

## Staging Success

### Lutheran West unveils state-of-the-art Jochum Performing Arts Center

By John Elliott | Photos by Scott Pease

**L**utheran High School West in Rocky River has unveiled a new 4,100-square-foot professional performing arts facility called the Jochum Performing Arts Center. The center, located within the school, consists of a state-of-the-art auditorium that seats nearly 500 people, allowing for the professional presentation of school drama and music programs. The Jochum Performing Arts Center will also open its doors to its neighbors, providing the opportunity to rent the facility for business and community programming.

The center incorporates new audio-visual equipment, an energy-efficient HVAC system, enhanced viewing via newly appointed rows of elevated seating, a state-of-the-art sound booth, an orchestra pit and extensive dressing room and storage space.

“The need for a dedicated performing arts center was identified by our community,” says John Buetow, superintendent of Cleveland Lutheran High School Association, which operates both Lutheran West in Rocky River and Lutheran East in Cleveland Heights.

Providing funding for the Jochum Performing Arts Center renovation was a \$5 million capital campaign launched in spring 2012. Called “Unleash the Spirit,” this fundraising operation has funded a construction effort broken into three phases.

The first phase included the new Jochum Performing Arts Center, which was completed in April 2013. It also provided new synthetic field turf for the football field (Alumni Field) and baseball infield, both of which were completed in August 2012, and included program

funding for The Honors Academy. A planned second phase will provide a facelift to the exterior of the school, as well as renovation of the main entrance and administrative offices, while a third phase will be a complete teardown and three-story rebuild of an existing wing.

After interviewing numerous architects, the leadership team selected Willoughby-based Then Design Architecture (TDA) for the Jochum Performing Arts Center construction project under a design-bid-build contract. TDA was selected because they brought

experience building both educational and performance facilities.

Cleveland-based The Krill Co., Inc. was selected as the general contractor. The seating and sound booth contracts were separate and went to Chicago-based Sedia Systems Construction and Cleveland-based Soundcom, respectively. Construction for the \$2 million renovation began in November of 2012 and was completed by April, just in time for a spring musical theater performance.

Experienced in building within occupied educational facilities, Krill implemented various safety measures to ensure that construction and school activity could occur safely together.

Renovation of the auditorium was complex as the roof was lifted to gain additional space for a raised seating system. New roof trusses and construction material were hoisted into the site via cranes. "It was actually a surgical exercise," says Bob Fiala, president of TDA.

This heavily coordinated and sequenced work was purposely scheduled to occur during winter break when school activity was diminished. Additionally, during construction, a barrier was constructed to redirect traffic away from the construction area. The Krill team collaborated extensively with school staff to ensure that access to classrooms was available and always safe.

"A November to April construction schedule is challenging," Buetow notes, adding that classes were not interrupted during the renovation.

Identifying that this project could be used as a learning experience for students, the Krill superintendent coordinated tours of the construction site for interested students.

"Students from the wood working and metal shop classes were enthused to see hands-on how trades work within a construction site," says Steve Sereda, Krill project manager. "It was a great opportunity to promote our industry."

The renovation made use of existing mechanical and electrical infrastructure. Once the electrical lines were uncovered, it was discovered that some lines had corroded and needed to be replaced. "This unforeseen condition stalled the project for almost a month, but actually it was a blessing in disguise for the owner," says Sereda.

Calling upon Valley View-based Lakeland Electric Inc., they worked out a solution. "Because the pipe and line were rusting and rotting, the new structure would have had to be torn

up again in four or five years when the line failed," says Greg Vittardi of Lakeland Electric. "The main box is 300 to 400 feet away, but we rerouted the [2-400 amp] line in a run of 70

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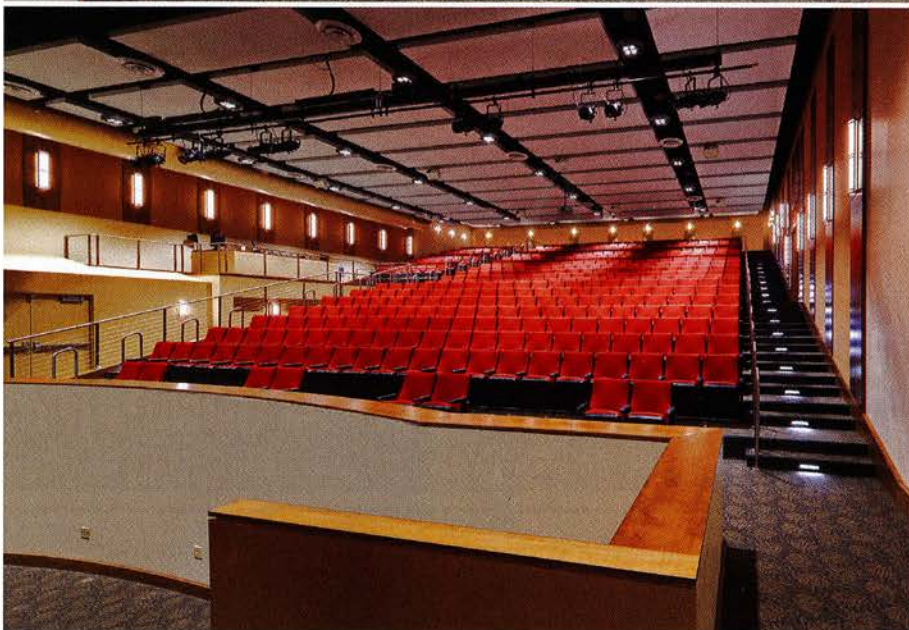
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**RISING TO DEMAND** Transformation of existing space into the new Jochum Performing Arts Center (top) required lifting the ceiling to accommodate tiered seating (bottom).



Hanging lights have been added to the ceiling near the stage, complementing the lights in the ceiling catwalk. Vertical lights have been built into the auditorium walls.

Auditorium acoustics have been improved with the addition of 4-by-12-foot to 4-by-14-foot, white-colored ceiling clouds made from pre-fabricated drywall finished on site.

The centrally located, rail-enclosed sound booth on the west end of the auditorium overlooks the stage to the right, the seats in front and the entry walkway below. The sound booth can be accessed from the first landing of the walkway.

“The school made a significant investment in sound and lighting and they are just fabulous,” Fiala says, describing the new systems as professional theater caliber.

### Entry foyer added

A lobby was added for pre-function activities and a coat check counter. Walls adorned with maple wood give the room a warm but modern look, further accented with silver ceiling lights.

Fiala notes that an area originally designed as a small chapel was converted into this pre-function area, creating a sense of entry for the remodeled auditorium. “Because it is circular, it is an unusual but intimate space,” he notes.

A curved wall in the school’s “commons” area carries the name of the new performing arts center and an entrance door.

The Jochum Performing Arts Center was dedicated with the student body present at a chapel service prior to the first public performance. “It was truly amazing to watch their reactions as they entered the facility,” Buetow says. “We have as fine an auditorium as one could possibly have. This will be a facility in high demand.”

“This is really a dedicated performing arts center,” Fiala says. “There is not a bad seat in this theater.” **P**

feet pipe and built a new pull box below the now new coat room. This saved the client at least \$50,000 in the long run.”

### Auditorium renovated

The updated auditorium is an open space. A carpeted walkway leads visitors to rows of built-in, burgundy-colored seats. The walkway, bordered by a metal rail and featuring built-in lights in the stairs, extends from the stage along a series of elevations all the way to the back of the auditorium.

The existing stage was retained, notes Fiala, although the raised roof supports larger and more complex stage sets.

Perhaps the most visible improvement was the introduction of tiered seating floors in the main auditorium,

which significantly expanded the seating area.

The walkway passes the lower rows of seating to a four-foot-wide landing which houses the sound booth on the west end of the room before continuing up to the largest section of rows. Once past the sound booth, an additional section on the north side of the building showcases eight more rows, containing seven seats each.

### Orchestra pit added

The four-foot-deep orchestra pit in front of the stage extends across nearly the full length of the stage, accessed by rail stairways leading down to the pit on both sides. A wheelchair lift on one side of the pit allows for handicap accessibility. A three-foot-high wall above the pit shields the orchestra from view.