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INSIDE



Gulfshore Playhouse

Patty and Jay Baker ignite support of new campus with \$10 million match pledge.

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Bakers ignite support of new Gulfshore Playhouse campus with second \$10 million match pledge

Gulfshore Playhouse recently celebrated the completion of the design process and upcoming groundbreaking in September for the new Gulfshore Playhouse Cultural Campus featuring the Baker Theatre and Education Center. Reaffirming their commitment to the transformative project, Patty and Jay Baker made a surprise announcement at the celebration, pledging to match all gifts made by July 4 up to \$10 million. The Bakers, who kicked off the Next Stage Capital Campaign with the first match gift, now have pledged up to \$20 million for the new Cultural Campus.

“Jay and I have always believed in laying eggs where we nest, and we nest in Naples. When Kristen shared with us her vision for creating a beautiful new state-of-the-art theater in Naples that would serve our community with professional programming and impactful education initiatives, we stepped up as the first supporters,” said Patty Baker, Gulfshore Playhouse board member, Naples philanthropist and Tony-award winning producer.

“We know this project will create transformational change in downtown Naples and enhance the vibrant redevelopment occurring in the downtown area. It’s time to see this project come to life, and we invite others to join us in making it happen today,” added Jay Baker, co-founder of the national retail chain, Kohl’s, and longtime donor for Gulfshore Playhouse.

Responding to the call, Drs. Patricia and George Kraus have stepped up as the first match donors, pledging \$1 million. A



MATTHEW SCHIPPER / COURTESY GULFSHORE PLAYHOUSE
A rendering of proposed Gulfshore Playhouse Cultural Campus featuring the Baker Theatre and Education Center.

Gulfshore Playhouse Managing Director Joel Markus, Patty and Jay Baker, and Kristen Coury, CEO and producing artistic director for Gulfshore Playhouse.

graduate of Dartmouth College and Tuck Graduate School of Business, Mr. Kraus is a serial entrepreneur and has been the founder of several companies. Author of “A Will, A Way”, Mrs. Kraus has served on numerous charitable boards, including Youth Haven and Professional Givers Anonymous.

The event was attended by nearly 300 supporters committed to bringing to life the new Gulfshore Playhouse Cultural Campus, destined to elevate the region’s growing reputation as a destination for the arts. In addition to Patty and Jay Baker, special guest speakers included, Steve Akin, Gulfshore Playhouse board chairman and co-chair of the Next Stage Capital Campaign; Michael Wynn, CEO

of the creative job sector, employing nearly 60 full time employees, 10 interns/apprentices, and more than 400 visiting artists who will also invest in Naples’ economy during their stay. Professional theater education internships and training programs offered by Gulfshore Playhouse will provide pathways for artistic careers, further boosting the creative economy.

Situated within the Design District on the corner of 1st Avenue South and Goodlette-Frank Road, the Cultural Campus also supports the City of Naples’ redevelopment plans for the East of 41 downtown area. In February, the CRA accepted a valuable one-acre land donation from Gulfshore Playhouse to be used as a municipal parking garage that will support programming at the theater and serve various retailers, restaurants and shops, nearby. The initiative was supported by a bipartisan group known as the East of 41 Coalition, led by Naples resident and business owner Michael Wynn. The growing group of coalition members recognizes the new Cultural Campus will help establish a destination district that will benefit existing and future businesses.

of Sunshine Ace Hardware, and Kristen Coury, CEO and producing artistic director for Gulfshore Playhouse.

In the last four months of the pandemic, Gulfshore Playhouse raised another \$14 million for the new Cultural Campus that will serve as an iconic visual and cultural center located at the gateway to downtown Naples. The new campus — one of the first in the nation to be formally named a “Theater and Education Center” — will spur more than \$20 million annually in economic activity in Southwest Florida. In addition to an expanded operational budget of \$10 million, another \$10 million is anticipated in expenditures within the City on ancillary services such as dining, shopping, retail, transportation and lodging. The new campus will expand

The new Gulfshore Playhouse Cultural Campus is anticipated to open Fall 2023. Gulfshore Playhouse invites individuals, businesses and families to join with other Naples residents in creating something special for generations to come. For more information about The Next Stage Capital Campaign and fundraising efforts, contact Chief Advancement Officer Kimberly Dye at 239-261-PLAY (7529) ext. 203 or kdye@gulfshoreplayhouse.org.

For more information about Gulfshore Playhouse, visit www.GulfshorePlayhouse.org or call 239-261-PLAY (7529). ■