



## Hands On Residents

(L to r) Tony Kennedy, president of the Friends of the Media Theater; Frank Lees, borough historian and businessman; Walter Strine Sr., creator of the plan to restore and convert the old Media Theater into the Media theater for the Performing Arts; and Mayor Bob McMahon; (not pictured: Elinor Cadman, former Media Elementary School teacher and premier borough booster) were among local dignitaries who preserved their handprints and initials last Thursday in wet cement along the edge of the new sidewalk in front of the theater.

# Curtain rises on Media

By TRISH COFIELL  
Times Features Editor

**MEDIA** — Hollywood's Academy Awards can't match the excitement or glamour that filled the air at Friday night's premier of the magnificent Media Theatre for the Performing Arts.

Patrons arrived in limousines, decked out in tuxedos and sparkling gowns. Spotlights flooded the Media sky overhead. And champagne flowed. That was all topped off with a perfectly charming performance of the Broadway musical, "My Fair Lady."

But the most remarkable aspect of the evening was the sheer pleasure and awe people felt as they marveled at every aspect of this carefully restored theater.

From the seven-foot crystal chandelier, to the red velvet stage curtain to the lavishly ornate ceiling — every detail has been restored to the original grandeur of the theater built in 1927.

The theater is truly magnificent and everyone attending reminisced about their earlier days at the Media Movies, some admitting to smooching in the balcony, and they all remarked at the tremendous feeling it gave them to see it restored and filled with patrons once again.

It's also a testament to Media's tenacity, surviving the construction of shopping malls on either side and a sagging economy.

More than 625 people turned out for the sold-out opening gala which benefits the newly formed Media Society for the Performing Arts.

The guest list was like a Who's Who in Media. There was Mayor Robert McMahon, Judge Joseph T. Labrum, Media attorneys Guy Messick, Joseph O'Brien and Joan Daly, local jeweler Joseph Doubet, County Councilmen Tom Killion and Joseph Kelly, restaurant owners like Pat Burns and Margaret Kuo, and business leaders like Zubair Kahn of Puffin Rugs and Barry Gross of B. Gross men's wear.

Of course, the real celebrity of the evening was Walter Strine, owner of the Media Theatre and the man responsible for its restoration.

Calling Elizabeth, his wife of 65 years, his "fair lady," Strine acknowledged the

praise for his contribution and, in opening remarks, admitted that he and Elizabeth sat in "the back rows of the old movie theater once in a while."

Strine reportedly spent \$1 million of his personal money to restore the theater. He even helped clean and string the glistening chandeliers.

Strine has long been a patron of the arts and he and his wife were both in-



Walter Strine, owner of the Media Theatre, was with Lila Allam of Swarthmore, at reception before opening.

involved with the Media Community Concert Association from 1950 to 1984.

He is also known for recycling old buildings including his former high school in Milton, Pa., which he rescued from a wrecking ball and restored as a retirement and community arts center. That building houses his Grand Candlelight Dinner Theater.

Strine said Media's performing arts center "has taken off like a rocket and is headed for the stars."

So far, the reservations exceed 20,000 and they expect over 50,000 people to attend performances during 1994. The opening night gala raised over \$10,000 for the Society for the Performing Arts.

Jack Holefelder, president of the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce and the Society for the Performing Arts, accepted the \$10,000 check from Strine joking that "not everyone can say they got a check off Walter Strine."

Broadway actress Ann Crumb, a native of Media, acted as emcee for the dedication. She said the Media Theatre embraces what regional theater is all about. She recalled her dreams of working in a theater when she was a Penncrest High student and said it's local theaters like Media's that launch actors and actresses on their way.

Jesse Cline, artistic director for Rockwell Productions, said staging a show in

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But Dem in entertain vestment by pit and dre in case the Ironically, being put t for the Per cultural cer town."

A 1920s movie house has become a center for the arts.



Owner Walter Strine spent \$1 million restoring the theater. More than 600 turned out for the opening.

## Launching theater's second life

By Cheryl Squadrito  
INQUIRER CORRESPONDENT

**MEDIA** — Dressed in gowns and furs or tuxedos and tails, more than 600 patrons celebrated the opening of the renovated Media Theatre for the Performing Arts on Friday night and gave a standing ovation to its first production, *My Fair Lady*.

From the pre-show champagne reception to the post-show cast party, the night belonged to owner Walter Strine, who put \$1 million into restoring the 1920s movie house and turning it into a center for the arts.

At a dedication ceremony before the curtain rose, Strine himself received a standing ovation from the crowd, which included local elected officials and patrons of the arts. The hostess of the night was Tony Award-nominated Broadway actress Ann Crumb, a former Media resident. She was introduced by the theater's artistic director, Jesse Cline.

"This project is the heart and soul of what theater is all about," Crumb said.

She added: "Although teenagers today will miss those thrilling dates in the back of the musty old sticky-floor movie theater, it's a small price to pay to bring arts to the community."

Media Mayor Robert McMahon recognized

See **GALA** on MD4



## Celebrating Media Theatre's reopening

**GALA** from MD1  
Strine with a plaque for his lifetime commitment to the arts. The opening was a benefit for the Society for the Performing Arts of the Media Theatre, a nonprofit group that Strine endowed. It raised \$11,000 for the arts organization, which will subsidize rents for community arts groups using the theater.

"I never expected it to be as exciting as tonight," Strine told the audience. "The theater has taken off like a rocket and is headed for the stars."

Strine said he expected 50,000 visitors this year and already had about 20,000 ticket reservations.

Paul Summers, executive director of the Delaware County Convention and Visitors Bureau, predicted that the theater would boost business on State Street and become the number one county attraction within a year. "We've been selling this at trade shows for the past year, and the

response has been phenomenal," Summers said.

Jack Holefelder, chairman of the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce, estimated that patrons of the theater would spend about \$10 million a year in the county.

Local historian I. Frank Lees, also attending the opening, remembered selling newspapers outside the theater the first time it opened — Aug. 29, 1927.

"It was beautiful then," Lees said. "Everyone raved about it. It was the most beautiful thing that Media had back then. [Strine] restored it just as it was then."

Jim Curtis, the superintendent on the 15-month renovation project, attended with his wife, Nancy, and smiled when he overheard people commenting on the fruits of his labor.

"I've been really excited about the opening all day," he said. "I left here

at 3 p.m.; believe it or not, I was still working. . . . There's still over the lobby."

Elise Brita, 25, of Wallingford, Del., arrived at the "wonderful" opening. "I think it's great to have something like this in the longest time this town has had. It was an eye opener that it really takes off."

### If You Go

**Where:** The Media Theatre for the Performing Arts, State St., Media.

**When:** "My Fair Lady" through March 6.

**Cost:** Ticket prices, sometimes and performance vary.

**Phone:** For information on tickets, call 610-566-800-568-771.

## Media Theater - What Next?

"Everybody's Fine," the name of the last picture show at Media Theater, still appears on the marquee. But, as everyone suspected, everything at the theater is far from fine.

After having met with Walter Strine Sr. and William Strine of Media Real Estate, which owns the E. State St. building in which theater is located, Mayor Bob McMahon announced at last week's council meeting that the theater, at least, faces an uncertain future.

"The most recent tenant is gone, and there are no other ones on the horizon," McMahon told council members. He pointed out that the Strines and he had agreed that options for putting the theater to use were "limited."

"We agreed it just won't work as a movie theater show," McMahon said.

"There aren't enough seats in the screening room only to cover the rent."

He said that the Strine

The Strine Foundation plans to restore and reopen the historic Media Theater on E. State as a performing arts center, it was announced last week by Bohdan Senkow, executive director of the Media Business Authority.

The Foundation is

headed by Walter Strine Sr., Walter Strine Jr. and William Strine of Media Real Estate Company, which owns the building in which the theater is located.

Senkow said the Strine Family decided movies were no longer a viable

option after a series of meetings that Media Mayor Bob McMahon and he attended.

McMahon said at last week's Borough Council meeting that the Strine Foundation is planning live theater, recitals and concerts in the main auditorium, and would convert the former upper level screening room into a meeting and conference area.

Senkow said Walter Strine Sr. is particularly interested in preserving and re-opening the theater, having once converted an old high school in his hometown of Milton, Pa.

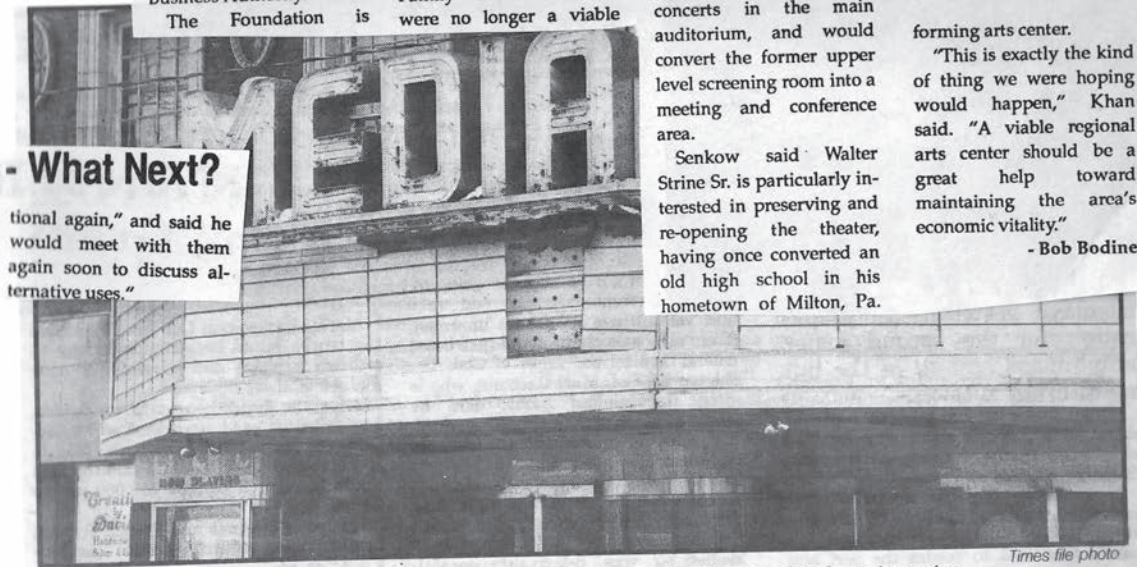
into a successful theater.

McMahon, Senkow and Zubair Khan, chairperson of the Media Business Authority Board, all are optimistic about the prospects of the theater being rejuvenated as a per-

forming arts center.

"This is exactly the kind of thing we were hoping would happen," Khan said. "A viable regional arts center should be a great help toward maintaining the area's economic vitality."

- Bob Bodine



Plans are under way to turn the closed Media Theater into a performing arts center.

Times file photo

# Strine Foundation agrees to revive Media Theater

By HELEN PASSARO  
Times Correspondent

**MEDIA** — Media Theater, built in 1927, can no longer be sustained as a movie house but it will serve splendidly as a performing arts center for live theater, recitals, concerts, meetings and

thority, according to McMahon, who said at those meetings he and Senkow encouraged redevelopment of Media Theater as both a community and business district asset.

"We are very glad to say that the project is under way," said Mayor McMahon on Friday. "We have approval from the Strine family to announce the start of major renovations to the building." The new center will be ready by the end

er and restorer of buildings through alternative use is well grounded. He subsequently made part of a building in Milton into one of the region's most successful dinner theater operations. His Rockwell Center, in Milton, named after the famed artist Norman Rockwell, features one of the finest collections of Rockwell's works.

McMahon said he and Borough Code Enforcement Officer Gordon Grinditch