

Historic Hemet Theatre

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THE MEN BEHIND HHT'S GOLDEN CURTAIN by Emily Rand

With the passing of Bryan Carrier, a huge hole was left at Historic Hemet Theater (HHT) that two men have tried to fill. Two volunteers, Ben Ortiz, Director of Operations, and Ray Rodriguez, Box office Manager & Programming Director, stepped in to fill a gap that cannot truly be filled.

Ben and Ray have handled the renovation work and coordinated the volunteers during the closure, in addition to planning for the concert season.

CEO Susan Carrier said of the two men behind the curtain, "they are critical to the ongoing success of the theatre. Without their passion for the theatre and extraordinary talents, none of this would be possible."

Ben Ortiz is responsible for everything that happens onsite in his role as Director of Operations. Pushing to complete the lobby renovation before the first show, he admits to struggling to find enough handyman volunteers.

"We've repainted the floor in the auditorium and the trim on the seats. There is a new reception area in the lobby, new vanities and stalls in the bathrooms, and a new concession stand," Ortiz explained, "I walked in that weekend [October 2018] and I've been there ever since."



BEN ORTIZ HARD AT WORK, RENOVATING THE LOBBY



SCAFFOLDING IN PLACE TO HANG NEW SURROUND-SOUND SPEAKERS

"I've done nearly all of the construction work by myself," Ortiz stated, "most days would find me building something while Dan Melendez worked painting the 3 wall murals in the lobby."

To help in the efforts, Ron Simler loaned the theatre scaffolding for the work in the auditorium and Wayne Stockton built an impressive the brass railing around the reception area.

"Now I'm also a board member," Ortiz said. "I am looking to expand the programming to bring even greater value to the community. More concerts, current movies, special events and private rentals are just the start."

Community volunteers are the backbone of this theater; and no one knows this better than Ray Rodriguez, as he heads teams of them. This is just one of many aspects of his role as the Box Office Manager & Programming director.

"I'm also Vice President of the board," Rodriguez explained.

He came to Hemet five years ago after retiring from working in major events in Los Angeles. His first event in Hemet was the 2016 Ramona bowl. At that event, he connected with people that worked at the Hemet theater.

"I stepped into the theater, and fell in love," Rodriquez said, which echoes the feelings of many volunteers.

Rodriquez also coordinates the band accommodations with booking agent James Elliott, making sure all their needs are met.

As if that was not enough, he is also Head of Security, both for performances and daily for the building.

"I ensure the safety of the band, the patrons and the staff," Rodriquez added. His security team keeps areas in and around the theatre safe.

Since the closure, he has also been helping to renovate the theater. "Everyone thought that we were closed; instead, lots of renovations were happening inside," Rodriquez explained. With the reopening in June, he is glad that they were able to use the closed time well and looks forward to the reopening. "I'm a people person," Rodriquez said.

With these two men taking the helm of running the theater, along with the work that was able to be completed and a host of outstanding volunteers, the future of HHT is brighter than ever.



VOLUNTEERS HOLLIE STILES AND RAY RODRIGUEZ AT THE BOX OFFICE

To volunteer or make a donation please stop in or visit their website at www.historichemettheater.com. Tickets for the performances will sell out and are on sale now, please contact the theater box office for information.

Information on all theatre events is available at www.HistoricHemetTheatre.com or by calling the Ticket Office, (951) 658-5950.