

# Daring to be great

## Contractor rose to meet challenges of restoring NorShor



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Plastic runners lined pristine red carpets to keep off the salt, snow and construction dust. The NorShor Theatre wasn't quite ready for its big reveal. But it was close. And it was Tim Huber ticking through the list of finishing touches during a January visit from the News Tribune. "Oh, about 8 billion of them," said Huber, the project manager for Johnson Wilson Constructors of Duluth. "It's been a challenge, no question. We've done many remodels, but never a theater and not like this."

There were light bulbs and letters for the marquee still to come; way-signs to go up within the building; touches of paint here and there; and out-fitting and stocking of the brand-new lounge and concessionary, a luxury that helped carve theater capacity down by about a third — something planners thought

would make for a more special experience. "Intimate is the word I like to use a lot," Huber said. Workers criss-crossed the interior of the nearly 120-year-old venue. One worker snapped in the molding around a window belonging to a pleather-covered theater door. Another hurriedly pushed a loaded cart. Huber did the slow walk-and-talk through what is an expansive place. Like most showpiece theaters, what a person meets on the outside is magnified ten-fold on the inside, where a cavernous interior belies even the most suggestive entrance. It can make for a near magical transition. "It's four stories and there's another 30 feet of space (floor-to-ceiling) in the attic," Huber said from inside the theater, where black ceilings soared and from underneath the stage peered a brand-new orchestra pit. It's there that contractors met one of their first unforeseen challenges — the bedrock that needed

to be chiseled out to form the hollow because "we couldn't use dynamite in here," Huber said. Interior demolition throughout parts of the building was happening as late as October, Huber said, even as the re-creation was coming to life around it. Deteriorated decorative wall molds each a story tall had to be reconstructed out of plaster to match the still original, taller ones on the wings of the stage. The swirling patterns accentuate the tall Renaissance-style paintings on the north and south walls and establish

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**A.** The remodeled NorShor Theatre has brand-new seating, a new stage and restored wall molds and paintings. This view is from the main floor. **B.** The original photo taken of Split Rock Lighthouse, mounted at the top of a staircase at the NorShor Theatre, has been re-scanned from the original negative and reprinted for a cleaner, sharper look. **C.** Freshly-painted walls, restored decorative wall molds and plush seats give the NorShor Theatre an air of elegance. **D.** The shipping and mining-themed bas-relief at the top of a stairway to the balcony of the NorShor has been cleaned and the wall repainted. Photos by Bob King / rking@duluthnews.com.

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