. Not surprisingly, there was some negativity on Facebook.

All of our 21-22 shows went on-sale – or in many cases back on-sale – on August 16th of 2021. On August 17th Dane County announced that in response to the Delta variant a new mask order would be in place starting August 19th. In the weeks that followed ticket sales dropped to a steady trickle – eventually picking back up in early October.

Over 13 weeks between September 16th and December 17th of 2021 we held 47 reserved ticket hybrid concerts at the Opera House. We sold over 13,000 tickets to those shows – 1,000 being virtual tickets. Ticket revenues for that period were approximately $430,000. For comparison, during the fall of 2019 we sold over 8,000 tickets to 31 ticketed events with about $270,000 in ticket revenues.

For this run of shows we required masks at all times in the theater and proof of vaccination at the front door. Masks were optional in the lounge if people chose to hangout in there.

The entire staff and crew were vaccinated and masked at all times inside the building. We were able to use largely the same production crew members for the entire run, so we were in a bubble of sorts. I had also purchased enough rapid tests in early August to test the entire crew and staff weekly prior to each series of shows.

Bands that performed and their road crews were also vaccinated and masked except when using the dressing rooms or when on the stage. There were 6 individual band members over the course of the fall that were not able to produce proof of vaccination and we were able to offer them rapid tests.

We had a couple near misses, but got through without losing the crew and with no reported clusters of cases resulting from Opera House shows. It was not until the final two shows on December 16th and 17th that we got large numbers of cancellations from both patrons and ushers due to illness.

Hope for 2023

Looking forward, I expect the Opera House to continue to require both proof of vaccination and masking at all shows through March and most likely until Syttende Mai. We have 37 confirmed events as of this moment with a handful of additional shows still unconfirmed.

However the spring unfolds, the process of booking the 2022-2023 season is underway. My hope is that we will be able to gather again at the Catfish River Music Festival on July 4th weekend and announce the new season.

For all the challenges we have been through and the ones still yet to come, we have found opportunities to grow and improve the Opera House in anticipation of brighter days.

TO: CACP
From: William Brehm
RE: Arts Council annual update
1/18/2022

I am writing to give you an update as to the activities of the Stoughton Arts Council over the course of 2021.

The mission of the Arts Council is to promote Arts in the community of Stoughton through awareness, appreciation, education and support; creating a connection between artists and audiences to enrich the quality of life for all.

There are two primary ways that the Arts Council has currently endeavored to fulfill that mission – first, through the promotion of arts events planned by others in Stoughton; second, through our flagship annual event Art Walk Stoughton.

Throughout 2021 event plans, generally speaking, continued to be thwarted by the coronavirus pandemic. The Arts Council was, however, able to hold the annual art walk on September 25th. Despite the surge in Delta cases taking place at the time, Art Walk Stoughton 2021 was a moderate success. Main Street came alive with locals and visitors perusing artist host businesses.

The Arts Council has held regular monthly meetings via Zoom over the course of the pandemic on the third Tuesday of each month. Meetings had grown more sporadic in 2021 post-Art Walk, but enthusiasm for revisiting old projects has begun to blossom in the group.
My hope is that as the Omicron wave recedes that the Arts Council will emerge ready to pick-up where we left off two years ago.