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A new arts and crafts era

NCSU's crafts center and theater get renovated spaces

BY ROY C. DICKS - CORRESPONDENT

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RALEIGH -- It's been a rough two years for the University Theatre and the Crafts Center at N.C. State University while the venerable Frank Thompson Hall that houses them has been going through a \$16.8 million makeover.

Theater-goers have had to look for the alternate venues where the university's plays have been staged, and those audiences as well as student and community crafters have had to trek to a satellite location near the State Fairgrounds for the few classes that could be offered.

Now, with the Craft Center's opening last month and University Theatre's first production opening on Friday, things are back in full swing. George Thomas and John McIlwee, the directors of the two programs, couldn't be happier.



NCSU sophomore Alexander Donne, center, rehearses with fellow cast members for a production of 'Amadeus.' opening Friday. - STAFF PHOTO BY ROBERT WILLETT

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"This building offers everything anyone would expect and want in a cutting-edge arts facility," said Thomas, formerly the Craft Center's assistant director and since June 1 its director.

Although neither program leads to a degree, both are popular enough with students that they voted a major increase in their school fees to cover two-thirds of the renovation costs (the rest came from partnerships between NCSU and private citizens, businesses and alumni). The students' funding helped save architect Hobart B. Upjohn's beautiful columned archways, delicate decorative work and soaring windows.

The building was constructed in 1925 as the school's athletic facility. Wolfpack basketball games were played there until 1949, when they were moved to the larger Reynolds



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Amadeus

By Peter Shaffer

Where: Titmus Theatre, Thompson Hall, NCSU

When: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday; 8 p.m. Sept. 23-26; 3 p.m. Sept. 27

Cost: \$13-\$17; students \$5

Contact: 515-1100; www.ncsu.edu/theatre

For more about the Crafts Center: 515-2457, www.ncsu.edu/crafts/index.html

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Conrad Weiser and photographer Jim Pressley).

Upstairs, the mainstage theater (now named the Titmus Theatre) has been turned 90 degrees to face east, with a new lighting booth, riggings (including the theater's first draw curtain) and closer exits to dressing rooms. It seats 192 with comfortable, wider seats, some in separate areas reminiscent of box seats. The walls behind them have a Tudor-like crossbeam pattern.

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Coliseum. In 1961, the physical education program moved to the newly built Carmichael Gymnasium.

The Crafts Center, formerly housed in the old student union, relocated to the basement of Thompson in 1963. That same year Thompson Theatre was organized, holding its first production in 1964 in the renovated gym. Despite some improvements, the building's original purpose had limited its current use, along with increasingly stringent safety codes.

The lovingly restored outer frame has been carefully merged with modern elements. A fanlike glass awning over the building's main entrance caps the glass-enclosed outer lobby housing the new theater box office.

The Craft Center's entrance on the building's west side, formerly a drab doorway, is now an inviting portal, also sporting a glass awning. Windows formerly blacked out are now gleaming invitations into the brightly lit interiors, and they double as craft displays.

"Students are now finding their way inside and liking what they see," Thomas said on a tour of the building.

On the theater level, two-story Palladian windows have been uncovered and gloriously restored, allowing floods of natural light into the newly created theater foyer on one side and classrooms and offices on the other.

Upgraded workspaces

The biggest changes, however, are inside the two programs' workspaces.

The Crafts Center gave up its permanent gallery for additional classrooms with the latest equipment for making jewelry, pottery and stained glass, as well as areas for weaving, photography, woodworking and paper arts. The spacious new central lounge accommodates movable exhibits (the current ones are tributes to the center's two previous directors, potter

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UNCG03 wrote on September, 14 3:16 PM:

You left out the best part—downstairs, in the back of (I think) the woodworking area you can see the original tile left behind from the now filled in swimming pool, complete with depth markers.

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