

# VENABLES THEATRE

ENGAGE ▪ PERFORM ▪ ENJOY



## Annual Report

**July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025**

Report prepared by  
Leah Foreman – General Manager  
Aimee Grice – Marketing and House Manager

Our 2024–2025 season at Venables Theatre featured a wide range of programming reflecting our ongoing commitment to serving diverse audiences and supporting varied artistic voices. As well as the greatest number of days in use in the history of the building.

### **Marketing and Ticket Sales**

Our e-blast continues to be our strongest marketing tool. Having built our list to 6000 subscribers and counting, it is a premium marketing tool that most renters are eager to utilize. We maintain strong relationships with advertisers, placing print ads in the Times Chronicle and, for select shows, in the Penticton Herald and Skaha Matters, alongside consistent social media promotion. Volunteers boost our reach by hanging posters in Oliver and Osoyoos, while our marketing coordinator secures nonprofit advertising rates to stretch our budget.

We actively pursue editorial coverage, with Castanet’s support continuing through our renewed sponsorship agreement. We also look for new and relevant advertising opportunities each season. Ticket sales remain strong, supported by increased rentals, and tribute acts continue to sell well despite price increases.

See Appendix 2 for an overview of our ticket buyers and where they are coming from. This is for ticket purchasing only and does not include free, lobby or non-ticketed events.

### **Performances and Stats (See appendix 1)**

This year we saw again an increase in theatre usage. Our total number of commercial renters rose from 24 in the previous year to 26 this year. Our Children and Youth use went up significantly with the addition of the *Improv Class*, *Circus Camp* and *Youth Drag Workshop*. These are not revenue-generating bookings but are particularly important to our community engagement. Total blocks booked were 219, surpassing last season which was 187. This includes the loss of one of the SOAP shows which take up to 14 days in the calendar.

Our local artist series, *Venables Alive!* returned for another season with 6 new performances announced. One of the events was cancelled due to low ticket sales.

This year we welcomed over 25,000 audience members through our doors, 3,000 more than last year. We had 3,700 cast and crew creating memories. Our volunteers provided 3,600 hours of service.

## **Board, Staff, Volunteers**

The Board of Directors continued to support and govern the direction of the theatre. Our 2024-25 Board of Directors are:

- Linda Nunes - President
- Janet Marcott - Vice President
- Don Brogan- Treasurer
- Merrill Bjerkan - Secretary
- Kenn Oldfield - Past President
- Ravina Johal - Director
- Ritchie Kendrick - Director
- Linsay Ogden – Director

We are fortunate to have a dedicated and enthusiastic team of volunteers, with a waitlist to join, something that sets us apart as many organizations face challenges recruiting help. In June, we hosted another lively volunteer appreciation event featuring entertainer Bobby Bovenzie, who had everyone up dancing and drumming. Each volunteer also received a gift as a token of our gratitude for their invaluable contributions to the theatre.

Jill Ward was hired as the Community Engagement Coordinator replacing Jack Newth who was looking for more full-time work that we were unable to provide. Jill is not only fulfilling this role she has also become an asset to our day-to-day operations. She has proven she is capable of supervising user groups and ticketed events.

Matt Oviatt has been hired as our tech lead part time. This is a critical role as the building and equipment get older and require more maintenance. He is also acting as the tech coordinator for user groups.

## **Presentations by the Society**

We saw several successes, navigated a few challenges, and gathered valuable insight that will inform future programming. Successes included the growth of our *Circus Camp*, which debuted in 2024 with 20 participants. Word-of-mouth from happy campers and families showed us the importance of offering arts programming outside of traditional performances. Our *Venables Alive! Local Artist Series* also continued to thrive, offering local performers a professional venue to connect with their community.

We also launched our first *Youth Drag Workshop*, a new initiative that combined education, identity exploration, and live performance. It was a highlight of the season in terms of impact and audience response, as detailed below.

Due to our success in receiving grants, we were able to add an additional important show to our series. *The Little Red Warrior and his Lawyer* by Savage Society was a thought-provoking comedy from a leading Indigenous theatre company.

Challenges were mostly related to marketing and audience development. For *The Dime Notes*, we partnered with an external organization for promotion, and the lack of visibility contributed to low turnout. Some shows like *Rick Miller's Boom X* and *Body Parts with Tara Cheyenne* were artistically strong but struggled at the box office. Despite these challenges, we stand by our decision to program work that challenges and expands the artistic appetite of our patrons.

We continue to find it difficult to consistently draw young families to our *Family Showtime Series*, despite low ticket prices and schedule adjustments. We're actively exploring partnerships and new outreach strategies to better engage that demographic.

Three Performances That Had a Strong Impact:

1. The Knitting Pilgrim – Audience Engagement

On April 17, we presented *The Knitting Pilgrim*, a unique solo show combining storytelling, visual projection, and textile art. The piece itself was compelling, but what made the event truly memorable was the level of audience engagement. We partnered with the local knitting guild, who took part in a pre-show workshop with the artist, displayed their own textile work in the lobby, and “yarn bombed” parts of the theatre. Many patrons attended wearing their own handmade items and brought their knitting to the show. This level of personal investment created a warm, communal energy that made the event feel like more than just a performance, it was a gathering of like-minded creatives. While ticket sales were modest, the impact was deep and affirmed the value of pairing niche programming with community partnerships.

2. Snotty Nosed Rez Kids – Community Impact

Bringing Indigenous hip hop duo *Snotty Nosed Rez Kids* to our stage on November 1 was a significant step in our ongoing efforts toward inclusion and reconciliation. The show attracted a younger and more diverse audience than we typically see, including a noticeably higher number of Indigenous patrons. While we had hoped for stronger sales, the success lay in audience development: we saw new faces in the crowd and created a space where Indigenous youth and families felt represented and welcomed. The energy was electric, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The show demonstrated how programming outside our usual demographic sweet spot can plant seeds for future community connection.

### 3. Youth Drag Workshop & Performance – Artist Development

From January 10 to February 7, we ran a six-week *Youth Drag Workshop* for LGBTQ2S+ youth and allies. Participants explored identity and expression through costume design, makeup, movement, and stage presence. The program culminated in a final performance, where participants showcased their new skills in front of friends, family. For many, it was their first time on stage, and for some, their first time truly being seen and celebrated for who they are. The workshop created a supportive, affirming space and helped build confidence, artistry, and community. This inaugural year proved there's both a need and an appetite for this kind of programming in our area, and we plan to bring it back in future seasons.

Overall, our 2024–2025 season reflected both our artistic goals and community values. By taking creative risks, supporting underrepresented voices, and finding ways to connect performances to real people and local stories, we continue to grow not just as a venue, but as a vital part of our region's cultural landscape.

#### **Financial Management**

This year was financially strong, closing with a small surplus that allowed us to invest in much-needed technical equipment for the theatre.

Our Presentation Series met its ticket sales targets, with several higher-profile performances drawing particularly strong audiences. We were also successful in securing grants to support the Series. While some applications were not successful, we continue to strengthen our grant writing and are exploring additional funding opportunities.

In addition, we applied for a \$160,000 grant from Canadian Heritage to support significant theatre upgrades. We are still awaiting confirmation on the outcome of this application.

#### **Lobby Services**

The lobby remains a vital space for serving our community, despite a slight decrease in rentals. Our piano continues to see regular use, with local pianists practicing during box office hours. At many performances, guests are welcomed with live background music from local musicians before the show and during intermission. This past season saw many youth performers in the lobby who were very well received. They showed an eagerness to return and perform for us again. These performers receive a small honorarium, complimentary tickets, and the opportunity to collect tips, creating a mutually beneficial way to showcase local talent.

## **Community Engagement and School Relations**

Our relationship with local schools and the School District remains strong, with ongoing collaboration to meet the needs of students, educators, and the community. This year, we hosted our second district-wide performing arts event, welcoming every elementary school in the district to a performance of *RupLoops* (Rup Sidhu), and *Boom X* for the Secondary Students.

As part of the *Venables Alive!* series, we continued to present *Rising Stars of SOSS*, now in its third year. Eighteen talented students performed, giving the community an inspiring evening to celebrate local youth talent.

There was an increase in last minute bookings by SOSS. Alison Podmorrow and her leadership class are trying to host more assemblies so that the school can gather and be familiarized with theatre etiquette and respect for performers and other students.

We also focused on community development by offering more workshops and opportunities for the public to engage with the theatre. This included a special workshop with *The Knitting Pilgrim* for the Desert Fiber Arts Guild, further connecting artists with local interest groups. Opportunities for youth included both a youth drag workshop, and an improv class hosted by Oliver Parks and Rec.

Our General Manager continues to work with theatres throughout the Okanagan-Kootenay region to coordinate tours, a cost-effective approach for both presenters and artists. These collaborations also create space for rich discussions on community engagement strategies and sharing valuable grant information.

## **Looking Forward**

This year brought new challenges and opportunities. We remained busy and committed to presenting spectacular, thought-provoking performing arts. Looking ahead, we approach the coming year with measured confidence, mindful of the limits of what our community can support and closely monitoring ticket sales and attendance. For our commercial renters and larger presentations, we are on a cusp of being too busy, recognizing that our ticket buyers don't have unlimited budgets. We will continue to monitor this and work with promoters.

We are hitting a critical point where we will need to upgrade existing technical equipment and we are working on plans to fund and implement these requirements. This will be an important focus of the coming year.

We have reaffirmed the community's need for the work we do, and our role in providing a safe, welcoming space for all forms of performing arts. Following the overwhelmingly positive feedback from summer 2024, we are excited to offer our circus camp for a second year, giving local kids another chance to explore creativity, movement, and performance.

## OCTS Annual Report

### Appendix 1 – Theatre Usage chart

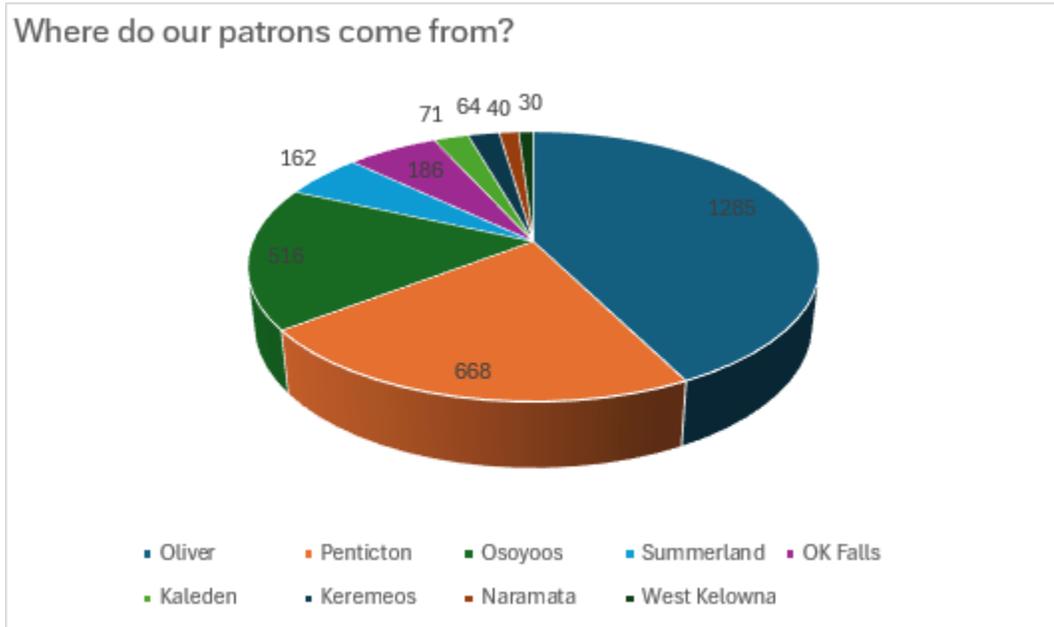
<b>Rental Category</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2023/2024</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>
SD 53 “Reserved”	<b>28</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>37</b>
Local users	<b>62</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>
Children and Youth	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38</b>
Commercial Renter	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>
Lobby events, and meetings	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>
SOSS “Last Minute” Rehearsal and class blocks	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>
FVT Presentations	<b>35</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Total blocks used</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>219</b>

*Please note that from the end of our 2019/2020 fiscal year to 2021/2022 we were faced with closures and restrictions due to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

<b>Rental Category</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>2020/2021</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>
SD 53 “Reserved”	34	39	34	31	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>
Local users	19	36	33	38	<b>55</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>
Children and Youth	11	16	18	17	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>
Commercial Renter	3	4	7	11	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>
Lobby events, and meetings	5	26	34	29	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>
SOSS “Last Minute” Rehearsal and class blocks	36	58	31	26	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
FVT Presentations			4	3	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Total blocks used</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

## APPENDIX #2

### Ticket sales by location of ticket buyers



Oliver	1285
Penticton	668
Osoyoos	516
Summerland	162
OK Falls	186
Kaleden	71
Keremeos	64
Naramata	40
West Kelowna	30