



(Submitted photos)

Top Projects of 2017: NorShor Theatre Community Arts Center

By: Brian Martucci July 27, 2018 1:50 am 0

Early this February, the curtain went down — or up, depending on your perspective — on one of Duluth's most complex renovation projects ever. The first performance of "Mamma Mia!" on the main stage of the revitalized NorShor Theatre Community Arts Center capped nearly a decade of work to transform the former strip club into a focal point for Duluth's Historic Arts & Theater District.

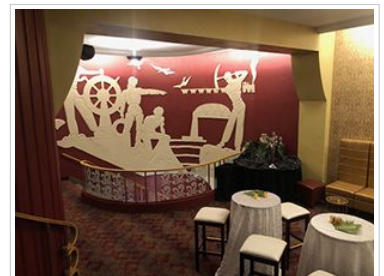
The project is the fruit of a partnership between the Duluth Economic Development Authority, which sold the building for \$2.3 million in 2016; current owner and developer Sherman Associates, which plowed about \$4 million into the project; and Duluth Playhouse, the principal tenant. Under its arrangement with Sherman Associates and the city of Duluth, Duluth Playhouse will own the building outright by the middle of the next decade.



NorShor's financing package was a byzantine mix of capital contributions, state grants, and tax credits. After a period of uncertainty that nearly scuppered the project, the state of Minnesota kicked in a nearly \$7 million grant ("an absolutely critical piece," said Richard Kiemen, senior vice president at Sherman Associates). Local tax increment financing and federal tax credits helped as well, with support from local partners like LISC Duluth.

Construction was just as challenging. At various times, the building was a playhouse, movie theater, concert hall, rock 'n' roll club, and adult entertainment venue. "It was an assemblage of different pieces, the product of multiple renovations," said Tim Huber, of Duluth-based Johnson Wilson Constructors, the general contractor.

Like most of Duluth, the NorShor sits atop impregnable bedrock, compelling crews to use dynamite in the basement. The roof was in comically bad condition: "basically, old carpeting held down by hundreds of car tires," said Kiemen.



For Duluth, the payoff is self-evident: a gleaming cultural hub in the heart of a resurgent downtown.

Address: 211 E. Superior St., Duluth

Project cost: \$30.5 million

Project size: 59,340 square feet

Owner: Sherman Associates

Contractor: Johnson Wilson Constructors

Architect: TKDA (design); Hess Roise & Company (historical consultant)

Engineer: DLR Group + Westlake Reed Leskosky; The Jamar Co. (mechanical); Parsons Electric (electrical)



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