

Darien Arts Center Replaces Theater Lighting System With \$100K Grant from Darien Foundation

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Darien Arts Center's Weatherstone Studio soon will get a new, state-of-the-art lighting system, thanks to a \$100,000 grant from The Darien Foundation, the foundation announced.

The new system could attract more performance groups to Weatherstone Studio, the DAC's stage, and allow the DAC to invite in more outside performing troupes, DAC and foundation officials said.

— *an announcement from The Darien Foundation*

The new lighting system will allow for more sophisticated performances, enabling the DAC to use "more complicated stage lighting to amplify and expand our schedule of live performances, as well as to expand our community collaborations," said Amy Allen, the DAC executive director.

The Board of Directors of The Darien Foundation (which provides grants for technology and capital initiatives in Darien), felt that the new system can help the DAC expand its role as a creative and cultural resource in town.

The new system will use the same state-of-the art technology used in many professional theaters, said Sarah Woodberry, executive director of the foundation.

"This will enhance the DAC's offerings as a cultural community destination, while attracting many more members of the community to participate, spectate, and enjoy the arts," Woodberry said.

Professional lighting designer Stuart Duke (originally from Darien), who has extensive experience with regional theater, opera, dance, architectural lighting, and corporate events, is advising the DAC on the project.

With the grant, Duke and the DAC were able to enlist Theatre Projects in South Norwalk to design and install the lighting system.

The new system will be much easier to use, Allen said. The current lighting equipment can only be operated by a professional working with a trained assistant. The new system will be easy to program, allowing volunteers and interns to operate it.

The improvements, set to begin in June, will include a new control console, an improved dimmer system and a new lighting system with LED luminaires, lighting units and dimmable LED houselights — which will be brighter, more energy efficient, and cost less to operate.

The nonprofit Darien Arts Center, founded in 1975, offers educational programs in dance, visual arts, music and theatre, as well as special events for all age groups.

Tucked behind the main entrance to Town Hall, the DAC's Weatherstone Studio is the most highly utilized space at the arts center, housing classes, rehearsals, special performances, and fundraising events throughout the year.

The studio serves 600 dance students annually, as well as numerous theater, visual arts and music students who attend classes and also use the space to perform and show their art work.

DAC Dance Director Bonnie Gombos, who has been with the arts center for 25 years, said the LED houselights will improve the light in the general studio space where she teaches dance classes, brightening up the dark corners.

With the new lighting, the DAC will have more opportunities to partner with Darien High School's Theater 308 student club to offer internships and allow theatre students to learn about the technical side of the performing arts, the foundation said in an announcement.

The new technology also will open partnership opportunities with outside arts groups, including East Coast Contemporary Ballet, Falcon Repertory Company,

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The British Group Theatre, and JIB Productions: Play with Your Food.

The new lighting system should help the DAC attract and retain talented performers and teachers, said Kerrie Kelley, one of the foundation board members involved in the grant review.