

DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL FOR THEATRES:  
A CASE STUDY OF KANSAS CITY'S STARLIGHT THEATRE

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the  
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DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL FOR THEATRES:

A CASE STUDY OF KANSAS CITY'S STARLIGHT THEATRE

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## ABSTRACT

The business of theatre is a profitable yet volatile industry. Typically, organizations are considered successful or unsuccessful, with the latter organizations theatres frequently going out of business. This study adapts methodology from the tourism field to give deeper insight into the viability of a given theatre. By examining the sustainability of an organization's business practices, this new approach produces a model to serve as an x-ray for the theatre and can identify strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, this study will help to identify "best practices" for theatres, theatre-specific areas of sustainability, refine the research methodology for similar studies, and provide data that will assist in the formulation of future sustainable business models for theatres.

This case study will provide the opportunity to take a micro and macro look at business practices of one theatre (Starlight Theatre) within three established dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. By narrowly focusing on Starlight Theatre, this case study will provide the most in-depth case study of a single theatre utilizing the three dimensions of sustainability. The selection of Starlight Theatre, a not-for-profit, continually-producing theatre with established practices, allows this study to primarily focus on *how* Starlight Theatre is sustainable, rather than *if*. The practices and managerial approaches examined in this case study can be used to identify key concepts of sustainability, usable by future researchers to determine how other theatres may approach the topic.

# **Developing a Sustainable Business Model for Theatres: A Case Study of Kansas City's Starlight Theatre**

## **Introduction**

By sustainable, we generally mean development which meets our needs today without compromising the ability of people in the future to meet their needs. It is thus about taking a longer term perspective than is usual in human decision-making and implies a need for intervention and planning.

—John Swarbrooke, *Sustainable Tourism Management*

## **Introduction and Justification**

Throughout the United States, theatre is an established industry, with not-for-profit theatres alone contributing over \$2 billion to the economy in 2014.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to obtain a complete picture of U.S. theatre activities due to the variety of theatre sizes, types (dinner, guerrilla, academic, for-profit, not-for-profit), and ways each reports statistics. Fortunately, some not-for-profit theatres fill out the IRS Form 990, which is required for organizations having annual gross receipts between \$25-\$250 thousand.<sup>2</sup> The trends of this set can be used to extrapolate information about the viability of the industry as a whole. The following list provides the number of not-for-profit theatres filling out Form 990 each year and the amount Theatre Communications Group (TCG) estimated they contributed to the economy.

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1. "Theatre Facts 2014," Theatre Communications Group, 2015, 8, accessed March 6, 2016, [http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TCG\\_TheatreFacts\\_2014.pdf](http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TCG_TheatreFacts_2014.pdf).

2. "Frequently Asked Questions," National Center for Charitable Statistics, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://nccs.urban.org/resources/faq.cfm/>.

2004 – 1,219 theatres; contributed \$1.46 billion  
2005 – 1,264 theatres, contributed \$1.53 billion  
2006 – 1,692 theatres; contributed \$1.67 billion  
2007 – 1,714 theatres; contributed \$1.7 billion  
2008 – 1,743 theatres, contributed \$1.9 billion  
2009 – 1,645 theatres; contributed \$1.9 billion  
2010 – 1,636 theatres; contributed \$1.9 billion  
2011 – 1,697 theatres; contributed \$1.94 billion  
2012 – 1,782 theatres; contributed nearly \$2 billion  
2013 – 1,773 theatres; contributed over \$2 billion  
2014 – 1,770 theatres; contributed over \$2 billion

On the surface, these numbers are positive indicators for the business of theatre, showing fiscal growth before and after 2008's economical downturn. TCG's approach to the information, however, overlooks an important factor; not all theatres filling out Form 990 survived or existed during the previous fiscal year. Despite there being growth in numbers, each year theatres are closing, and new organizations are springing up, adding new competition for audience and donor support.<sup>3</sup> The National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) found that 16% of not-for-profit charities that filed a Form 990 in 2000 did not file in 2005. "This means that they either dropped below the \$25,000 filing threshold or went out of business."<sup>4</sup> Neither circumstance is ideal, emphasizing the need for a sound, sustainable business plan for both existing and new theatre organizations.

In recent years the annual "Theatre Facts" produced by TCG have highlighted less promising trends. The 2009 report found that "more than half" of the 180 not-for-profit, TCG-member theatres surveyed, while seeing a rise in average single ticket income,

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3. Between 2003 and 2013, NCCS saw a 20.6% growth in the number of 501(c)(3) public charities, which would include arts organizations. The organization does an annual 10-year comparison in their statistics section. This data reinforces the view that audiences and donors are being sought after by more and more arts organizations.

4. "Frequently Asked Questions," National Center for Charitable Statistics.

reported a negative bottom line for the 2008 and 2009 fiscal years.<sup>5</sup> Theatres were able to cover shortfalls through funds raised by capital campaigns and other contributions, and their reliance on these sources of income reached a new level in 2009. “Average contributed income exceeded average earned income for the first time in 2009 for Trend Theatres,” which means donations outpaced other mission-based revenue streams (ticket sales).<sup>6</sup> In their 2014 findings, the 118 theatres surveyed had profitable seasons, but the “upswing in total income was driven more by growth in contributions than earned income.”<sup>7</sup> Despite their tax classification, not-for-profit theatres generally operate with the goal of financing their operations through earned income. Finally, over the past five years, TCG’s surveyed theatres added “3.7% more resident performances that were met with 1.9% fewer attendees.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the decline in audiences, ticket income grew, seeing a 4.2% increase from 2013 to 2014.<sup>9</sup> These figures indicate that theatres are losing audiences but, by charging higher ticket prices, are able to increase or maintain revenue. Simply put, a majority of theatres appear to be operating with an unsustainable business model, one that focuses on present-day profitability but does not ensure financial longevity. Realistically, reliance on donations and endowments should only be a worst-case scenario and not a common practice. Throughout TCG’s “Theatre Facts 2012” the report discusses how finances “have largely returned to pre-recession levels after a

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5. “Theatre Facts 2009,” Theatre Communications Group, 2010, 1, accessed August 29, 2010, [http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TheatreFacts\\_2009.pdf](http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TheatreFacts_2009.pdf).

6. *Ibid.*, 3.

7. “Theatre Facts 2014,” Theatre Communications Group, 5.

8. *Ibid.*

9. In 2011-2012, the Broadway League’s statistics found a trend similar to TCG’s research amongst professional Broadway productions, with grosses increasing but attendance and number of performances declining.

turbulent 5-year period.”<sup>10</sup> The fact that so many theatres were unprepared to weather the financial storm of those five years reinforces how crucial it is for organizations to make decisions today that will benefit them in the future.

To prevent theatres from depleting financial reserves and to strengthen their organizations, it is important to adopt sustainable business practices, informed by a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to the topic, including but not limited to tourism, marketing, agriculture, and business management. All these fields have developed sustainable business models and refined the approach to the topic. The needed sustainable practices would emphasize implementing best practices that strongly consider the impact of economic, environmental, and social areas, as well as attempt to lay the foundation for long-term growth and success.

In recent years, several groups have focused on sustainability within theatre practices. Founded in 2008, The Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts (CSPA) focuses on “economic stability and strengthened cultural infrastructure” as a core value in arts organizations.<sup>11</sup> CSPA, started by California Institute of the Arts’ Ian Garrett, publishes a quarterly journal and engages artists of all art forms. CSPA is “exploring hybrid business models in an effort to break conventional non-profit dependencies, to engage politically, and to re-invest funding into the arts.”<sup>12</sup> Studies emphasizing the need for more in-depth research within the field of sustainability proliferate in academic tourism journals. Coghlan and Gooch’s 2011 article, “Applying a transformative learning

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10. “Theatre Facts 2012,” Theatre Communications Group, 2013, 36, accessed April 24, 2014, [http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TCG\\_TheatreFacts\\_2012.pdf](http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/tools/TCG_TheatreFacts_2012.pdf).

11. “About Us,” The Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, 2008, accessed December 10, 2010, <http://www.sustainablepractice.org/about-us/>.

12. Ibid.



framework to volunteer tourism,” takes the concepts of sustainability and applies them to a narrow area of tourism. The pair viewed their article as a starting point for further research and discussion on a field rich in possibilities. “As a sector (volunteer tourism), therefore, it may need time to develop its identity along with the tools and strategies that will serve its cause as a form of highly engaged, alternative, sustainable form of tourism.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, by continuing to gather information and histories of theatre companies in the form of case studies, groups like CSPA and researchers will be able to identify trends in best practices and discover what sustainability initiatives are most successful within the theatre field. This case study of Kansas City’s Starlight Theatre will create a model with which to analyze an existing theatrical organization, adding to our knowledge or understanding of how theatre organizations may develop sustainable practices.

## **Purpose**

This case study will provide the opportunity to take a micro and macro look at business practices of one theatre (Starlight Theatre) within three established dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental.<sup>14</sup> Previous theatre studies within the field of sustainability have focused on one dimension or encompassed multiple theatres in the exploration of the dimensions, as will be discussed later in this introductory section. By narrowly focusing on Starlight Theatre, this case study will

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13. Alexandra Coghlan and Margaret Gooch, “Applying a Transformative Learning Framework to Volunteer Tourism,” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 19, no. 6 (February 2011): 713-728, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2010.542246>.

14. John Swarbrooke, *Sustainable Tourism Management* (Cambridge: CABI, 2005), 3.

provide the most in-depth examination of a single theatre utilizing the three dimensions of sustainability. This case study will contribute to the growing theatre research on sustainability. In doing so it will help to identify “best practices” for theatres, theatre-specific areas of sustainability, refine the research methodology for similar studies, and provide data that will assist in the formulation of future sustainable business models for theatres. The macro aspect of the study will broadly address how each dimension is handled within the selected theatre, highlighting which departments control each dimension, and how the three dimensions combine to create the overall model of sustainability. The micro approach taken by this case study will include in-depth exploration of specific practices within each dimension of sustainability. The selection of Starlight Theatre, a not-for-profit, continually-producing theatre with established practices, allows this study to primarily focus on *how* Starlight Theatre is sustainable, rather than *if*. The practices and managerial approaches examined in this case study can be used to identify key concepts of sustainability, usable by future researchers to determine how other theatres may approach the topic.

Founded in 1950, Starlight Theatre has ample, available data. The venue is Kansas City’s oldest continually operating theatre. Starlight Theatre was modeled after Saint Louis’s Municipal Theatre (MUNY), another outdoor venue.<sup>15</sup> From Starlight Theatre’s inception, the organization has been willing to explore different business practices. For instance, Starlight Theatre modified the MUNY season model to present mixed seasons of self-produced and touring productions. The organization has experienced several changes in leadership, has had financially successful and

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15. Kathleen Hegarty Thorne, *The Story of Starlight Theatre* (Eugene, OR: Generation Organization, 1993), 11.

unsuccessful fiscal years, continues to add programming, and has rewritten its mission statement in recent years. These are strong indicators that Starlight Theatre is a viable organization, and its history suggests an ability to remain sustainable by a willingness to adapt its practices. Starlight Theatre's financial records are accessible, and the organization's annual reports will allow this study to track broad, macro trends and practices over its sixty-five years of existence.

### **Terminology**

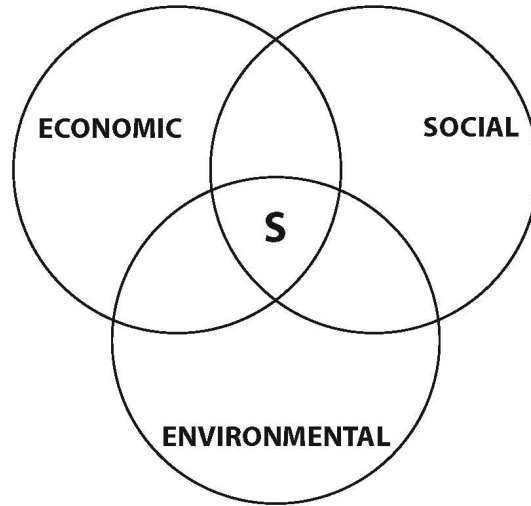
This study will use John Swarbrooke's interpretation of sustainability, quoted at the opening of the Introduction. Swarbrooke, author of *Sustainable Tourism Management*, traces the origins of sustainable tourism as far back as 1965.<sup>16</sup> Within tourism, the term was refined, and by the late 1980s focused on three areas of impact: social, economic, and environmental. The three dimensions of sustainability emphasize a balanced approach to business and development. The three dimensions protect the needs of the business (economic), community (social) and natural resources (environmental). A sustainable approach to business decisions would require management to consider how decisions will affect all three dimensions, "a longer term perspective."<sup>17</sup> For instance, increasing ticket prices may strengthen the economic dimension of a theatre, but the growing price may result in a diminishing audience pool. In this scenario, the economic dimension is increased at the expense of the social dimension. Figure 1 further illustrates the concept of balanced sustainability:

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16. Swarbrooke, 8.

17. Ibid., 3.

**Figure 1: Sustainability Model**



**Area S** represents ideal sustainability, where the economic, social, and environmental dimensions equally benefit from a business practice.

As shown by Figure 1, sustainability depends on a balance among all three dimensions. This study considers a dimension to be “balanced” when the related business practices produce a positive impact, ideally overlapping more than one dimension. This means balanced sustainability is achieved when business practices are made to maximize the positive impact of all three dimensions, with the majority of practices landing around Area S. The next step is to maximize the positive results, developing adjustments to bring the practice closer to Area S. This concept will be further explored in the Methodology section.

Research within sustainability uses the identified dimensions, because they serve as basic categorical units for a myriad of practices and concepts. The dimensions are also useful in that they theoretically encompass all of the potential stakeholders of a project or organization. Within sustainability, stakeholders refer to individuals, groups, or areas (geographical and environmental) that have a vested interest in the practices of a specific organization. Stakeholders may fall into more than one dimension. Below is a brief list of potential Starlight Theatre stakeholders.

## ABBREVIATED LIST OF STARLIGHT THEATRE STAKEHOLDERS

Starlight Theatre Association (includes full-time employees)  
City of Kansas City (owners of venue)  
Surrounding Neighborhoods  
Greater Kansas City Businesses (hotels, dining establishments)  
Kansas City Arts Council  
Kansas City Zoo (located across the street from Starlight Theatre)  
Kansas City Department of Parks and Recreation  
Kansas City Convention and Visitors Association  
Starlight Theatre Volunteers  
Starlight Theatre Summer Employees  
Starlight Theatre Caterers and Food Providers  
Starlight Theatre Corporate Sponsors  
Greater Kansas City High School Musical Theatre Programs  
Swope Park (referring to the actual land and ecosystem)  
Local Actors and Musicians  
Local Stagehands  
Touring Companies

Important fields of study when dealing with business practices are marketing and management. A survey of available texts offers a strong background on organizational structuring and operation. Paul Peter and James Donnelly Jr.'s *A Preface to Marketing Management*, used in the University of Missouri's M.B.A. curriculum, contains detailed analysis of the marketing field and related terminology. Part C of the book deals with the marketing mix, commonly referred to as the 4 P's.<sup>18</sup> Properly assessing an organization's product, price, place (distribution) and promotion ensures not only marketing success but also financial stability. In sustainability terms, the 4 Ps may best be classified as:

Product (Economic, Social, and Environmental Dimensions)  
Price (Economic and Social dimensions)  
Place (Environmental and Social Dimensions)  
Promotion (Economic and Social Dimensions)

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18. Paul Peter and James Donnelly Jr., *A Preface to Marketing Management* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2008), 78.

These principles will supplement the tourism studies, providing alternative perspectives of the dimensions.

### **Theatre and the Social Dimension of Sustainability**

The sustainability of the social dimension is rooted in how well the stakeholders and theatre interact and provide for the needs of the other. The theatre relies on a community for financial support, patronage, workers, talent, and inspiration. A community relies on the theatre for entertainment, education, and enrichment. Too often, communities fail to see how the arts broadly benefit society, focusing heavily on the entertainment element. It is increasingly important for a theatre to identify and promote its own worth within a community. On September 17, 2011, Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director of the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, D.C., shared his personal list of seven reasons why theatre matters: "...it (theatre) does no harm, expresses a basic human instinct, brings people together, models democratic discourse, contributes to education and literacy, sparks economic revitalization, and influences how we think and feel about our own lives."<sup>19</sup> Shalwitz's comments were made to donors and patrons, providing clear examples of why those individuals should continue to attend and support his theatre. Of this list, six of the seven points fall under the social dimension, with "sparks economic revitalization" being better suited to the economic dimension. Every theatre should contemplate its own view of "why theatre matters," identify ways they already are or could be better engaging the social dimension, and adopt practices that will

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19. Howard Shalwitz, "7 Reasons Why Theatre Makes Our Lives Better," *TheatreWashington*, October 27, 2011, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://theatrewashington.org/content/7-reasons-why-theatre-makes-our-lives-better>.

produce a sustainable future. Understanding this relationship will allow theatres to improve their own programming and, like Shalwitz, be able to serve as arts advocates for themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Studies have supported the views put forth by Shalwitz, confirming that simple exposure to theatre through attendance can positively impact a community. One such study, “Culture Builds Community,” was a large-scale arts initiative of the William Penn Foundation. From 1997-2001, 38 organizations within Philadelphia received grants to provide exposure to community-based arts organizations. Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania studied the communities in which the increased exposure took place.<sup>21</sup> What they found was a strengthening of the communities in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. “Culture Builds Community” developed the four statements below based upon its findings:

1. Cultural activity draws new residents into communities, reducing poverty and increasing population.
2. Cultural participation and diverse communities are mutually reinforcing and tend to promote gradual growth rather than rapid gentrification.
3. Culture creates a positive social environment resulting in greater civic participation, lower truancy rates and lower delinquency rates.
4. Cultural participation builds bridges across neighborhood, ethnic and class divides in ways that many other forms of civic engagement do not.<sup>22</sup>

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20. The speech by Shalwitz and consequent post on *TheatreWashington* led to a series of columns on the importance of art in Washington, D.C. Many touch upon the benefits to society. The content by Shalwitz stands out as giving a clearer roadmap of how theatres can justify their existence.

21. Social Impact of the Arts Project, “Culture Builds Community Research Brief: The Power of Arts and Culture in Community Building,” University of Pennsylvania, 2001, 3, accessed February 15, 2014. [http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/siap/docs/culture\\_builds\\_community/research\\_brief.pdf](http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/siap/docs/culture_builds_community/research_brief.pdf).

22. *Ibid.*, 3.

These positive results are from exposure and the ability to participate in the arts. In 2004 the Performing Arts Research Coalition published “The Value of the Performing Arts in Five Communities 2,” using survey data to analyze perceptions of the arts and their value within Austin, Sarasota, Boston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Washington D.C. Like the early Philadelphia study, survey data revealed that the majority of responders perceived arts as strong contributors to their surrounding communities.<sup>23</sup> During a time when there is a steady increase in the number of organizations seeking financial support and vying for patronage, theatres should emphasize their value to society.<sup>24</sup>

Theatres can engage the theatre-going Social Dimension stakeholders through audience education and enrichment. Traditional approaches to accomplishing this connection have been utilized by theatres for years; program essays, study guides, talkbacks, and theatre tours, but some theatres have begun adapting these practices to engage new technology and audiences. For instance, many theatre companies have moved supplementary materials, such as study guides and interviews with the creative team, to their websites as a means of making them more readily available. This new flexibility allows organizations to provide both basic bullet points of information and in-

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23. Mark A. Hager and Mary Kopczynski Winkler, “The Value of the Performing Arts in Five Communities 2” *Urban Institute*, January 31, 2004, 11, accessed January 8, 2014, [http://www.urban.org/research/publication/value-performing-arts-five-communities-2/view/full\\_report](http://www.urban.org/research/publication/value-performing-arts-five-communities-2/view/full_report).

24. Beth Radtke, interview by author, Kansas City, November 1, 2012. Radtke serves as the Vice President and Foundation Office Director at Commerce Bank in Kansas City. As part of her position, she assesses regional organizations as they apply for funding from Commerce Bank’s foundations, trusts, and other forms of funding. As part of the interview, Radtke gave insight into the trends and difficulties she has seen in the Kansas City area, which included donors wanting more concrete details on how their funds are serving society within each organization.



depth essays. When moving online, Arena Stage embraced such a method.<sup>25</sup> This expansion in offerings developed because they became aware that their audiences approached supplementary material differently. Arena Stage was able to use their online resources to provide videos, in-depth interviews, and lengthy stories for information-hungry patrons. Printed materials would not allow them to provide such a vast quantity of research, leaving their most interested audience group wanting more. Chicago Shakespeare Theater embraced a similar informal approach for their actor and audience discussions. Their Pub Cast Calls take place prior to the show in the Theater's Pub, giving patrons a chance to chat with the cast before they head to the dressing rooms.<sup>26</sup> Finally, theatres continue to embrace technology and the countless ways it can keep audiences engaged with productions and the organization. Facebook, Foursquare, Pinterest, and blogs are common social media tools and preferred platforms of younger demographics. Twitter has found a unique home in several organizations. Shakespeare Festival St. Louis (SFSL) reserves a back row of seats at each performance for audience members to tweet along with the production.<sup>27</sup> Approaches to audience enrichment should be formed from the unique needs of each theatre. Not every organization is suited to live tweeting or pub talks. It is important for theatres to understand how useful this type of programming can be for their engagement with the Social Dimension.

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25. Janie Sobek, "Dramaturging the Restaged Festival, Part One: Arena Stage in Crystal City," (paper presented as part of the Association for Theatre in High Education's Dramaturgy Debut Panel, New York City, NY, August 10, 2009).

26. "Audience Enrichment," Chicago Shakespeare Theater, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.chicagoshakes.com/main.taf?p=3,8>.

27. Eliza Bent, "Tweet Seats? Really?!", Theatre Communications Group, February 2012, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/feb12/strategies.cfm>.

“Starting in the 1990s a growing body of research has shown that art education correlates strongly with a wide range of positive outcomes for young people.”<sup>28</sup> Despite surveys showing extremely high public support for arts education, school budgets do not always have the ability to fund such classes.<sup>29</sup> In 2009, the Kansas Arts Commission conducted an online survey regarding arts access in schools. The top three obstacles to providing arts in schools were funding (85%), time (49%), and academic priorities (42%).<sup>30</sup> Around the same time, the Missouri Alliance of Arts Education (MAAE) conducted a three-year analysis of data received from 514 Missouri school districts. Of those 514 districts, only 210 (roughly 41%) offered any courses in theatre or drama. Within the districts providing these classes, 70% of the courses were provided at the high school level.<sup>31</sup> The MAAE study was able to analyze the academic performance of students with exposure to theatre and found those students more likely to experience gains in reading proficiency, self-concept, motivation, empathy, and tolerance for others.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the study reinforced a trend found in similar research. “High theater arts participation was more significant for low-income students than those from high-income

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28. Nick Rabkin, “Teaching Artists, making culture, and building democracy,” *Verve*, December 4, 2012, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://verve.marwen.org/2012/12/04/teaching-artists-making-culture-and-building-democracy-3/>.

29. “The Effects of Theatre Education,” American Alliance for Theatre and Education, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://www.aate.com/?page=effects>.

30. “Education Survey,” Kansas Arts Commission, 2009, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/Kansas.pdf>.

31. “Arts Education Makes a Difference in Missouri Schools,” Missouri Alliance of Arts Education, March 5, 2010, 16, accessed February 6, 2014, [http://www.moaae.org/arts\\_education\\_research0.aspx](http://www.moaae.org/arts_education_research0.aspx).

32. *Ibid.*, 12.

backgrounds.”<sup>33</sup> Despite a great deal of research to support the need for students to receive exposure and training in the arts, budget and resource constraints leave schools struggling to provide in-school outlets for the arts. Additionally, the low-income students who stand to gain the most from the arts are in institutions with the least amount of resources. In many communities, theatres have bridged this gap by offering programming for youth. The possible results of exposure of youth to the theatre put forth by playwright Lauren Gunderson are perhaps the clearest example of theatre’s sustainable connection with the Social Dimension, because it is focused on filling a community need and working towards creating a future group of patrons.

If you take a child to the theater, not only will they practice empathy, they might also laugh uproariously, or come home singing about science, or want to know more about history, or tell you what happened at school today, or spend all dinner discussing music, or learn how to handle conflict, or start becoming future patrons of the arts.<sup>34</sup>

### **Theatre and the Economic Dimension of Sustainability**

The Economic Dimension encompasses the elements most widely put forth when the business of theatre is discussed. The economic statistics are quantitative and harder to dispute when making an argument for the influence and value of a theatre, especially to those who have not been exposed to or understand the worth of the Social and Environmental Dimensions. In terms of sustainability, the focus turns to making financial decisions today that will lead to long-term stability. Regardless of the size or history of an

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33. Ibid.

34. Lauren Gunderson, “How Theater for Young People Could Save the World,” *The Huffington Post*, March 19, 2012, accessed February 8, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lauren-gunderson/world-theater-for-children-and-young-people-day\\_b\\_1343408.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lauren-gunderson/world-theater-for-children-and-young-people-day_b_1343408.html).

organization, it is important to look towards future financial security and profitability. The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, coming off of its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, ended the 2013 fiscal year with a reported loss of \$438,000. In January of 2014, with a third of their 2013-2014 season completed, the organization made the decision to furlough around 140 full-time employees for roughly a week. Trish Santini, Director of External Communications at the Guthrie, indicated the furloughs were not “an indication of larger financial difficulties, but simply a tool to get back on track.”<sup>35</sup> The 2013 deficit occurred despite the fact that the Guthrie cut \$1.1 million worth of expense from the budget and saw a 10% increase in charitable donations, resulting in almost \$1 million in additional donations from the previous year. Unfortunately, these changes were not enough to overcome a decline in ticket sales.<sup>36</sup> If this were a constant, year-to-year occurrence, the “tool” of furloughing would not be national news, but given that this deficit followed nineteen straight profitable seasons the furloughing seems like a drastic step. The Guthrie’s move makes outside individuals question whether this was the organization’s only strategic plan to weather a one-season loss or if no financial safety net had been put into place during those nineteen profitable years.<sup>37</sup> As stated in the Justification Section, ticket sales fluctuate and do not always cover operating costs. Other revenue streams can

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35. Susie Jones, “Guthrie Theater Employees Taking 1-Week Furlough,” WCCO News Radio, January 15, 2014, accessed March 5, 2014, <http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2014/01/15/guthrie-theater-employees-taking-1-week-furlough/>.

36. Carey Purcell, “Following Announcement of Operating Deficit, Guthrie Theater Furloughs Full-Time Employees,” Playbill.com, January 15, 2014, accessed March 5, 2014, <http://playbill.com/news/article/186524-Following-Announcement-of-Operating-Deficit-Guthrie-Theater-Furloughs-Full-Time-Employees?tsrc=hph>.

37. In 2015, The Guthrie named Joseph Haj as the organization’s new Artistic Director. *The Associated Press* released an article by Jeff Baenen, which highlights Haj’s previous financial success at PlayMakers Repertory Company and how that will inform his new position. Accessed April 10, 2016, [http://www.berkshireeagle.com/theaterreviews/ci\\_29433737/guthrie-theaters-new-leader-is-not-your-average](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/theaterreviews/ci_29433737/guthrie-theaters-new-leader-is-not-your-average).

counter the season ticket shortfall, whether it be through sponsorships or fundraising. Theatres can build a sustainable Economic Dimension by understanding how to maximize attendance, ticket prices, diversify funding, and utilize resources, which will in turn support the business's other interests and goals.

One of the main reasons given for the financial issues at the Guthrie was a decline in subscription ticket sales. Such volatility in tickets sales is increasingly the norm for theatres. "You used to be able to plot ticket sales trends on a graph over time. Now there is enormous variation from year to year, which makes it very hard to plan," observed Mark Bernstein, managing director of the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. "Ticket-buyers are becoming more fickle."<sup>38</sup> TCG sees variations each year, with some theatres seeing increases in season subscriptions but the majority of organizations have lost season ticket holders, who appear to become single ticket customers. A safe approach to ticket sales would be similar to investors wanting a diversified stock portfolio. Since trends are not as reliable as they were a decade ago, working to engage a variety of patron types (season, single, group) may reduce the negative impact if one population sees a decline in purchasing. To target each category of patron types theatres must identify what they can offer each population to entice them. For many theatres, season subscribers receive priority seat selection, a reduced ticket price, and flexibility in attendance dates. Group ticket buyers receive special ticket rates, the potential to add tours and other features as part of their evening, and frequently a group sales representative at the theatre to work with one-on-one. Patrons who purchase their tickets one performance at a time are given fewer incentives, because they are driven by the event. In this case, the goal is to find the

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38. Sarah Hart, "Expect the Unexpected," *American Theatre*, November 2013, accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/issue/featuredstory.cfm?story=5&indexID=37>.

show title that will pique their interest. If an organization is able to balance these patron types, even if areas don't excel in a given season, they are already strengthening the stability of their ticket sales.

A theatre's ticket sales will typically generate the bulk of its revenue, but it shouldn't be relied upon as the sole source of income. Instead, theatres should explore all potential sources of income from their performances. From the minute patrons approach a venue to the moment they leave, they are potential income for that organization. Every theatre is unique in what they can offer in this area, but patrons are monetized through parking fees/upgrades, concession sales, event merchandise, backstage experiences, meet and greets, and rentals, to name a few. Similarly, theatres should explore opportunities for corporate sponsorships to become an additional revenue stream. These could be one-time items (naming rights to a venue element) or reoccurring (show sponsorships, season sponsorships, program advertisements). By identifying areas of potential revenue theatres will hopefully maximize the potential profitability of each performance while offering desired services to clients and patrons.

The Guthrie's recent furloughing highlights the employment opportunities theatres provide. These positions may be part time, seasonal, or full time and can benefit the surrounding areas by putting money into their economies. Theatre employees are easy to track and analyze in terms of a theatre's economic impact. The surrounding areas may also benefit from a theatre in less direct ways. For instance, when individuals come into town to see a show they may stay at a hotel, eat out, use city transportation, and/or attend other local events. All of these items bring money and jobs into an area. New York City provides a large-scale example of the monetary importance of the theatre industry to

surrounding commerce. In 2007 a stagehand strike essentially closed Broadway for nineteen days.<sup>39</sup> During this period it was estimated that non-theatre related businesses, nearby hotels, and dining establishments lost upwards of two million dollars in potential revenue.<sup>40</sup> According to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office, Broadway was responsible for "contributing \$5.1 billion to the city's economy and supporting 44,000 local jobs" in 2008.<sup>41</sup> It is easy to focus inwardly on an organization's profitability, but it is important to identify how the surrounding stakeholders benefit/suffer from the theatre's economic practices and influence.

### **Theatre and the Environmental Dimension of Sustainability**

A wealth of research, initiatives, conferences, and articles on the Environmental Dimension of Sustainability can be found beginning in 2006. *Wicked* producer David Stone, who provided the financial capital to implement environment-friendly production practices, traces his interest in environmental issues to *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006).<sup>42</sup> The release of this documentary is an important milestone, because it raised awareness of global warming and highlighted how everyday business practices were impacting the environment. Many "green," or environment-friendly, theatre programs began appearing

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39. Andrew Gans, "Broadway Grossed Nearly \$1 Billion During 2007-2008 Season," Playbill.com, May 28, 2008, accessed June 5, 2008, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/118146.html>.

40. Andrew Gans, "Day 12: *August* Extends, *Mermaid* Postpones and the Strike Goes On," Playbill.com, November 21, 2007, accessed November 21, 2007, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/112945.html>.

41. Rebekah Kebede, "Broadway's 'Great White Way' Goes Green," Reuters.com, November 25, 2008, accessed November 27, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/artNews/idUSTRE4AO88Y20081125>.

42. Michael Crowley, "What Would Elphaba Do? The Broadway Green Alliance Squeezes Broadway Into Smaller Shoes," Green Theater Initiative, May 18, 2009, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.greentheaters.org/elphaba-stone-sampliner-broadway-green-alliance-squeeze-broadway-smaller-shoes>.

around the same time as Stone's implementations. Gideon Banner, former member of the Blue Man Group, founded the Green Theatre Initiative in early 2008. The Green Theatre Initiative believes audiences and theatres "share a concern for the sustainability of their communities" and assists theatres in incorporating "environmental concerns in their planning and operations."<sup>43</sup> Banner and the Initiative were profiled in the October 2008 *Stage Directions* article "Green Support," written by Mike Lawler, founder of the ecoTheatre Blog.<sup>44</sup> Lawler's ecoTheatre Blog has offered resources and articles on green theatre practices since 2007. The bulk of theatre discourse on the environmental dimension has focused on practices that promote recycling and a lower carbon footprint. This approach mimics how other fields have approached sustainability. The next step is finding specific ways the environmental dimension can be engaged for the unique situation of a theatre.

The majority of businesses and tourism sites will have some form of an off-season, where patrons are less frequent or non-existent. For a theatre this timing is based upon the organization's season. The bulk of the business will coincide with performance events. One way to increase the positive use of the venue would be to explore how to earn money from the space when not in use for performance. Renting available space for non-theatrical events may be one way to get more profitable use out of a venue. The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut, for example, offers eight different spaces within its grounds for rent, offering what party size and type each space

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43. "About," Green Theater Initiative, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.greentheaters.org/about>.

44. Mike Lawler, "Just who is writing this stuff?," *ecoTheater Blog*, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://ecothheater.wordpress.com/about>.



can accommodate and a base amount for rental fees.<sup>45</sup> The O’Neill also offers non-profit rates and discounts for renting multiple spaces. Another common use for theatre space is to hold education programming during the day and/or off-season. As discussed earlier in the Social Dimension, introducing young audiences to theatre aids their emotional development and creates future interest in the arts. Using a venue’s free space to earn money from class fees and bringing a new generation into the theatre specifically exemplifies how all three dimensions can benefit from one practice.

While this study will look at traditional Environmental Dimension issues, like recycling, reuse of resources, and energy efficiency, it will also take a broader view of the topic. This dimension will consider both the tangible and intangible environmental aspects of the theatre’s surroundings. In this approach the organizational structure (for example, the size of the workforce) will be looked at in the Environmental Dimension. Too much work and too few employees would be a sign of a negative, unsustainable office environment. Finally, this dimension will also take into account a theatre’s board of directors, as they have significant influence on the theatre. Many of their top-down decisions begin as environmental shifts that impact other areas. By utilizing the Environmental Dimension to view more than the standard reuse, reduce, recycle topics, this study tilts a bit more towards the business world and incorporates sustainable aspects found in other approaches to the topic.

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45. “Rental Info,” The Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, accessed April 26, 2014, <http://www.theoneill.org/contact-and-visit/rental-info/>.

## Methodology

This study relies on the sustainability model most commonly used in the tourism field, which focuses on three dimensions of sustainability. Originally, within tourism, sustainability was heavily used to strengthen environmentally-based tourism (eco-tourism and agricultural tourism). In the past three decades, the principles of sustainable tourism have grown to encompass more than just the environment; “it (sustainability) is also concerned with long-term economic viability and social justice.”<sup>46</sup> In 1991, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) developed a five-dimension sustainability model, which included a political and cultural dimension.<sup>47</sup> This study will consider political agencies as stakeholders instead of a separate dimension, as shown in the earlier stakeholders list, and deal with their influence throughout all three dimensions. In the CIDA’s model, culture refers to maintaining the region-specific heritage as opposed to tracking culture as an art form. For this study the Cultural Dimension will be absorbed within the Social Dimension. Typically, the tourism and business fields consolidate the dimensions as three, given that political agencies and cultural entities fit into dimensions as stakeholders easily, providing clarity to the three-dimension model.<sup>48</sup> A simplified approach to three dimensions presents a clearer snapshot of a theatre’s vitality, making it easier to analyze how they coexist. Below is a general outline of the dimensions, providing the business practice qualities being considered within each area. The

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46. Swarbrooke, vii.

47. “Cultural Dimensions of Sustainable Development,” Canadian International Development Agency; Political and Social Policies Division, June 1998, accessed February 8, 2011, <http://www.cida-ecco.org/CIDARoadMap/RoadMapEnvoy/documents/Cultural%20Dimensions%20of%20Sust%20Dev.pdf>.

48. *Ibid.*, 47. It is important to note that different fields of study have adjusted the dimensions of sustainability, often adding to the core three. Over time theatre research might similarly expand the dimensions, but this study will focus on the core three.

dimensions serve as the macro topics in this case study, which will then be explored at a micro level through analysis of current and past practices.

### **OUTLINE OF SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS**

1. SOCIAL DIMENSION (Macro Level)  
(Micro Level)
  - improved income distribution
  - equal opportunity
  - benefits to host community
  - investing in basic health and education
  - emphasizing participation of the host community
  - participation in strengthening host community
  - sensitivity to cultural factors
  - recognition of values that are conducive to development
  
2. ECONOMIC DIMENSION (Macro Level)  
(Micro Level)
  - appropriate economies policies
  - efficient resource use
  - more equitable access to resources
  - identification of potential revenue streams
  - avoidance of monetary leakage (keeping business local)
  - protection of local business from unfair competition from externally-owned enterprises
  
3. ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION (Macro Level)  
(Micro Level)
  - raise awareness of environmentally-sound practices
  - energy efficiency
  - minimize resource consumption
  - new development utilizes recycled or locally-sourced materials
  - provide new uses for buildings

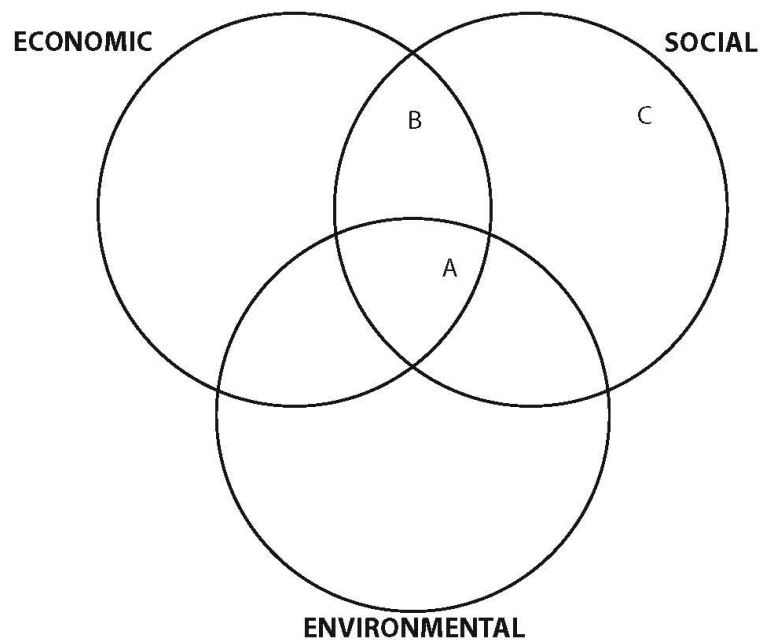
(Adapted from CIDA and Swarbrooke)

Most of this study will explore pre-selected subsections (micro level) based upon knowledge and available information regarding Starlight Theatre. It is anticipated that the research and interview process may reveal additional discussion points and it is most useful for this study to explore key areas of sustainability as they arise. The subsections will likely skew towards current practices. These items have the most readily available resources to analyze and are likely still being used because they have proven to be successful. When looking at a current practice, the study will provide relevant

background history on the practice, when available, showing the path that led to the current approach.

The main goal of this study is to produce an overview of a specific theatre's sustainability, including areas of strength and weakness. This goal will be achieved in two ways. First, by providing a detailed analysis of the business practices, the study will give ample information regarding what has worked or failed for Starlight Theatre's business model. Secondly, to facilitate analysis of these concepts this study will utilize a graph to provide a visual overview of the business practices. For this study, the Starlight Theatre business practices (micro view) will be plotted on a Venn Diagram based upon their balance in relation to the three dimensions (macro view). For example, three subtopics within a given dimension may be graphed as such:

**Figure 2: Graphed Practices**



In this example, “A” would be categorized as a highly sustainable practice, given its ability to benefit all three dimensions. “B” is a sustainable practice, engaging both the Social and Economic Dimensions. While “C” illustrates an emphasis on the social dimension without benefit to the other two. When considering which business practices could be adjusted to positively impact the organization, “C” would be the best candidate given its current one-dimension placement. By the end of the case study Starlight Theatre’s areas of strengths and weaknesses will be both analyzed in the text and visually distilled in the Venn Diagram.

The use of the Venn Diagram to plot business practices is not currently employed in the field of sustainability as an analytical tool. Rather, the diagram is used in numerous studies and academic articles to explain the framework of sustainability.<sup>49</sup> Researchers have found this to be the simplest way of capturing the concept. Since this case study will be dealing with a vast amount of data and information, it will be beneficial to adopt a tool to clearly chart the qualitative research. The Venn Diagram is a logical approach, given its usefulness in illustrating the balance of sustainability. This approach was selected after looking at how different sustainability studies report and assess qualitative data.<sup>50</sup> Ritchie and Spencer’s approach to qualitative research is used throughout the sustainability field, and finding a way to map this study’s data is consistent with their research framework

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49. A simple sampling of studies from the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* will reveal a broad use of the Venn Diagram to demonstrate sustainability; Musa (2004), Moscardo (2011), Pomeroy, Noble, Coghlan and Gooch (2010), Johnson (2011).

50. In the 2001 *International Journal of Tourism Research* article, “A new model to assist in planning for sustainable cultural heritage tourism,” Hilary du Cros created a 3x3 matrix framework to assess multiple criteria of a subject and then plot its vitality. As stated in Bob McKercher and Pamela S.Y. Ho’s paper, “Assessing the Tourism Potential of Small Cultural and Heritage Attractions,” du Cros’ framework “demonstrates its efficacy as a preliminary assessment tool and its ability to provide insights into future management strategies.” For this study, a matrix will be used, but in the form of the individual Venn Diagram circles, allowing the three main matrixes to be considered individually and as a whole.

analysis.<sup>51</sup> Through the course of this study, all five steps of their structure will be utilized.

#### Ritchie and Spencer's Framework Analysis

1. Familiarization; data collection.
2. Identifying a thematic framework; selecting areas of interest within the macro sections.
3. Indexing; sorting content into micro sections of interest.
4. Charting; after surveying the micro topic research, the information will be put through an assessment tool to gauge the practice's sustainability. These will be included in the study's appendix.
5. Mapping and interpretation; using the charts from the previous step, each practice will be put onto the Venn Diagram. Their placement and overall viability will be discussed briefly after each area.

The charting method will provide indicators on the sustainability of the subtopics explored in the micro view. This will be achieved by highlighting the largest stakeholder groups (Starlight Theatre Association/Kansas City Parks and Recreation, Neighboring Communities, Kansas City businesses, ticket holders, seasonal employees/volunteers). Each subtopic will be given a level of sustainability as it applies to these five stakeholder groups. These levels will then be used to plot the subtopic on the Venn Diagram.<sup>52</sup> The chart will include the following levels; highly sustainable, moderately sustainable, neutral sustainability, moderately unsustainable, highly unsustainable. Below is an example of how this chart will appear.<sup>53</sup>

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51. Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer, "Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research," *Analysing Qualitative Data* (London: Routledge, 1994), 173-194.

52. A 2x2 graphing matrix was used in Etsuko Okazaki's "A Community-Based Tourism Model: Its Conception and Use" (525). In the graphing tool, four main zones were established: high rating area, low rating area, and two areas needing work. These areas can be seen in the next two figures (2 and 3) below.

53. This chart was adapted from one used in McKercher and Ho's study, which created this table to serve as an assessment tool. The information gleaned from this chart will then be used to plot the business practices on the sustainability matrix (Venn Diagram).

<b>Subtopic Example: Starlight adds a roof to the venue</b>				
	Social Dimension	Economic Dimension	Environmental Dimension	Issue/s
Starlight Theatre Association/KC Parks and Recreation	Neutral Sustainable	Highly Sustainable	Moderately Sustainable	
Neighboring Communities	Moderately Sustainable	Moderately Unsustainable	Moderately Unsustainable	An expanded presenting calendar limits when parts of Swope Park will be open for use by the community.
Kansas City businesses	Moderately Sustainable	Highly Sustainable	Moderately Sustainable	
Starlight Theatre ticket holders	Highly Sustainable	Neutral Sustainable	Highly Sustainable	
Seasonal employees and volunteers	Moderately Sustainable	Highly Sustainable	Moderately Sustainable	
Overall Assessment	Moderately Sustainable	Moderately/Neutral Sustainable	Moderately Sustainable	

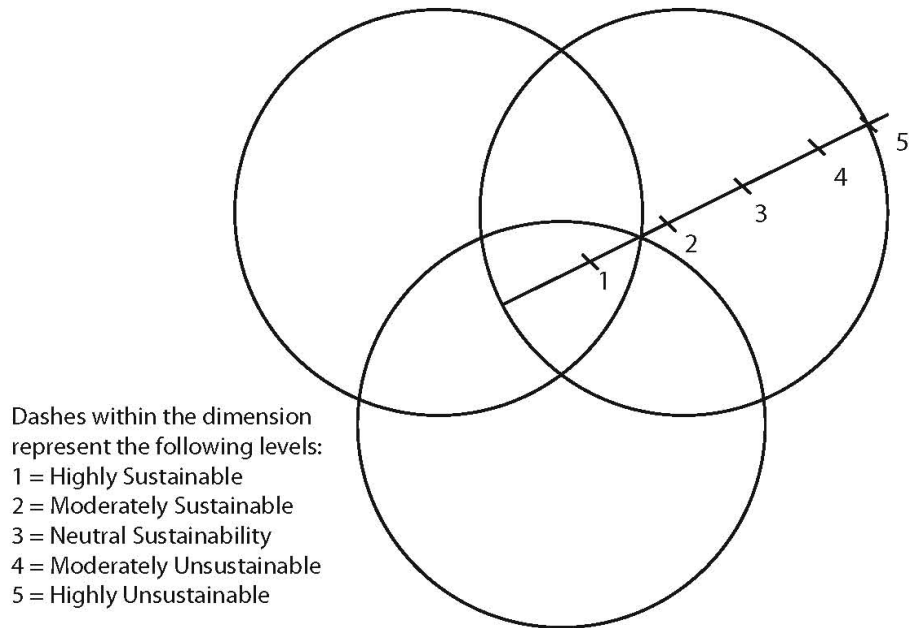
The final paragraph of each analyzed practice will scrutinize these levels of sustainability for the three dimensions.<sup>54</sup> The varying levels of sustainability will dictate how a business practice is plotted on the Venn Diagram. Figure 3 shows how a practice will utilize the

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54. The chart adds to the Venn Diagram's credibility by showing the step taken between the indexing and mapping stages. Conducting multiple interviews and/or engaging the opinions of several stakeholder groups provides the data. This allows me to see patterns emerge from input of those closest to the topics. The chart will force me, as the researcher, to look at the data from a different angle, which will allow me to verify that the written narrative of a practice's history, the chart, and the plotting are all finding the same levels of sustainability in their respective approaches to the topic.

chart's sustainability scores in the plotting process. The initial graphing will be done for the dimension in which the practice is best suited and influential.

**Figure 3: Charting of Sustainability Levels**



The above diagram is not taking into account the influence of the other two dimensions.<sup>55</sup>

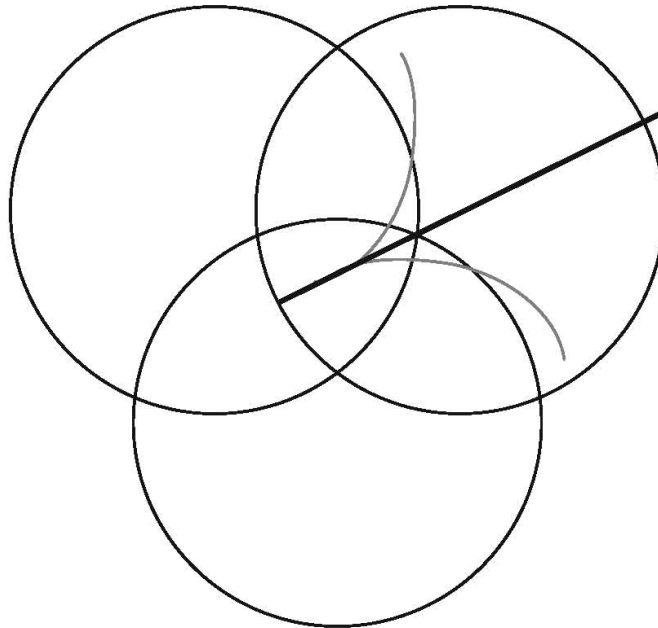
Depending upon their sustainability or lack thereof, the other two dimensions will cause the plotting to move to different areas of the diagram, as shown below.

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55. This study will approach the chart differently from previous studies. In McKercher and Ho's approach, all areas are viewed equally and their influence is not given any priority, which they considered a limitation of the tool. For this study, during the framework analysis, each practice will have been indexed under a specific dimension of sustainability. When using the results of the chart to plot a practice the dimension with which it was indexed will be given priority/weight in the plotting.



**Figure 4: Plotting In Respect To All Three Dimensions**

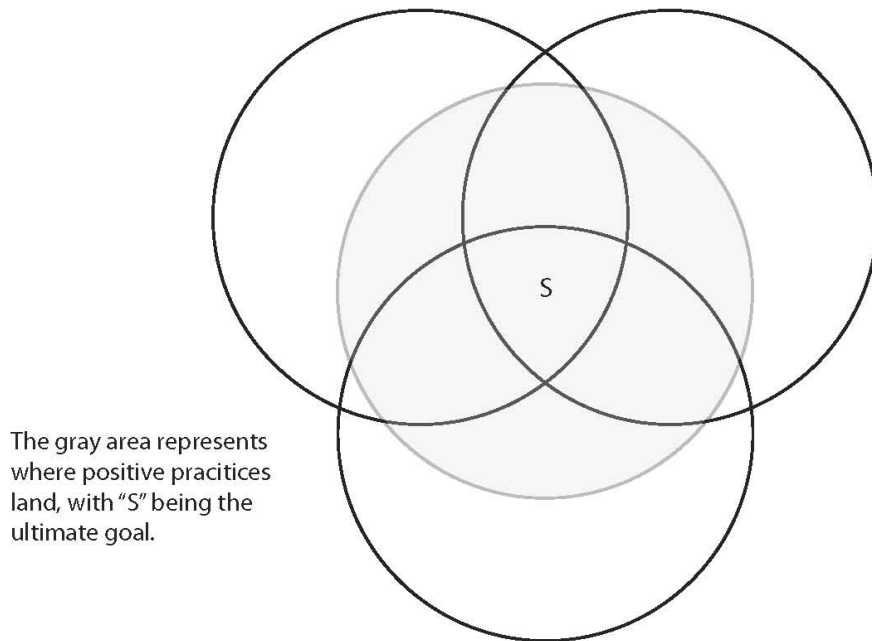


The gray lines represent how the plotting of a point is pulled and influenced by the business practice's engagement of all three dimensions. Despite a practice being more specific to one dimension, the impact of the other two dimensions will force the point to gravitate away from center. Later studies can analyze this plotting tool's strengths and weaknesses and refine it through future applications.

Sustainability depends on a balance among all three dimensions. This study considers a dimension to be "balanced" when the related business practices produce a positive impact, ideally overlapping more than one dimension. If a practice produces a strong economic impact with little to no effect on the Social and Environmental Dimensions, then it would appear in the center of that Dimension, as shown in the earlier figures. In a perfect world, all business practices would land in Area S and produce positive impacts in all three areas. More realistically, businesses must aim for Area S

while finding ways to positively impact as many dimensions as possible. This means balanced sustainability is achieved when the majority of business practices are made to maximize the positive impact of all three dimensions, even if a practice is only geared towards one or two dimensions. Instead of all practices landing within Area S, this approach would result in a cluster of practices in or around Area S and would include practices that produce a positive effect for one dimension or more, as illustrated in Figure 5. The expectation is for a balanced pattern to emerge in the area slightly out of center, landing in the areas considered “moderately sustainable” or better.

**Figure 5: Cluster of Sustainability**



By watching where the points cluster, this graphing technique will highlight a theoretically gray area of sustainability, when a practice is not significantly sustainable

but still produces a positive result.<sup>56</sup> The next step is to maximize the positive results, developing adjustments to bring the practice closer to Area S. Practices should not be isolated in one area, but engage two or more of the dimensions. In the above cluster, a practice might land close to Area S, producing positive results, but the next goal is to increase its ability to impact another dimension positively. In sustainability no practice is isolated as a “social practice” or “environmental practice,” because it always engages multiple dimensions at once, even if its main purpose is geared towards a specific dimension. Even the lack of impact in a dimension is a form of engagement.

This study will rely heavily on semi-structured interviews and correspondence with stakeholders. A unique trait of the sustainability model is its valuation of the humanistic level. Sustainability requires the engagement of individuals with a vested interest in an organization (stakeholders), whether in survey or interview setting. The opinions of each stakeholder, from a single audience member to the organization’s president, inform the overall assessment of the organization’s practices. In order to properly address each dimension of sustainability, interviewees, especially key theatre employees, might need to be interviewed multiple times. This approach is better suited to the study than basic questionnaires, because the human element allows the research to go beyond raw data. For instance, a program can appear strong on paper, but if it doesn’t have organizational support or interest, it may not be operating at full potential. The use of personal narratives is supported by this case study’s purpose, determining how Starlight Theatre is sustainable, not whether it is sustainable. This goal is of a theoretical nature, supported where applicable with statistical data. In the conclusion of

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56. The practices that are expected to cluster in this area are ones with a charting score of 1.5-3 (Figure 3), which would fall between almost being “highly sustainable” and “neutral sustainability.” The hypothesis will be that a balance will be achieved within this cluster area.

“Development of a tourism sustainability assessment,” Tae Ko reinforced the need for personal perspectives,

In addition to the intrinsic limitations of quantitative data, there are a number of issues in the destination (organization) which cannot be explained by quantitative data. The wisdom and experience of stakeholders might be more valuable than these statistical data to cope with their issues.<sup>57</sup>

While researching attitudes towards sustainable research, Kerry Godfrey made the assertion that tourism development is a process.<sup>58</sup> “If this is so, then it is logical to identify the appropriate means by which to engage in that process.”<sup>59</sup> By finding ways to contextualize the narrative histories with the framework assessment of Starlight Theatre’s sustainability, this study will establish a new approach to engage in the study of sustainable theatre.

## **Limitations**

The biggest obstacle this study must overcome is the breadth of available material. Starlight Theatre has been identified as sustainable, because it has a long history of producing and profiting from theatre. This long history has produced sixty-five years of potential material. The study will consider the availability of data, organizational impact, and an assessment of potential usefulness to future studies when determining the

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57. Tae Gyou Ko, “Development of a Tourism Sustainability Assessment Procedure: A conceptual approach,” *Tourism Management* 26, no. 3 (May 2005): 443, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2003.12.003>.

58. Kerry Godfrey, “Attitudes Towards ‘Sustainable Tourism’ in the UK: A view from local government,” *Tourism Management* 19, no. 3 (May 1998): 213-224, accessed April 24, 2014, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(98\)00020-X](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(98)00020-X).

59. Davina Stanford, “‘Exceptional Visitors’: Dimensions of tourist responsibility in the context of New Zealand,” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 16, no. 3 (November 2008): 258, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669580802154082>.

Starlight Theatre business practices being examined in the micro sections. The “macro” parts of each section are being used to offset this limitation, providing space to do a cursory survey of a broader range of issues.

A survey of available Starlight Theatre materials is provided in the latter part of this introduction. Certain avenues of research will require the cooperation and consent of Starlight Theatre. For instance, the organization does an annual survey of audience members. This survey could provide statistical information that may support a multitude of sustainability practices. Some survey results are provided in print materials distributed by Starlight Theatre, but access to additional information would be at the organization’s discretion. Similarly, Starlight Theatre protects the information of its audience members. It would be possible to identify audience members through print materials, but the study must rely on Starlight Theatre to provide any additional contacts.

Since Starlight Theatre is still an operating, changing organization, the majority of practices being researched are still being utilized and adapted within the company. For instance, from the time this study was devised to present time, Starlight Theatre has had three different executive presidents. As the head of the organization, these three individuals have the ability to dynamically alter Starlight Theatre’s business practices and the sustainability of these items. Therefore the data pertaining to these practices must be continuously collected and reassessed. This study must only revisit the analyzed practices when significant changes are made. If the study attempted to keep all the research topics as up to date as possible it would be impossible to accomplish its goal of assessing Starlight Theatre’s sustainability. To allow for this constantly changing research terrain,

the chapters must be approached as a snapshot of the organization's practices at the time the specific area was being analyzed.

### **Case Study Structure**

This study will be organized into four chapters. The next chapter will provide a brief overview of Starlight Theatre's history. The following three chapters will each be dedicated to practices geared towards one of the dimensions of sustainability (economic, social, environmental). Reinforced throughout this portion of the case study, discussions of sustainability consider all three dimensions in tandem and no practice is exclusively unique to one dimension. These sections will begin with an overview of the dimension's applicability to Starlight Theatre. After briefly discussing Starlight Theatre within the context of the given dimension (macro), four to six specific areas of Starlight Theatre's operation will be examined in subsections (micro). The last section of the study will give a final overview of Starlight Theatre's approach to sustainability and provide suggestions for future case studies.

### **Survey of Existing Scholarship**

"Sustainability" was initially only applied to environmental issues and used to analyze natural resource depletion. The works of Donella Meadows were groundbreaking in their approach to developing proper organizational behavior, rooted in sustainable practices. In the early 1970s, Dr. Meadows, founder of the Sustainability Institute, and her fellow Massachusetts Institute of Technology scholars used computer simulations to graph global growth. The study, first published within the book *Limits to Growth*, calls

for a long-term approach to business practices. Throughout the book Meadows utilizes simple metaphors and terminology to explain why non-sustainable practices will ultimately fail or “overshoot,”

The three causes of overshoot are always the same, at any scale from personal to planetary. First, there is growth, acceleration, rapid change. Second, there is some form of limit or barrier, beyond which the moving system may not safely go. Third, there is a delay or mistake in the perceptions and the responses that strive to keep the system within its limits.<sup>60</sup>

The concepts presented in *Limits to Growth* are key to organizational framework presented in Meadows’ *Thinking in Systems*. Whereas *Limits to Growth* provided discourse on sustainability, *Thinking in Systems* allowed Meadows to apply her concepts on a macro level. “A system is more than the sum of its parts. It may exhibit adaptive, dynamic, goal-seeking, self-preserving, and sometimes evolutionary behavior,” stated Meadows.<sup>61</sup> For this study, Meadows’ approach to the system will be used to explore how an organization can exhibit and produce sustainable behavior. This marked an evolution for the concept of sustainability to extend beyond environmental issues.

Meadows helped champion an approach to business practices and systems referred to as “sustainable development.” Following the basic principles of Meadows’ earlier theories, sustainable development urges businesses to adopt realistic, obtainable growth goals. In 1983, the United Nations established the independent World Commission on Environment and Development. Four years of research and discourse culminated in the Commission presenting their report, “Our Common Future,”

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60. Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, and Jorgen Randers, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004), 1.

61. Donella Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008), 12.

In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the past decade, this area has continued to be researched and studied. Again, the focus is put on long-term survivability and success over short-term profit. In *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development*, author Herman Daly calls for businesses to strive for a “steady-state economy” (SSE) over a growth economy. “Economists are always preoccupied with maximizing something: profits, rent, present value, consumers’ surplus, and so on. What is maximized in the SSE? Basically the maximand is life.”<sup>63</sup> Daly’s *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* and Tim Jackson’s *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* provide strong commentary on sustainable development practices for businesses.

The tourism field has produced ample research on sustainability and the wealth of data and case studies has made it possible to broaden the scope of research. For instance, *Tourism Management*’s “Sustainability indicators for managing community tourism” (2006) and “Operationalizing sustainability in regional tourism planning: an application of the limits of acceptable change framework” both focus on establishing a means of assessing the potential sustainability of a project prior to its creation. The measurement procedures created within these studies are built upon the information and data gleaned

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62. United Nation, “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future,” Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development, A/42/427, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm#1>.

63. Herman Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 32.



from past case studies. As put forth in Tae Gyou Ko's "Development of a tourism sustainability assessment procedure: a conceptual approach," (*Tourism Management*, 2005) time has allowed tourism sustainability to move "from theory to practice."<sup>64</sup> Ko's article examines the first two decades of tourism sustainability, which focused on theoretical arguments and a multitude of case studies. The article focuses on 12 tourism case studies and uses them to develop assessment criteria. All three of these articles emphasize the importance of conducting individual case studies on sustainability, because those studies form the foundation of future assessments and refinements within the area.

As noted earlier, the concept of sustainability within theatre practices is mirroring the concept's evolution within tourism. Like tourism, theatre's interest in sustainability was initially heavily rooted in the environmental dimension. It is important for theatre to look towards tourism and how that field approached sustainability. Specifically, understanding that sustainable best practices do not pertain to only environmental impact, but must include potential influences on the economy and social dimensions of a theatre. In September 2008, *American Theatre*, TCG's magazine with a readership of 60,000 individuals, published Lawler's "Toward a More Sustainable Theatre: Why theatre artists should be concerned about pollution, global climate change and the sustainable future."<sup>65</sup> This opinion column by Lawler is perhaps the widest read theatre article on the subject. Lawler, like the tourism practitioners for decades before him, grappled with the term sustainability:

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64. Tae Gyou Ko, 431.

65. "Advertise in American Theatre," Theatre Communications Group, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.tcg.org/advertise/at/index.cfm>.

Defining *sustainability* can be tricky. Even trickier, perhaps, is defining *sustainable theatre*. But after the semantic hair-splitting is finished, a fairly straightforward ideal of behavior remains: acting in a manner that takes into consideration the ability of future generations to sustain themselves in a healthy and safe way that does not diminish the quality of life.<sup>66</sup>

This definition is quite broad, but could still be applied to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It is important to balance all three dimensions, because focusing on only one or two can be detrimental to achieving sustainability. For instance, Lawler acknowledges that some feel a heavily environmental approach to sustainability puts the needs of the Earth ahead of humans.<sup>67</sup> He defends this perspective by arguing that caring for the Earth is a means of caring for future generations. Ultimately, this approach fails to consider the future of the theatre company. If too many environmental changes are made (Environmental Dimension), theatres may run into budget troubles (Economic Dimension). Current trends indicate that theatres raise ticket prices to bridge this gap, making it difficult for lower income individuals to attend productions (Social Dimension).

The sustainability focus is often on ecotourism, not leisure or cultural tourism, which is where theatre tourism is categorized. Still, journals provide ample studies on acceptable, adoptable practices. *Tourism Management* and *Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism* will be key sources of sustainability studies. In some instances, such as Higgins-Desbiolles' "More than an 'industry': the forgotten power of tourism as a social force" and Gu's "Place attachment, identity and community

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66. Mike Lawler, "Toward a More Sustainable Theatre: Why theatre artists should be concerned about pollution, global climate change and the sustainable future," *American Theatre*, September 2008, 59.

67. Ibid.

impacts of tourism – the case of a Beijing hutong,” sustainable practices are discussed, but not given the identifier of “sustainable.” These journals will also provide examples of practices and terminology used by the tourism field. *Social Indicators Research*, which published Kathryn Davidson’s article “Reporting Systems for Sustainability: What Are They Measuring?” will be used on an article-to-article basis. The articles within this journal tend to have an underlying bias. For instance, Davidson’s article attempts to lessen the importance of the Economic Dimension, which she feels is privileged by the “dominance of the neoliberal discourse in the sustainability debate.”<sup>68</sup> Part of the difficulty in exploring sustainability is the breadth of areas that have adopted the practices. Ideally, referencing a multitude of journals will aid in finding a broad balance, using articles like Davidson’s as a reminder to treat equally all three dimensions.

*Harvard Business Review* articles will be used extensively to provide current business practices and research outside the theatre and tourism fields. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* employs organization theory to inform different approaches to leadership and management styles. The text highlights the different “frames” leadership can use when addressing a specific situation or the whole of an organization. Bolman and Deal’s approach to leadership is well suited for this study. “Overemphasizing the rational and technical side of an organization often contributes to its decline or demise. Our counterbalance emphasizes the importance of art in both management and leadership.”<sup>69</sup> *Reframing Organizations* focuses on different approaches

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68. Kathryn Davidson, “Reporting Systems of Sustainability: What Are They Measuring?,” *Social Indicators Research* 100, no. 2 (January 2011): 351, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11205-010-9634-3>.

69. Le Bolman and Terrence Deal, *Reframing Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), ix.

to management and organization, which allow a business to adapt to external and internal changes. This adaptability is essential for sustainable businesses, because long-term planning will require the ability to adjust to any given situation.

Only one academic study, Calder Arthur Johnson's "Sustainable Theatre: An Analysis of Theories and Practices," has attempted to address the three dimensions of sustainability and how they apply to theatre.<sup>70</sup> Johnson's Master's thesis in Social Science: Environment and Community was completed in May 2009 and presents "a qualitative analysis of techniques and theories for creating a more sustainable mode of production of live theater."<sup>71</sup> The thesis analyzed sustainability using the three dimensions. The objective was to "create a working analytical framework that enables a holistic yet systematic examination of sustainability issues, and may serve as a resource for any continuing research or practical implementations involving the sustainable production of live theatre."<sup>72</sup>

The heart of Johnson's thesis is found in Chapters 3-5, which explore the individual dimensions. The chapters dissected each dimension using a unique structure, a variation on tourism's approach to "stakeholders." "Here it is desirable to introduce an additional layer of granularity (compartmentalization) to the framework by dividing each

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70. Journal articles and other academic studies focus on a few business practices or only those pertaining to one dimension of sustainability. Johnson's thesis, all though dealing with multiple theatres, did approach the topic by examining each dimension individually. Since Johnson's study is the closest to utilizing the dimensions in a similar fashion to this study, adequate time must be given to assessing the thesis' approach to the topics.

71. Calder Arthur Johnson, "Sustainable Theatre: An Analysis of Theories and Practices" (Master's thesis, Humboldt State University, 2009), iii.

72. *Ibid.*, iv.

of the three areas into macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of scale.”<sup>73</sup> These scales were paired with a specific audience/stakeholder. “Micro” focused on sustainable issues at the “creator” or leadership level. “Meso” was attributed to the theatre company. Finally, the macro-level of the scale dealt with sustainability within a community setting. Johnson utilized these levels so that the material could be explored in nine distinct areas, each dimension at three scales.

While presenting methodology and establishing the thesis’ framework, Johnson put forth a belief that guides his study:

A sustainable practice is case-specific. Each theatre group is a wholly unique organism. While there are certain concerns or issues that will be held in common, it is not intended for the analytical framework to be a laundry list of highly specific procedures, all of which must be implemented in order to reach a sustainable system. Every theatre group functions at a particular scale and within a particular context. Missions and goals are also individual to each group. As such, it is important for each theatre company to engage in an organized process of self-examination and implement a tailored protocol that is appropriate to their circumstances.<sup>74</sup>

This study agrees that each theatre must find its own balance to achieve sustainability. Throughout Johnson’s study is a fear of putting theatre in a box or using a structured model to fully examine a specific organization. As tourism has shown, the only way to bridge this gap and develop a sustainable business model for theatre is by gathering a wealth of knowledge of current practices.

The subsequent chapters of Johnson’s study present examples of best practices at each level, introducing theatres that have achieved positive results in each dimension.

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73. Ibid., 15.

74. Ibid., 20.

Although vast arrays of topics are covered, no tools are given to assist a theatre in diagnosing its own practices as they apply to the three dimensions of sustainability, an initial goal of the thesis. The study gets lost in the sheer number of unrelated participants interviewed, consisting of nineteen individuals from different backgrounds. By Johnson's own admission, these individuals were included as a convenience sample:

Each of these participants were [sic] chosen on the basis of being either a professional, academic, or avid amateur practitioner of live theatre in the area, or being a non-practitioner who brought some specific expertise to issues of sustainability as well as an 'outsider' perspective on how these issues could relate to the practice of theatre.<sup>75</sup>

Approaching this topic from this convenience sample approach is problematic. First, there are no indications given as to how successful the included theatres have been in terms of sustainability. Subjects often give a lot of information in a singular dimension. It is possible that any of the included theatres are strong with the economic dimension, but are unable to balance the other two. If that is the case, then sustainability was never properly reached, because the dimensions were not balanced. This study will resolve this issue by examining Starlight Theatre within all three dimensions. This narrowed focus is in line with sustainability case studies in tourism, which also focus on one institution at a time. Additionally, researching a theatre's history through the lens of sustainability will provide a new approach to exploring the business of a theatre.

Traditionally, explorations within the field of theatre management and business approach the topic from one of two methodologies, positional hierarchy or historical overview. Texts focusing on positional hierarchy, such as *Theatre Management* and *Running Theaters: Best Practices for Leaders and Managers*, attempt to highlight the

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75. Ibid., 6.

multitude of roles and duties within theatre organizations. Historical overviews, such as - *Building the Successful Theater Company* and *The Commercial Theater Institute Guide to Producing Plays and Musicals*, focus on production histories, key figures, and box office successes and failures. Essentially, the vast majority of business texts focus on structuring a theatre or analyzing the business after the fact, treating the topic of organizational and management behavior with brevity. For instance, Conte and Langley's *Theatre Management* devotes a mere two pages to the manager's job of "supervising" and "controlling."<sup>76</sup> Often, theatre management texts are written for academic settings and attempt to give students a crash course in basic business structure. An emphasis is placed on understanding and building organizational structure. This emphasis results in a pedagogical gap in theatre business texts, which do not sufficiently address the sustainable management of operating theatres. Additionally, little is done in the traditional texts to establish best practices that could lead to longevity, sustainability. Attention is given to identifying and understanding revenue streams, but not how to properly balance revenue and expenses for long-term success. The first step to bridging this gap is conducting sustainable theatre case studies.

Publications by Theatre Communications Group and Broadway League offer a wealth of raw data. Both organizations have access to a large pool of theatres and report current statistics. Founded in 1961, TCG boasts a membership of "nearly 500 theatres in 47 states and the District of Columbia," over 12,000 individual members and trustees,

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76. David Conte and Stephen Langley, *Theatre Management* (Hollywood: EntertainmentPro, 2007), 5-6.

roughly 150 universities, funders, and other supporters.<sup>77</sup> The organization's website provides extensive research tools, spanning arts education and fiscal matters. The "Theatre Facts" and "Taking Your Fiscal Pulse" articles cited earlier are examples of the detailed statistics available through TCG. The Broadway League provides a different set of statistics. The 80-year-old organization has over 600 members, which include theatre owners, operators, producers, suppliers and presenters.<sup>78</sup> The League's focus is primarily on Broadway and touring productions, but its inclusion of presenting venues broadens the scope of its statistical reports. Annual facts released by the League make it possible to compare national trends of touring productions, Broadway houses and regional theatres. Finally, the League's statistics will be of interest, because Starlight Theatre is a member of the organization. Those reports will assist this study to compare Starlight Theatre's trends with the national trends reported by Broadway League.<sup>79</sup>

Starlight Theatre's facility is owned by Kansas City, Missouri, and is located in Swope Park. Starlight Theatre Association (STA) has been in charge of operating Starlight Theatre since it was founded. This connection to Kansas City and the Kansas City Department of Parks and Recreation is useful when researching the organization, because official audits and files are saved within the city's archives. These archives include correspondences between STA and city officials, venue improvements, payroll

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77. "About Us," Theatre Communications Group, accessed December 8, 2010, <http://www.tcg.org/about/index.cfm#membership>.

78. "About the League," The Broadway League, accessed December 8, 2010, [http://www.broadwayleague.com/index.php?url\\_identifier=about-the-league-1](http://www.broadwayleague.com/index.php?url_identifier=about-the-league-1).

79. "Theatres," The Broadway League, accessed December 8, 2010, [http://www.broadwayleague.com/touring/index.php?url\\_identifierr=theatres/](http://www.broadwayleague.com/touring/index.php?url_identifierr=theatres/).



and more.<sup>80</sup> As part of the Kansas City community, local newspapers and television stations have covered Starlight Theatre's ups and downs. The rich source for general press releases and briefs on Starlight Theatre is the Kansas City Star's newspaper archives. In addition to annual reports, Starlight Theatre also archives every theatrical program, which often contains facts about the organization's practices. In recent years, Starlight began periodically printing *Spotlight*, a brochure-magazine hybrid. *Spotlight* often includes audience survey results, information about capital campaigns and other organizational facts.

In 1993 Kathleen Hegarty Thorne wrote *The Story of Starlight Theatre*. A published version of her Master's thesis, the book is a snapshot of Starlight Theatre. Since the book's publication, Starlight Theatre has undergone a change in leadership, expanded its Education Department, and revised its mission statement. By predating these changes, Thorne's thesis is able to capture how Starlight Theatre operated for a majority of its years. Thorne was involved with Starlight Theatre since 1952 as a performer. The text is split up into five "acts" or chapters: The Beginnings of Starlight, A Unique Production Facility, The Theatre Managers, The Artist and Technicians, and Training Ground for Young Talent. *The Story of Starlight Theatre* is filled with a plethora of backstage stories and personal accounts, and also gives insight into how the pre-1993 organization functioned. Finally, Thorne's bibliography is potentially useful in identifying additional resources for this study.<sup>81</sup>

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80. "Starlight Theatre Correspondence and Report Files," Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Archives, accessed December 8, 2010, <http://www.kcmo.org/CKCMO/Depts/ParksandRecreation/Archives/index.htm>.

81. Unfortunately, Thorne's thesis did not utilize footnotes or citations throughout, making it a difficult task to decipher which resource in her bibliography provided a specific piece of information. For

In his thesis, Johnson stated, “Each theatre group is a wholly unique organism.”<sup>82</sup> As will be seen throughout this case study, certain key elements of Starlight Theatre’s sustainability are specific to its organization and location. But, as more theatre case studies in sustainability are completed, trends can be seen and broad ideas extrapolated. Collecting case studies will highlight important approaches to management and practices over time. Ultimately, these studies “could enjoy the benefits of being able to generate opinion and move towards consensus on any issue that requires the input of geographically disperse experts.”<sup>83</sup>

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this reason, the bibliography will be more of a guide to the different resources she utilized, individuals engaged, and specific dates to use as a timeframe for this study.

82. Calder Arthur Johnson, 20.

83. Graham Miller, “The Development of Indicators for Sustainable Tourism: results of a Delphi survey of tourism researchers,” *Tourism Management* 22, no. 4, (July 2001): 351, accessed March 28, 2016, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00067-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00067-4).

## Chapter 1

### Starlight Theatre's Journey Toward Sustainability

Citizens and friends of the Heart of America, tonight is a great night in the history of Kansas City. Tonight, we dedicate and open the newest, the greatest, and the most modern and up-to-date open-air theatre in all the world. The splendor and excellence of this gigantic stage, those beautiful pylons, the great seating capacity, the perfect lighting and sound equipment and the gorgeous landscaping all about us all pay tribute to the genius, industry and ability of the many men and women who have made it possible.

—“Starlight Theatre: Opening Ceremony 1951”

As stated in the Introduction, Starlight Theatre's longevity makes the organization a strong subject for a case study on sustainable business practices. In taking a look at the venue's history, it will become clear that sustainability is difficult to obtain and requires constant adaptation to the forces influencing the three dimensions of sustainability. Starlight has frequently found itself out of balance, with different approaches to business and leadership favoring one or two dimensions. This chapter will broadly examine Starlight's trajectory to its current sustainable business model, highlighting instances of both imbalance and stability. Subsequent chapters will break down specific business practices and analyze how they align with the three dimensions of sustainability.

Kansas City's upper echelon attended Starlight's opening ceremony on June 25, 1951, but the organization can trace its origin back to the early 1920s, nearly three decades before that auspicious night. As part of a 1926 Kansas City visit by Queen Marie of Romania, the Kansas City Federation of Music held a concert of local performers. The event brought about a \$7,000 profit, and local officials decided the money would be best

spent to build an outdoor performance venue.<sup>1</sup> City leaders honed in on a potentially sustainable project. The 1926 concert was a financial success, Kansas City did not currently have an outdoor venue, and attendance at the concert showed a public interest, strong indicators in all three dimensions of sustainability. Six years later, construction began on something akin to a band shell. The construction stopped when neighbors began complaining that the chosen location, where the Kansas City Art Institute now stands, would bring unwanted noise and traffic levels. From 1932-1940, plans and locations would reemerge, being turned down for various reasons.<sup>2</sup> A Citizens' Planning Council, led by former Parks Board President John Moore convened to conduct a four-year study on the project.<sup>3</sup> In 1941 members of the Citizens' Planning Council visited St. Louis and the area's established Municipal Theatre (MUNY).<sup>4</sup> The following year, the Council contracted A.W. Archer to develop preliminary plans for a "Music Temple" similar to that of the MUNY.<sup>5</sup> Archer completed his plans by the end of 1943 and early in 1944 members of the Park Board took the plans to St. Louis to be vetted by Mr. Watson Barrett, Production Manager for the St. Louis Opera:

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1. Jim McQueeney, "The Starlight Story, Part I," Starlight Theatre's *Desert Song* Program, June 25 1951, 24.

2. Various histories list the different attempts to build an outdoor venue. This included a temporary stage north of the University of Missouri-Kansas City, near Heart of America Shakespeare Festival's location. The temporary stage plans ended partially due to the high cost: \$10,000.

3. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," Starlight Theatre Commemorative Program, 2000, 8.

4. The members on this trip to St. Louis were John Moore, J.V. Lewis (Director of the Kansas City Parks Department), Edwin Chandler, and John Lacy (Parks Board Secretary).

5. John Lacy, "Starlight Theater Committee of Citizens Regional Planning Council Meeting Minutes: Memorandum," October 4, 1949, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

As a result of the recommendation received from Mr. Barrett, the Board decided that the plans prepared by Mr. Archer would not be suitable for a municipal opera, and as a result a luncheon was held on September 20, 1944, at which time Mr. Archer was invited to attend.<sup>6</sup>

At this luncheon members announced architect Edward Delk would design and oversee the construction of the new outdoor venue. Delk joined the Parks Department in January, but he was already a prominent name in the area, having helmed the design and construction of Kansas City's Country Club Plaza, a shopping area inspired by architecture of Seville, Spain.<sup>7</sup> The addition of Delk to the planning committee can be seen as a turning point in the project, and resulted in more attention being paid to the proposals, which in turn sped up a project that had spent years on the backburners.

Over the next few years, Delk visited all the known Municipal Opera buildings in the country before he began planning the Kansas City project.<sup>8</sup> The Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives contain letters exchanged between Delk and his supervisors throughout his traveling. While he is known for his architectural contributions to the project, it is important to note that in addition to assessing the buildings Delk also reported back about the different organizational management structures. In this regard, Delk influenced the environmental and economic groundwork of the new venue, using other venues to identify the most sustainable plans in both dimensions. These observations can be seen in an October 4, 1949, letter from Delk to Moore:

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6. Ibid.

7. Jim McQueeney, "The Starlight Story, Part I," Starlight Theatre's *Desert Song* Program, June 25, 1951, 29.

8. John Lacy, "Starlight Theater Committee of Citizens Regional Planning Council Meeting Minutes," October 6, 1949, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

In nearly all of the cities I visited, I was told to keep local men out of the organization of production. Let them import the stars, let them select choruses and the ballets so that no local matron can force her child into a production. In other words, divorce production from all local social and business contacts. Naturally, the local dancing schools would furnish the ballet, and Kansas City would furnish the members of the chorus, but the stars should always be imported.

Circuits have proved unsatisfactory. For instance, Shubert will promise, say, Jeanette MacDonald, to star in the "Prince of Pileen" and will substitute some other singer for 101 reasons. It has proved much more satisfactory for the local executives to produce their own shows rather than having the shows on a theatrical circuit.

In this same letter, Delk commended the MUNY's structure and approach to arts management.<sup>9</sup> Other cities were similarly planning an outdoor venue and began reaching out to Kansas City to inquire about their progress and decisions. The Minneapolis Park Board wrote J.V. Lewis, Director of the Kansas City Park Department, because they were considering constructing their own outdoor theatre. In his response, Lewis identified the MUNY as a model: "As to the type of organization and sponsors, very likely we will follow the successful plan of St. Louis."<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising that the MUNY served as a model throughout Kansas City's planning process, given its close proximity and willingness to share information.

City officials selected Swope Park, being close to the city and yet far enough away from other city destinations to support the potential noise and traffic, as the perfect location for the venue. On May 16, 1946, after exploring several Swope Park locations, the area known to the planners as "Proposed Site No. 2, lying south and east of the

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9. Delk letter, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

10. Lewis Letter, March 12, 1947, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

present tennis courts,” was selected for the future theatre.<sup>11</sup> In 1946, three years into Delk’s research, the Citizen’s Planning Council presented the formal outdoor theatre plans as a proposed city bond issue. The voters supported the measure in 1947, allotting the project \$500,000 to put towards construction. Unfortunately, the bond that had secured funding ended up being part of a broader litigation against the newly formed Citizens Bond Committee, making the funds unavailable.<sup>12</sup>

Anticipating that the bond issue’s legal woes were coming to an end, the Citizen’s Planning Council met on October 6, 1949. It had been nearly three years since their previous meeting, but much had progressed in the planning of the outdoor venue project. It was at this meeting that the venue was first referred to as “Starlight Theatre” and by this time Delk’s plans were 90% completed. The Council pushed to begin excavation of the selected Swope Park site. With the bond issue funds tied up, the Council looked for alternative funding sources. First, they investigated what had become of the \$7,000 profit from the 1926 performance for Queen Marie, the original inspiration for the outdoor theatre project. This money had recently been earmarked to construct a band shell in the northeast area of the city. Members planned to evaluate the possible use of funds from a 1931 bond issue, for the “construction of a ‘Stadium and Outdoor Theater.’”<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately for the committee members, an interested party found them. The Centennial

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11. John Lacy, October 4, 1949. Proposed Site No. 1 would have placed Starlight Theatre in the northwest corner of Swope Park, west of the Sand Pavilion. This would appear to be to the north of Starlight’s current position and to the west of Southeast Community Center, more exposed to the Swope Parkway/63rd St intersection. A third possible location was situated to the west of Crest Drive, north of Gregory Boulevard, and east of Elmwood. Today, this would be to the north of the Lakeside Nature Center, currently an off-leash dog park.

12. John Lacy, October 6, 1949, addresses this topic and references a *Kansas City Star* article from November 27, 1949 (page 13).

13. Ibid.

Association who was planning a large-scale pageant to celebrate Kansas City's anniversary knew of the outdoor theatre plans. The centennial group put up \$135,000 to allow construction to begin.<sup>14</sup>

In December of 1949, excavation began on the Starlight Theatre site. The project had a hard deadline, because the Centennial Association planned a performance of "Thrills of the Century," a centennial review, in June. It is estimated that bulldozers removed over 300 trees from the 14-acre site in two weeks. Construction also required the removal of nearly 10,000 yards of solid rock, which included an eleven-foot-deep rock ledge. Sub-zero temperatures slowed the mammoth construction project, halted work for five days.<sup>15</sup>

Concrete totaling 1,600 cubic yards and 200 tons of steel went into the auditorium area on schedule despite a truck drivers' strike and one at a sand plant. Cement finishers worked until midnight night after night completing ramp and sections of the slab so that the seats could be installed at the rate of 400 per day. The rail strike prevented delivery of the seat bottoms, and metal chairs were rented during the pageant to provide seating in areas where seat bottoms were missing. The metal chairs were secured to the standards of the permanent seats.<sup>16</sup>

After seven months of construction, in a still unfinished venue, "Thrills of a Century" brought Kansas City history to stage with a "Starlight Theater Pageant."<sup>17</sup> In the months that followed a call went out to a select pool of Kansas City citizens, asking them to join the Starlight Theatre Association. 586 community members paid \$10 to be part of

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14. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," Starlight Theatre Commemorative Program, 2000, 8.

15. Jim McQueeney, "The Starlight Story, Part VI," Starlight Theatre's *Chocolate Soldier* Program, July 30, 1951, 24.

16. Ibid.

17. *Kansas City Star*, Sunday, May 28, 1950. Section C.



the Association. From this group, roughly 200 individuals served as members of the Starlight Theatre Board, who gathered to draft theatre policy and plans.<sup>18</sup> The final cost of the 7,854-seat outdoor theatre was \$1.75 million. Unlike some theatre organizations, created by artists or business professionals, Starlight Theatre was conceived, developed, and founded by an eclectic group of citizens, creating an undeniable tie between Starlight Theatre and the Social Dimension. Carter Tucker, head of the Kansas City Park Board, reinforced this relationship in the closing statements of Starlight's Opening Night Ceremony:

Mr. Moore represents a great group of almost a thousand men, women and companies who have contributed to the Starlight Theatre Association and have assumed the responsibility for the productions that you will enjoy in this Theatre, and while they assume all of the financial risks and all of the responsibility for these productions, they at the same time have agreed that every dollar of profit that is made from the operation of this Theatre will be spent in improvements to the Theatre or to the park system of Kansas City. We are greatly indebted to this organization, and Mr. Moore I now surrender to you and your associates the key to the Starlight Theatre properties and wish for you as much happiness and joy in producing great entertainment in this Theatre as your Board of Park Commissioners have had in the building of the theatre. (Key handed to Mr. Moore.)<sup>19</sup>

The initial leadership of Starlight Theatre was split between two positions.

Richard Berger was hired as the organization's Producing Director. Berger, who came to Kansas City with a diverse background, quit high school in 1927 to sell theatre tickets in New York for the Schwab and Mandel producing firm. Lawrence Schwab befriended

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18. Jim McQueeney, "The Starlight Story, Part VIII," Starlight Theatre's *Bittersweet* Program, August 13, 1951, 32.

19. "Starlight Theatre: Opening Ceremony 1951," June 25, 1951, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

Berger and hired him as an assistant when Schwab took over as production director of the MUNY. Following Schwab's retirement two years later, Berger was promoted to the position and stayed for eight years before moving to television production. William Symon served as Starlight's first Business Manager. While Berger was tasked with overseeing the artistic endeavors, Symon handled the fiscal side of the organization. Symon had made a name for himself by being part of or heading numerous Kansas City civic projects. He previously held positions with the Convention Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, and Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design. Together, Berger and Symon served as the organization's checks and balances, one focusing on the financial business and the other on the artistic endeavors.<sup>20</sup> This leadership allowed Berger to provide the Social Dimension with productions of interest and Symon kept the Economic Dimension in check. Construction continued towards completion, which in turn helped move the Environmental Dimension closer to a sustainable state.

From 1951-1958, season programming consisted of ten productions, limited to operettas, musicals, and light opera. These seasons provided ample opportunities for local performers to be involved with the productions. Starlight functioned under a basic summer stock ensemble format, bringing in star performers for leading roles and using local performers as chorus members. The local chorus was a benefit to the Social Dimension. The early seasons might see one or two variety shows in the lineup. The first variety show, headlined by Liberace, opened the 1957 season and the following season

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20. This period of Starlight's history is covered by Jim McQueeney, "The Starlight Story, Part IX," found in Starlight Theatre's *Babes in Toyland* Program (August 20, 1951, 20) and Thorne's *The Story of Starlight Theatre*, 32.

opened with “The Jerry Lewis Show.”<sup>21</sup> Starlight’s 1958 season also featured the world premiere of *Tom Sawyer*, which was revived in the 1959 season. A Production Committee, made up of board members and using recommendations provided by Berger, picked the seasons. Their selections were then presented to the full board for input and approval.

The financial stability of Starlight in its early seasons is a complex issue. Throughout these early years Starlight Theatre Association reported profitable seasons, but that profitability did not take into account capital expenses spent on the new and growing theatre. The main reason Starlight’s finances are complicated is a money pool called the Guarantors Fund. This idea was borrowed from the MUNY who also had an established group of guarantors.<sup>22</sup> The guarantors were individuals who agreed to loan interest-free money to Starlight to provide the organization with a liquid cash source. They would pledge a specific amount, making 50% available at the time of pledging, and could be called upon at any point throughout the year for the remaining funds. The guarantors would basically be given a yearly “I.O.U.” statement from Starlight and could ask for their funds back at the end of each year. On paper, these funds were not traditional donations, as that was handled as a separate pool of money, and there would be no financial return on investment. The impulse to create this money pool is understandable when one takes into account how much funding for Starlight was tied up with litigations, preventing the Parks Department from allocating the needed resources.

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21. While performing for his show, Jerry Lewis requested that a cover be added to the orchestra pit, which would allow him to move downstage, closer to the audience. After being told by the Starlight Theatre Association that funds would not allow for this construction, Lewis paid for the construction himself.

22. “St. Louis Munny Opera Fund of \$100,000 Asked,” *Cape Girardeau Southeast Missourian*, Thursday Evening Edition, November 21, 1929, 2.

Yearly letters would go out to current or prospective guarantors (see APPENDIX 1). From 1951-1958, only the 1952 season added money to the Guarantors Fund. In 1952, the Guarantors Fund had a balance of \$70,662.18. The other seasons pulled varying amounts from \$847.69 (1953) to \$60,665.54 (1958) from the Guarantors Fund. Each year any subsequent withdraw from the Guarantors Fund made Starlight less economically sustainable. By the end of 1958, Starlight pulled a total of \$186,531.17 from its Guarantors Fund:<sup>23</sup>

(Symon) pointed out that the “loss” figure of previous years involved the purchase of better than \$200,000 worth of new buildings and other assets and improvements which the city or park board had been unable to provide at the time the theatre was opened; that the theatre was not finished when we opened in 1951 and many things had to be done, particularly during the first two years, when the electrical work was unfinished; the concrete area was inadequate; when scenery, properties, curtain, wages, etc. were non-existent.<sup>24</sup>

On paper the organization looked profitable, because in the organization’s ledger the yearly-borrowed guarantor money was balanced by the value of Starlight’s physical assets. In reality, if the guarantors as a whole ever asked to be refunded their invested money at the end of a season the only way to pay them back would be to liquidate Starlight’s assets. In theory the positions held by Symon and Berger would foster a sustainable balance between the Social and Economic Dimensions. In actuality, when coupled with construction and production costs, the reliance on the Guarantors Fund concept rendered the economics of Starlight unsustainable from inception. In a November

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23. The 1958 debt of \$186,531.17 would be the equivalent of \$1,530,401.612 in 2016, according to the US Inflation Calculator.

24. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1959), August 21, 1959, 5, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

19, 1963 letter to Tucker, head of the Kansas City Park Board, Symon acknowledged issues with the Guarantors Fund:

(Reporting of the Guarantors Fund) is a matter which should again be studied. There is no reason why it cannot be done – and the Guarantors’ Fund straightened out at the same time. That procedure (loaning from the Fund) has been followed three or four times, but each time it seems to get fouled up and no definite answer is ever arrived at. Even the auditors are confused.<sup>25</sup>

As highlighted in the Introduction, sustainable business models for theatres cannot depend on donations to cover losses. Starlight’s situation was more unsustainable, because the Guarantors Fund might require repayment. The only way to prevent this was to ask for donations as opposed to repayable investments.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the Guarantors Fund, Starlight took out loans when needed. This was the state of affairs when Symon passed away in 1966 and Anthony Ferrara assumed the position of Business Manager. Ferrara had risen in the Starlight ranks since its opening in 1951. He worked as Starlight’s assistant lighting coordinator and then as assistant stage manager before joining the business office. At the time Ferrara stepped into his new role Starlight was struggling. Attendance for the 1953 season was 359,398 (ten shows) and by 1965 that number had declined to 249,362 (eight shows).

Additionally, the production cost for a show in 1954 was roughly \$40 thousand, but rose

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25. Symon’s letter is found in the Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1964), Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

26. Over time Starlight eliminated the repayment aspect of the Guarantors Fund. The first attempt to eliminate the tracking of these funds as loans came in 1957. Any original guarantor who renewed in 1957 could still ask for all of his funds from 1951-57 be reimbursed, even though only a few (10 or less) would do this each year. Guarantors not renewing in 1957 received letters alerting them their “loans” would be forfeited. Starlight’s Executive Committee used similar deadlines and alterations in language until the Guarantors Fund morphed into straightforward donations.

to \$46 thousand by the 1958 season.<sup>27</sup> For a ten-production season, the production budget had grown \$60 thousand in four seasons. By 1969, the organization had spent all of its Guarantors Fund, amassing over \$300 thousand in debt.<sup>28</sup> Following the 1971 season, at the request of the Starlight Theatre Board, Berger retired.<sup>29</sup> Ferrara was promoted to the new position of General Manager, which combined the duties of Symon and Berger. This new leadership model made Ferrara solely responsible for balancing both the artistic and financial interests of the organization.

Ferrara took control of the organization and, following the forced retirement of Berger, the majority of his decisions were economic-centric, to the detriment of the other two dimensions of sustainability. In the 1970s Ferrara presented fewer productions (eight-show seasons) and included a heavy mixture of variety shows, such as the Carol Channing Show (1971), Jim Nabors Show (1971), and Robert Goulet Show (1972).<sup>30</sup> The bulk of these shows were formed out of town and did not always utilize a local dancing or singing chorus. Gone were the summers of summer stock seasons that made up Starlight's early years and with them a source of community involvement.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the 1972-1974 seasons only included one book musical each, with the rest of the season consisting of variety and musical acts; 1972 was the first season to not include a locally-produced show. From a financial standpoint, the emphasis on variety shows made sense for the organization. "From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the average book musical

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27. These figures were found in Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1954), January 22, 1954 and February 17, 1954, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

28. Kathleen Hegarty Thorne, 31.

29. *Ibid.*, 32.

30. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," Starlight Theatre Commemorative Program, 2000, 27.

31. *Ibid.*, 10.

lost \$5,740 a week, while twenty-nine weeks of star variety shows recorded an average profit of \$7,750 a week.”<sup>32</sup> Starlight’s Board constantly vetted Ferrara’s decisions. Whereas in previous years Berger would present his proposed productions, stars, and even touring options, now board members were interjecting opinions regarding every aspect of the season-planning process. A faction of patrons and board members felt Starlight should return to book musicals, pointing out that variety shows were readily available on television.<sup>33</sup> By 1976, the season returned to a ten-show format with nine book musicals and one variety show. Despite their best efforts, Ferrara and the Board never seemed to find the right balance of programming, star names, and promotion to lure audiences to Starlight. The eight-show 1965 season had an attendance of 249,362. By 1980, the ten-show season attendance had declined to 207,000, despite including stars such as Cab Calloway, Ginger Rogers, Sid Caesar, Joel Gray, Joe Namath, Chita Rivera, and Rosemary Clooney. Following the conclusion of that season, the Starlight Board of Directors relieved Ferrara of his position.<sup>34</sup>

Faced with decades of financial losses, Starlight Theatre Association made several fundamental changes to the organization over the next three seasons. These seasons were a crucial turning point in Starlight’s history, because they began the process of putting into place sustainable leadership structures and practices. First, the 220-member Starlight Theatre Board was reduced to 30 officers. Next, to avoid financial risk, in 1981 Starlight became a landlord, renting the venue to the Kansas City Philharmonic

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32. Kathleen Hegarty Thorne, 38.

33. This insight was obtained by surveying the Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1972), Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

34. Kathleen Hegarty Thorne, 42.

and seeing musicals presented by The Theater League. Starlight hired Alan McCracken, with a background in theatre preservation, as the new General Manager. Along with McCracken, Bob Rohlf was brought on to handle marketing and to address the extensive organizational debt.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, despite removing the producing duties, the responsibilities of running Starlight did not suit McCracken's expertise and he was let go from his position after only one year.<sup>36</sup> Rohlf, with no prior experience in the business of theatre, was promoted to General Manager a year after joining Starlight. His first task was to eliminate Starlight's debt. At that time Starlight had amassed considerable debt, which Rohlf refers to as "the six-figure type." Starlight was "\$357 thousand in debt and had \$120 thousand in the bank."<sup>37</sup> In total, Starlight owed money to 57 creditors. After running the numbers against Starlight's available cash Rohlf was able to offer the creditors twenty-five cents on the dollar for what was owed. All of the individuals accepted the offer. Thirty years after opening, Starlight was a debt-free organization.

By 1984, it became apparent that the landlord position did not offer the financial safety net the Association was seeking and they returned to the producer role.<sup>38</sup> This return to producing included offering a mix of touring productions, concerts, co-produced and self-production musicals, a formula still followed by today's management. This Broadway mix brought back the local choruses for productions, helping restore a once

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35. Hallmark Cards, Inc. actually paid for Rohlf's first three years of employment. Starlight's financial state of affairs were too dire to hire any additional employees, but the Board, which included Adele Hall, concluded that a business-minded marketer was desperately needed. During a luncheon with Starlight's 2012 interns, Adele Hall was asked if she had any concerns putting money up for Rohlf's salary given Starlight's financial woes. She replied by advising students, "You bet on the jockey, not the horse."

36. Ibid.

37. Bob Rohlf, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, August 24, 2012.

38. Ibid.



lost element of the Social Dimension. With Rohlf at the helm, Starlight developed a concert series, ultimately partnering with Live Nation, a national promoter. The concert series and additional programming aspects will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Under Rohlf's leadership, Starlight focused on obtaining grants and sponsoring a yearly gala to raise money for the organization's general fund.<sup>39</sup> These newly developed sources of money, which strengthened the Economic Dimension, allowed Starlight to renovate and to add to its physical space, which in turn benefited the Environmental Dimension. In 1987 Starlight launched a \$2.7 million improvement plan to replace the entire stage floor, create a sit-down dining option prior to performances (Applause Club), and to renovate the pavilions used for rehearsals. Prior to this plan the last major additions to Starlight were the roofed pergolas (1954) and permanent ticket office (1963). A decade later, following extensive research, Starlight decided to renovate its stage:

In 1993, we embarked on a five-year, five-million dollar capital improvement effort. In the final year of the five-year effort (1997), it was to have included the spending of some money on our stage (about a \$600,000 planned improvement). As we started thinking about that improvement, we started to look at other theatres in the country and to see what their stages were like from a technological standpoint. We were also surveying our audiences to determine what shows they wanted to see on our stage and seeking what kind of new products were being developed on Broadway. When we started to look at those three things together, it became apparent that the \$600,000 planned improvement to our stage was a band-aid and wouldn't have any positive long-term benefits to the theatre.<sup>40</sup>

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39. Starlight's first gala was held in 1986 and is still an annual event.

40. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," Starlight Theatre Commemorative Program, 2000, 29.

The 2000 season opened on the newly completed, 10.5 million, 10-story Jerry and Jeanette Cohen Community Stage.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the remodeled stage, the \$15.25 million Future Generations Campaign provided private funds to build indoor rehearsal spaces, an administrative building adjacent to the theatre, and numerous amenities for patrons.<sup>42</sup> It was estimated that between 1993 and 2008 Starlight Theatre Association made improvements to its facility totaling \$32 million.<sup>43</sup> Another addition to the organization that year was Epic Innovative Events (originally Epic Entertainment). Epic Innovative Events is a wholly-owned, for-profit subsidiary of Starlight Theatre Association, which means the entirety of Epic Innovative Events' profits go to financially support Starlight. They plan events in the Starlight venue and outside Swope Park, and their business will be examined further in later chapters.<sup>44</sup>

In 2005, during the construction of Starlight's new administrative building, conversations occurred about the organization's future leadership. Rohlf indicated an interest in retiring in the coming years and Starlight's Board contemplated restructuring the organization's leadership model.<sup>45</sup> At one point in the administrative building design process, plans called for two corner offices, one for an Artistic Director/Producer and the other for a President CEO, harkening back to the Berger/Symon dual leadership years.

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41. The 2000 stage renovation will be detailed extensively in Chapter 4.

42. "Starlight Theatre Completes \$15.25 Million Capital Campaign," Starlight Theatre Press Release, November 1, 2006.

43. Laura Spencer, "Bob Rohlf Takes Final Curtain Call At Starlight," KCUR News, September 16, 2008, accessed August 22, 2014, <http://kcur.org/post/bob-rohlf-takes-final-curtain-call-starlight>.

44. "About Us," Epic Innovative Events, Inc., accessed August 22, 2014, <http://epic-kc.com/about-us/>.

45. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

Ultimately, these plans were scrapped and a single corner office was made.<sup>46</sup> When Rohlf retired in 2008, Denton Yockey was named his successor. He had served as President and Executive Producer for Casa Manana in Fort Worth, Texas, for 11 years.

Yockey was Starlight's first leader to assume the position out of debt and with the three dimensions of sustainability balanced. "Although I was the new guy in town, I was smart enough to know that Starlight was a longtime tradition with a very special place in this community's heart," wrote Yockey in 2011. "I wasn't about to raise anyone's ire by spouting off a list of possible changes or enhancements I might recommend...even if I had a few swirling in my head."<sup>47</sup> Some of the changes under Yockey's leadership included the addition of a facility recycling program, dynamic pricing for Broadway versus concert concessions, with concert concessions being sold at a slightly higher price point, and an increase in self-produced and co-produced productions. The facility underwent updating as well. Two of Starlight's restroom structures had an \$850,000 renovation in 2011 and the stage received a new sound system in 2014.<sup>48</sup> The sound system, costing just under a million dollars, replaced equipment installed in 2000.<sup>49</sup> As part of a study to help combat extreme summer heat, Starlight added a misting function to one of their main fountains and ceiling fans around the pergolas. The largest programming change during Yockey's tenure was the creation of Starlight Children's

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46. Justin White, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

47. *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, December 2011, 2.

48. *Ibid*, 8.

49. "New Sound System Tops List," *Starlight Theatre Blog*, May 10, 2014, accessed September 10, 2015, [https://www.kcstarlight.com/starlight\\_blog/starlight\\_blog\\_post.aspx?id=455](https://www.kcstarlight.com/starlight_blog/starlight_blog_post.aspx?id=455).

Theatre. In 2012 and 2013, four shows were presented as part of this series at the Muriel Kauffman Theatre.<sup>50</sup>

At the end of the 2013 season, which also marked the completion of Yockey's five-year contract, Starlight's Board announced its intent to restructure the organization's leadership model. These changes followed a season filled with self-produced shows and a dramatic decline in concert bookings. Concerts historically gross more than self-produced musicals, because they carry lower overhead costs. Harkening back to the two proposed corner offices of 2006, Starlight planned to divide Yockey's position into two positions: a President/CEO and an Artistic Director/Executive Producer. Board member Russ Welsh attributed this change to Starlight's "dual tracks" of Broadway and concert programming. The President/CEO would oversee concerts and the organization's business and the Artistic Director/Executive Producer would be in charge of the Broadway season.<sup>51</sup> Yockey parted ways with Starlight and voiced concerns that the new leadership model would not be compatible with how Starlight conducts business. "I don't know that they're (the Board) really going to do what they say they're going to do," said Yockey during his last week at Starlight. "Next year we're only producing one show. So you shouldn't go out and spend a full time salary for a producer. ... Not necessary." Finally, with two leaders, there could be some power struggle. "Who is going to be more important? Who is going to be able to get their say so?"<sup>52</sup>

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50. *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, December 2011, 2.

51. Rob Roberts, "Starlight Theatre leadership change leaves president without a role," *Kansas City Business Journal*, July 30, 2013, accessed April 13, 2016, <http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/news/2013/07/30/starlight-theatre-leadership-change.html?full=true>.

52. Denton Yockey, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, September 12, 2013.

Starlight assembled a search committee to fill these positions. To avoid conflicts from two leaders, like the issues Yockey raised, the President/CEO position would be treated as the head of the organization with the Artistic Director/Executive Producer positioned just below that title on the chain of command. With the assistance of a headhunting firm, the search committee interviewed and brought in several candidates. Ultimately, Starlight hired Richard Baker as the new President/CEO. Hired in February 2014, Baker came to Kansas City from his position as President of Saint Louis' 4,500-seat Fox Theatre. He also held the position of Vice President of the Independent Presenters Network and sat on the Broadway League's Board of Governors.<sup>53</sup> Baker's eclectic mix of professional experience also includes performing with the St. Louis group Sing Out Florissant Valley and working as a CPA prior to arriving at the Fox. His first exposure to Broadway was from attending shows at the MUNY, making him familiar with the atmosphere of an outdoor theatre.<sup>54</sup> Starlight's press release regarding Baker's hire stated that he would "oversee all of Starlight's operations and programming including the not-for-profit's Broadway and Concert series, extensive education programs, and all development activities for the 64 year-old performing arts organization."<sup>55</sup> There were no additional public discussions pertaining to the proposed Artistic Director/Executive Producer position after Baker's hiring. While interviewing,

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53. "Richard Baker to become President and CEO of Starlight Theatre," Starlight Theatre press release, February 13, 2014.

54. Terry Perkins, "Richard Baker Bids Farewell to the Fox and Shares Thoughts on Local Arts Scene" STL Public Radio, February 28, 2014, accessed August 23, 2014, <http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/richard-baker-bids-farewell-fox-shares-thoughts-local-arts-scene>.

55. "Richard Baker to become President and CEO of Starlight Theatre," Starlight Theatre press release, February 13, 2014.

Baker informed the Board he did not feel the position was necessary if Starlight was headed in the direction he was envisioning for it, with an emphasis on tours and concerts:

I also told them (the Board) this, ‘So much depends on what you as the Board is planning. If you really want to become more like the MUNY-model, where you self-produce all of your shows or a majority of them, then you need an Artistic Director. If you’re really planning to produce one a year or something like that, then I don’t think you need that (position). That, I think, will be a waste of money. You’ll find enough talented people in the organization that can put that together.’ ... Apparently the Board agreed with me since they hired me.<sup>56</sup>

Baker had a few initial ideas for the organization’s future growth and success, which were informed by his own observations and patron feedback from previous surveys. Based upon trends in the surveys, Baker felt patrons’ Starlight experience could be improved by addressing weather, parking, and food.<sup>57</sup> Baker acknowledged that controlling the weather wasn’t feasible, but there were ways to shield Starlight from its show-canceling effects. “The one thing I’d love to do is put a roof on this place, but I want to do it creatively,” Baker explained.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, patrons frequently took issue with the parking. “That was mentioned quite a bit. One of the things I would love to do is build a parking garage between us and the (Kansas City) Zoo, but I want it to be a green parking garage. Right now it’s asphalt.”<sup>59</sup> While with the Fox, Baker was working with the Grand Center Arts District on environmentally sustainable renovation initiatives. This planning gave him, as he joked, just enough experience in sustainability “to be

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56. Richard Baker, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, April 1, 2014.

57. All three of these areas will be explored further with greater detail in later chapters.

58. Richard Baker interview, 2014.

59. Ibid.

dangerous,” but it also gave him a familiarity with how to approach an issue considering all three dimensions of sustainability. Baker’s concept of a green parking garage is one that would be subterranean, useable as a storm shelter, and able to provide runoff rainwater for grounds maintenance. Finally, before his first season with Starlight, Baker had already heard opinions on the facility’s food options. “Then the third thing is, almost everybody I talked to says, ‘The food’s bad and the prices are too high.’” The main way he knew to correct this issue was to make food service an in-house operation as opposed to bringing in a company to run the concessions and Applause Club, the sit down, pre-show dining option:

So, to me, those are the big three. And if we can roll those all into one big, sexy capital campaign I think we’ve got a legitimate chance of doing them, because people will buy something if they can really believe the concept. They’ll donate to it. I think that’s our job, to explain why we need it, why it’s so important to the community, and the fact that (these improvements) make Starlight sustainable for years and years to come.<sup>60</sup>

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60. Ibid.

## Chapter 2

### The Social Dimension in Business Practices of Starlight Theatre

This theatre was not built for the enjoyment of the few, but for the edification of the many, and we must all do our part to make certain that this objective is achieved.

— Starlight Theatre Association Minutes, November 17, 1953

#### **Starlight Theatre and the Social Dimension**

Starlight Theatre's path has always been heavily tied to the Social Dimension. The vision for the venue came from community leaders, its completion was funded through civic donations, and every renovation adds value to a city-owned property. In 1995, Starlight launched an internal and external self-evaluation process. The result, Starlight Theatre's "Strategic Plan: 1995," included the organization's first vision and mission statements, specific strategies to implement, and thoughts of how these plans would influence the organization's "role within the Kansas City community."<sup>1</sup> Bob Rohlf, Starlight's Executive Producer at the time of the study, explained the importance of conducting such studies:

One of the things we (Starlight Theatre) always looked at and questioned and asked ourselves was, 'What is our role in the community and what should it be?' I think any non-profit, if they're serious, has to ask themselves that question periodically, not just once and forget about it. Every year, 'Who are we? Why are we here? What are we doing? What should we be doing?'<sup>2</sup>

The study identified the following five areas essential to Starlight's success: finance, education, the unique Starlight Theatre venue, human resources, and audience

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1. "Strategic Plan:1995" Starlight Theatre internal document, 1, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

2. Bob Rohlf, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, August 24, 2012.



development.<sup>3</sup> The mission and vision statements provided a clear path to follow and formally addressed Starlight's commitment to Kansas City.

The strategic plan stated that Starlight Theatre Association had followed a basic mission statement since 1950, "to present family-oriented entertainment at affordable prices."<sup>4</sup> As a product of this internal examination, the organization adopted a new mission statement:

The mission of the Starlight Theatre Association is to present first quality professional entertainment and arts education to diverse audiences, while building an appreciation for the performing arts and preserving and enhancing the Starlight venue for future generations. As it carries out this mission, Starlight will remain committed to family oriented entertainment at affordable prices, with a focus on musical theatre.<sup>5</sup>

In 2011, as suggested by the Board of Directors, Starlight Theatre reevaluated its mission statement. Board members submitted suggestions and employees were emailed a potential draft to offer feedback. At the end of this process, the following was adopted in the fall of 2011 as the new mission statement:

Starlight Theatre Association is dedicated to producing, presenting and promoting excellence in musical theatre and the performing arts for diverse audiences of all ages, with continued programming for families and children. Starlight strives to enrich our region for all residents and visitors by building appreciation for the performing arts, making live theatre and music affordable and accessible, providing superior theatre arts education and community outreach programs, and delivering exceptional customer service. Starlight will remain a beloved Kansas City cultural tradition by devoting resources to preserving and enhancing

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3. "Strategic Plan: 1995," 1.

4. Ibid.

5. Starlight Theatre's *Fosse* Program, 2000, 50.

our home venue in Swope Park and creating new memories for generations to come.<sup>6</sup>

A reading of both mission statements expresses a stated commitment to family entertainment, a newly issued goal of providing arts education, and the preservation of the physical venue. The organizational directive of offering arts education is also seen in the vision statement, which has remained the same since 1995. “Starlight Theatre is the premiere entertainment treasure of the heartland, where performing arts share center stage with education.”<sup>7</sup>

The arts education component of Starlight’s current mission supports an important principle of the organization, bringing the community to Starlight. Throughout the organization’s audience surveys, patrons cite the “Starlight Experience” as one of the leading factors in purchasing tickets to the venue. Justin White, Starlight’s Vice President of Operations, described this intangible as “a sense of nostalgia,” tied to traditions of attending productions at Starlight and growing up with the organization.<sup>8</sup> Year-round education programming, previously offered children’s theatre, and the ability to always connect with Starlight through social media outlets has enabled the organization to remain part of its patrons’ lives year round.

### **Social Dimension Focus Area #1: Social Media**

Starlight has always welcomed community input, using this feedback to guide decisions, both large and small. The practice of creating a season through community

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6. “Mission and Vision Statement Page,” Starlight Theatre, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/about-us/mission-and-vision>.

7. Ibid.

8. Justin White, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, December 18, 2015. The concept of the Starlight Experience is explored further in Chapter 4.

input can be traced to Starlight's second season, which the organization formed using ticket holders' opinion cards.<sup>9</sup> Only recently, with the advancement of technology and access to online capabilities, has Starlight been able to engage a larger pool of individuals within the Social Dimension efficiently and in a cost-effective manner. In 1984, when Rohlf took over leadership of the organization, he brought with him his previous experience as a marketing executive. One of his first steps in his new position was to gather customer research to find out who was the typical Starlight patron and who wasn't attending productions.<sup>10</sup> It was important to know the demographics of Starlight's immediate, already engaged population of the Social Dimension. The next step would be to reach those individuals in a less passive manner, the audience survey. Previously, surveys were conducted infrequently and, with so many individuals on the Board's season planning committee, did not strongly guide show selection. The new yearly survey still sought the patrons' interest in a long list of productions (musicals, plays, variety shows) for the upcoming seasons, but went a step further and engaged them about all aspects of the venue.<sup>11</sup> From 1990-1993, Rohlf implemented the Starlight Theatre Audience Response Program (promoted as the S.T.A.R. Program) as a way for pre-designated audience members to fill out a "report card" after visiting the venue. Their ratings and comments allowed Starlight staff to spot-check their customer service and

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9. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1952), August 12, 1952, 5, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

10. Rohlf accomplished this by bringing in outside researchers who surveyed individuals throughout the metro Kansas City area, finding out their interests and theatre-going habits.

11. When interviewed by the author, Rohlf explained that the surveys didn't always result in a specific show being selected, but were used as a barometer in what style of show the audience would be excited for in future seasons.

venue operations on a variety of production nights.<sup>12</sup> Eighty-four groups and individuals were listed as part of the S.T.A.R. Program in Starlight's 1993 *Big River* program.<sup>13</sup> The downside of this program was that it gave a small, selective audience pool the majority of the influence. These individuals were often on corporate tickets or members of families with close ties to Starlight, which meant it was not a true cross section of Starlight patrons. Additionally, these report cards were manually filled out, making it difficult to assemble and analyze the data without the staff dedicating a large amount of time to the process. In an ideal situation, all patrons would be engaged to the same level of those in the S.T.A.R. Program, but the cost of printing surveys and the time it took to record the data was too great a barrier. Starting in 2007, following the launch of several online social media platforms, Starlight began an era of higher engagement with audience and non-audience members alike.

### ONLINE SEASON SURVEYS

In 2004, Starlight found a more effective means of gathering information from its patrons. By moving their season survey online, Starlight was able to ask more questions, reduce paper consumption and data entry time, and gain the ability to compartmentalize and dissect the results with greater ease. Before the electronic version, the paper surveys relied on capturing the opinions of audience members who took the time to fill out the surveys and turn them in to designated spots following performances or mailed them back to Starlight. This process was fraught with uncontrollable variables. If a season ticket member did not attend the show in which the survey was distributed, that

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12. Starlight Theatre's *Hello, Dolly!* Program, 1992. "Hello, Dolly!" 1992 program, 44.

13. Page 51.

individual was unable to provide input. Weather could hinder audience turnout for results. Patrons receiving a survey on a night of rain would naturally have a lower response rate, because of early departures and the tricky combination of paper surveys and water. The attendance count of a show can have a negative or positive influence on the survey. Appendix 2 provides an overview of the yearly survey. So, for instance, the decline in responses for the 2006 survey can be partially attributed to a low audience turnout for *Rent*, which was a departure from the classic and comedic offerings typically included in a Starlight season. Finally, the risk of human error was greater with the paper surveys throughout the process. The surveys were turned in to numerous volunteers at the gates and different locations within the venue, which required the paper sheets to trade hands several times before they reached the administrative offices. Within the office, some surveys were faxed and mailed in and travelled a similar path before reaching the designated counter. As the surveys were gathered, individuals would process the surveys by hand, creating elaborate tally sheets, which tracked what type of subscriber filled out the survey, what shows they wanted to see, and other key responses. The tallies were made on large grids and would be added up after all of the surveys had been collected. When looking at these sheets covered in checkmarks and lines, it is easy to comprehend a number being miscounted or mark being put out of place.<sup>14</sup>

The most striking advantage of Starlight's online survey is the ease with which it gathers data. From an environmental standpoint, paper surveys are no longer being used and wasted. Although Starlight has a recycling program, there was not one in place during the years of the paper surveys. Additionally, less office space is being consumed

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14. 1999 and 2000 survey responses, internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

by surveys and survey results. The Starlight archive room has copies of surveys dating back to 1999, corresponding invoices, and multiple printouts of the results. Now, surveys are gathered in one online location and are able to be digitally downloaded. Finally, the surveys are formatted, electronically distributed, and analyzed by one Starlight employee. This reduces the man hours spent printing, distributing, collecting, and tallying the individual sheets.

Starlight benefits from a lower cost ratio for gathering data with the online surveys. For instance, the 1999 Survey #3 brochure/questionnaire was printed at a cost of \$5,811.<sup>15</sup> The high price can be attributed with the quality of the survey, which was printed on a higher weight paper, in color, and with perforations to make for easy removal and mailing.<sup>16</sup> 35,000 copies of this particular survey were printed, making the price tag roughly seventeen cents before mailing. This survey garnered 4,217 responses, at a cost of \$1.38 per respondent after applying the \$5,811 price of printing. Between the 2002 and 2003 seasons, a 12-page “Starlight Theatre Patron Satisfaction Survey- 2002 Season” was mailed to 750 subscribers. The goal of this mailer was to update statistical information gathered during the 1995 strategic planning period. This lengthier survey cost \$3,900.55, or \$5.20 per survey mailed. Online, Starlight is able to conduct in-depth surveys similar to 1999’s Survey #3 and the 2002/2003 mailer, but with better return rates and more detailed responses. Currently, surveys are done with the Internet site SurveyMonkey. Starlight’s premium memberships costs \$300 annually. Different departments utilize SurveyMonkey throughout the year. But, even if the membership

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15. Internal invoice, internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

16. 2000 survey brochure, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

were only for the season survey, this year would have resulted in a pre-man hours cost of .04 cents per respondent.

The online surveys have evolved over the years, as those preparing the questions have nuanced the wording or way certain choices are presented. Since the first season survey on file, patrons have been asked to “select X number of shows from the list below.” Then, in 2009, respondents were asked to select their top 5 choices and then asked to reselect their top choice on the next question.<sup>17</sup> Although this could have been accomplished in the paper surveys, for the first time, Starlight was able to not only find the popular shows, but cross-reference that data within the same survey.<sup>18</sup> It is easier to provide the show list twice online and with no added costs, whereas paper surveys such a step would have been space and cost prohibitive. The current surveys list the shows to gauge interest on each of the titles individually and then lists them again for people to select their ideal five to six shows. In the 2012 Audience Survey, Starlight attempted to refine the show preference section even further. On Question #27, respondents were asked to, “Please rate how interested you would be in purchasing tickets for the following shows.” Below that direction were 40 titles listed in three categories, New Musicals (14 shows), Revivals (17 shows), and Family Show (9 shows). Next to each show title were the options “Very Interested,” “Somewhat Interested,” “Not Interested,” and “Unsure.” This new page of the survey allowed Starlight to see interest levels in each show, including fledgling titles that might be aiming for a future run on Broadway (*Matilda* and *Little Miss Sunshine*). These responses can then be broken down by patron ticket type;

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17. 2009 survey results, internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

18. The online survey collected a lot more demographics than the paper surveys could, which meant top shows are now sorted by age, gender, patron type (group, season), and a variety of other traits.

season, single, take 3, group, did not attend. Starlight is now able to produce a clearer picture of a season that would entice new patrons, season subscribers, and groups.<sup>19</sup>

One only has to look at the respondent numbers in Appendix 2 to comprehend how much the online survey has increased audience engagement with the season survey. Survey responses have more than doubled since 2007, the first year the survey was only available online. Additionally, the 2012 survey increased the categories of respondents, adding “did not attend” as an option for respondents to identify themselves. The logic put forth by the Marketing Department was that this group was filling out the survey in previous years, because they had attended shows in the past or registered their information, but did not have a clear way to communicate what type of customer they were on the current year’s survey.<sup>20</sup> In fact, out of the 7,478 respondents, 1,852 identified themselves within this new category (“did not attend”), 24.8% of the respondent pool.<sup>21</sup> An added benefit to the online survey is the ability to put in skip logic, which would take survey takers to specific questions based on the type of subscriber they selected. For instance, after a patron selected “did not attend,” they were taken to a list of reasons for not attending and given the option to select all that applied.

The ability to capture a clear picture of what different audience types are interested in via the online survey is extremely useful to Starlight. Rohlf used to rely on the surveys to guide the type of shows that interested audiences. He felt it was often more

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19. 2012 season survey, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

20. Starlight Theatre Board Meeting, October 30, 2012. The survey link is emailed out to individuals who opted in to receive emails, which means patrons might receive the link despite the fact they did not attend a show in a given year. Additionally, the link is posted on social media accounts, which can’t control who completes the survey.

21. 2012 survey internal results document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.



productive to uncover the genre or style that most appealed to his subscribers. With increased numbers in survey responses and the ability to pinpoint trends, certain shows may jump out from the survey. This was the case with the 2013 season. In the December 2012 issue of Starlight's printed newsletter, *Spotlight*, Starlight's then current Executive Producer Denton Yockey discusses how the survey influenced the show selections:

We take the results of our audience survey to heart. A good example is *Footloose*. That title has come up for the past two years as one of the top five shows Starlight audiences said they wanted to see. When it came up high in the results again this year, we quickly reworked the 2013 season line-up and decided to produce it ourselves. We don't program, however, completely by surveys.<sup>22</sup>

Prior to the survey, Starlight had decided upon all but one of the 2013 shows. Within the survey, they asked a specific question for an open show slot. "To help Starlight finalize the last show for its upcoming season, please choose the one you would most like to see in 2013." The choices were *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, *Bring it On: The Musical*, *CATS*, and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, the interest in *Footloose* on other survey questions moved it ahead of the original four options.

As the number of season survey respondents increase, it is important for Starlight to continually monitor where their responses are coming from. This knowledge will help guide marketing efforts, areas in need of outreach, and potentially untapped regions. As seen in Appendix 3, respondents are sprinkled throughout the United States of America, but are very clustered in the Kansas City metro area. Appendix 4 gives a closer look at the portion of the 6,225 respondents who provided a zip code. One problem that can be gleaned from these maps is a lack of input from the most immediate neighborhoods to

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22. *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, December 2012, 2-3.

23. 2012 season survey, question #26, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

Swope Park, which is indicated by a green space and pine tree. This lack of engagement highlights an issue within the Social Dimension, the importance of engaging the most immediate stakeholders. City officials have worked to encourage growth and improvements around Swope Park, which consists of low-income households. Over the years, Education and Outreach programs from Starlight work with these neighborhoods through the Starlight On Site, Vincent Legacy Scholarship, and the Community Tickets programs. Unfortunately, this survey shows a lack of input from these neighborhoods. For Starlight to gain support within the surrounding communities and learn what would best benefit those stakeholders, they must be engaged. By limiting surveys to current and past subscribers or, back in the years of paper surveys, only those attending specific shows, this crucial demographic is not being touched.

The pre-2007 season surveys were highly unsustainable because they had a low return rate, high associated cost, and did not engage a broad scope of patrons (Economic and Social Dimensions). Additionally, these surveys used a lot of paper and needed physical storage space (Environmental Dimension). The current online surveys strike a very sustainable balance between the three dimensions. The per-survey cost is low, the electric approach conserves paper, and Starlight receives a high response count (All Dimensions). For this practice to move even closer to the center of the sustainable chart Starlight needs to seek out survey responses from its surrounding communities (Social Dimension).

## ONLINE NIGHTLY SURVEYS

The increased success of the online season surveys encouraged Starlight to implement new ways of utilizing the resource. In 2011, the low cost and ability to quickly obtain results led Starlight to use the online surveys to email nightly surveys to subscribers who attended a Broadway show or concert. The goal was to obtain feedback throughout the summer, allowing problems to be dealt with, customers to be responded to, and front of house practices to be examined. Although this plan seemed balanced on the surface, staff members discovered there were flaws in obtaining so much data quickly.

“The nightly surveys, in my opinion, are currently out of control and unable to maintain in its current status. Initially, the nightly surveys were nothing more than a glimpse at what happened that night,” explained Adam Watson, Starlight’s Digital Marketing Manager.<sup>24</sup> The initial idea for the survey came from nightly paper surveys utilized in a Branson, Missouri, theatre.<sup>25</sup> Within one summer at Starlight, several individuals have seen some drawbacks to the process.

Watson pointed out the original inspiration surveys were anonymous and meant to alert staff of sound or seat problems, which could be easily fixed before the next performance. Much like the paper surveys once used by Starlight, the Branson theatre collected their nightly input by being handed back surveys as patrons left. As an online survey, it is difficult to provide the perfect window of opportunity for patrons to get online and submit their feedback. This leads to the potential of a problem from a

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24. Adam Watson, interview with author, Kansas City, MO, December 7, 2012.

25. Ibid.

Tuesday-night performance not being submitted until Sunday night. Another dilemma was that initial nightly surveys included feedback from irate customers threatening not to return to Starlight. Initially, surveys did not ask for email addresses, making it impossible for Starlight to contact responders and address any issues. A field was created to allow users to give contact information, but few opted to provide this information. So, the first question became “What is your e-mail address? (optional, but helps us respond to you).”<sup>26</sup> Email addresses were submitted more frequently, even with positive comments. Soon, Starlight was responding to a majority of survey respondents with simple messages of thanks, which became quite a time commitment during show weeks. This was added on top of the hour Watson estimated it took to wrap up and sort the data each day.<sup>27</sup>

Below is listed an example of the quantity of responses to the nightly 2012 surveys:

**Nightly surveys submitted during *Peter Pan***

July 24: 118 respondents (90 emails entered)  
July 25: 129 respondents (81 emails entered)  
July 26: 139 respondents (97 emails entered)  
July 27: 132 respondents (87 emails entered)  
July 28: 134 respondents (91 emails entered)  
July 29: 114 respondents (73 emails entered)<sup>28</sup>

So, through the course of this specific show week, 519 patrons were potentially expecting a response to survey comments. This would be in addition to any nightly reports given to the guest service tables.

Watson was not the only Starlight employee struggling with the frequency of the surveys. White, as Vice President of Operations, is responsible for the bulk of show

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26. Starlight Theatre nightly 8 p.m. Survey for *Aida*, August 11, 2012, stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

27. Adam Watson interview, 2012.

28. Starlight Theatre Online Survey Results, stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

night activity, from ticket takers, volunteers, guest assist workers, to housekeeping. Outside of concessions and show content, the majority of the remaining complaints or raves within the surveys would be directed to some part of his department. Given the amount of responsibilities he has on a given show night, receiving daily feedback makes it difficult to process anything but the most urgent problems:

When you've got, especially Broadway, shows back to back and you've got 4,000 people out here every night for 14 nights in a row, it (processing) just becomes physically impossible, in our current arrangement of replying to surveys. The people in the organization who can respond, who know how to answer all of these (problems), are also the people who don't have time to respond, to answer these. Well, don't have the time without an opportunity cost. Don't have the time to take care of this without letting something else slide.<sup>29</sup>

Both Watson and White indicated the need and usefulness of the nightly surveys. White highlighted the importance of giving an outlet for both negative and positive comments from patrons. For those who must have the most interaction with the nightly surveys, there is an imbalance in the amount of data and the available time to properly manage its handling.

In recent seasons, the approach to nightly surveys shifted and became more sustainable. By 2014 the online surveys mined information, provided places for feedback and examples, but did away with any identifiable questions, leaving the responses anonymous. By doing this, the surveys no longer put a strain on Starlight personnel who previously handled the required follow-up responses (Environmental Dimension). While this change eliminates a potential interaction with a patron (Social Dimension), it was an

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29. Justin White interview, 2012.

important step to take as the response count increased.<sup>30</sup> Finally, because the nightly surveys use the same online system as the season surveys, the cost is low (Economic Dimension). In 2012 the nightly surveys were outside the graph's sustainable center (still within a moderately sustainable area), but the adjustments, coupled with the increase in responses, moved the practice closer to center.

### FACEBOOK

On June 20, 2008, Starlight launched its own Facebook page.<sup>31</sup> A popular social media platform, Watson points to Facebook as one of the easiest ways to stay connected with Starlight's audience during the traditional off season.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the year, the Marketing Department uses Facebook to share stories, audition announcements, educational programming details, and a variety of tidbits. During the summer, postings tease upcoming shows and concerts, include songs to give a taste of the materials, and help educate the followers about production content. Currently, Starlight's Facebook page has 48,950 likes (followers). Compare that to other Kansas City arts organizations:

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art- 89,802 likes  
Sprint Center- 68,985 likes  
Live Nation Kansas City- 66,593 likes  
Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts- 43,334 likes  
Kansas City Repertory Theatre- 12,279 likes  
The Kansas City Symphony- 26,881 likes  
Kansas City Ballet- 20,258 likes  
Unicorn Theatre- 6,867 likes  
New Theatre Restaurant- 9,419 likes  
Coterie Theatre- 6,742 likes

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30. In 2012 *Peter Pan* produced 519 nightly surveys. By 2014, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* produced 1,028 surveys.

31. Date obtained from Starlight's Facebook timeline.

32. Adam Watson interview, 2012.

Spinning Tree Theatre- 4,380 likes  
Just Off Broadway Theatre- 1,551 likes<sup>33</sup>

In 2012, when Starlight's Facebook statistics were first pulled, the organization's following grew to 34,881 likes. As the platform expands its reach, Starlight's ability to use Facebook to immediately engage users online grows as well.

One of the draws of Facebook is the ability for users to share opinions, activities, likes, and dislikes. Watson tries to avoid moderating the opinionated posts on Starlight's Facebook page. He removes comments and posts that are off-topic or offensive. Watson welcomes users to turn to Facebook if they have something they need to share or raise an issue about. Such was the case during the 2012 season, when a displeased user posted on Starlight's Facebook page nine days before *La Cage Aux Folles* was to begin its week run at the theatre:

I'm writing to express my extreme disapproval of your Theatre's need to include a disclaimer with your upcoming production of *La Cage aux Folles* (sic) as including: 'adult themes and alternative lifestyles.' Adult themes I can understand but describing gay as an 'alternative lifestyle' in 2012 is unacceptable. Nudism is an alternative lifestyle. 'Swinging' is an alternative lifestyle. One's sexual orientation is not a 'lifestyle.' This is a Tony award winning piece of theater and its subject matter is well-known. I can't believe that your management felt the need to include this unfortunate wording. I'm glad I saw it BEFORE I bought tickets—you've lost my business with your poor choice of two little words which people quit using long ago to (sic) when describing sexual orientation.  
-Posted on Sunday, August 19, 2012 at 8:18 am

This post was on Starlight's page and could also be seen in the author's Facebook feed. In just 24 hours, this post garnered 422 likes and 73 comments posted in response to the initial entry. Some comments were anti-Starlight, "An organization that large should be

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33. All Facebook statistics gathered on March 22, 2016.

more cautious and aware. Guess it highlights that they are not an arts organization, just a big business with their priorities out of wack (sic).” Others believed the negative view would not matter. “See the show or don’t. Trust me, Starlight isn’t concerned if you’re offended or not.” Only a select few were supportive of Starlight. “Did you ever stop to think that maybe they were trying to say it in the most sensitive manner so they didn’t offend anyone?” Monday morning, 25 hours after the initial post, Starlight posted a detailed, lengthy response to this thread (See Appendix 5), which was met with approval and appreciation.<sup>34</sup> This incident is one of the examples Watson points to in support of Starlight’s use of social media, which easily connects the organization to the public:

Had this been several years ago (before Facebook) we wouldn’t have known (about the problem). Everybody would have complained, been upset, and talked about it amongst themselves, which I believe was going on already. ... That is the plus of social media. We are able to see an outcome and immediately respond.<sup>35</sup>

Although not all of the users were swayed by Starlight’s response, the most vocal and those in the initial thread expressed their appreciation for Starlight taking the time to respond and alter their wording.<sup>36</sup>

Facebook is a great, sustainable tool for Starlight’s Marketing Department. The platform has a large reach and accounts are free (Social and Economic Dimensions). However, the organization does spend money on the staff member who maintains the site as part of his duties (Watson) and those who assist him in creating text for posts (Economic Dimension). Additionally, the site is open to public posts around the clock,

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34. Facebook conversation thread was printed out by author in 2012.

35. Adam Watson interview, 2012.

36. The displeasure put forth by Facebook commenters during the *La Cage Aux Folles* example was extreme. That said, the Facebook page does deal with this type of negative feedback throughout a given year, whether due to anger over weather or a crowded ticket line for a concert going on sale.



whether Murphy is on the clock or not. So, there is a level of unsustainability tied to the inability of Starlight to monitor content around the clock (Environmental Dimension as it relates to workload).

#### 4SQUARE, FLICKR, GOOGLE+, PINTEREST, TWITTER, AND YOUTUBE

Starlight tries to utilize a variety of social media platforms, which might reach different users. Some of those in the list are less interactive; 4Square is basically a check-in application that tells users where you are located. Others, like Twitter, allow for more communication and sharing of opinions. Additionally, some of these platforms interact with each other. Pinterest posts are shared on Facebook. Youtube videos may be tweeted on Twitter. 4Square check-ins pop up in Facebook feeds. Alone, these platforms are less active than Facebook. But, when you consider all of them as group, they account for an additional 17,804 engaged users (not counting Flickr, which tracks differently). Even if some users belong to multiple platforms, they are receiving different impressions across the different media. Watson sees potential in all of these online avenues:

Pinterest just came out of nowhere all of a sudden. I started hearing about it late last summer (2011) and then about November-ish I started actually hearing people I knew on it. All the sudden, by summer, it was the new, hot social media. If anything, I can see it (social media) becoming more interactive in terms of videos and what Google+ has with hangouts. I just don't think anybody has truly figured out how to do it and do it successfully.<sup>37</sup>

Giving the volatility of any given platform's popularity, it is smart of Starlight to have a presence across a variety of social medias. For instance, as described above, by the time Pinterest became the "it site," the window of adoption and being a driver in the market

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37. Adam Watson interview, 2012.

was almost closed. Starlight is protecting itself against unexpected shifts in their user base by maintaining a presence on a variety of social media platforms.

Since this study first pulled data on these social media platforms in 2012, it can now track growth. Below you can see the user counts in 2012, followed by the 2016 numbers:

Social Media Platform Statistics (December 16, 2012)

4Square- 3,057 users checking in via this application  
Flickr- 2,514 photo views  
Google+- 168 users engaged  
Pinterest- 75 followers  
Twitter- 2,556 followers  
Youtube- 50 subscribers (84,398 video views)

Social Media Platform Statistics (March 22, 2016)

4Square- 4,894 visitors checking in via this application  
Flickr- 4,378 photos with 116,817 photo views  
Google+- 428 followers with 977,025 views  
Pinterest- 387 followers  
Twitter- 11.9 thousand followers  
Youtube- 195 subscribers (329,943 video views)

From 2012 to 2016, Starlight's Facebook page grew by 14,069 likes. Only Flickr and Twitter have seen remotely comparable growth. Other platforms showed growth in different ways, like Youtube's near quadrupling view count. Overall, the platforms demonstrate enough growth for Starlight to continue their presence.<sup>38</sup>

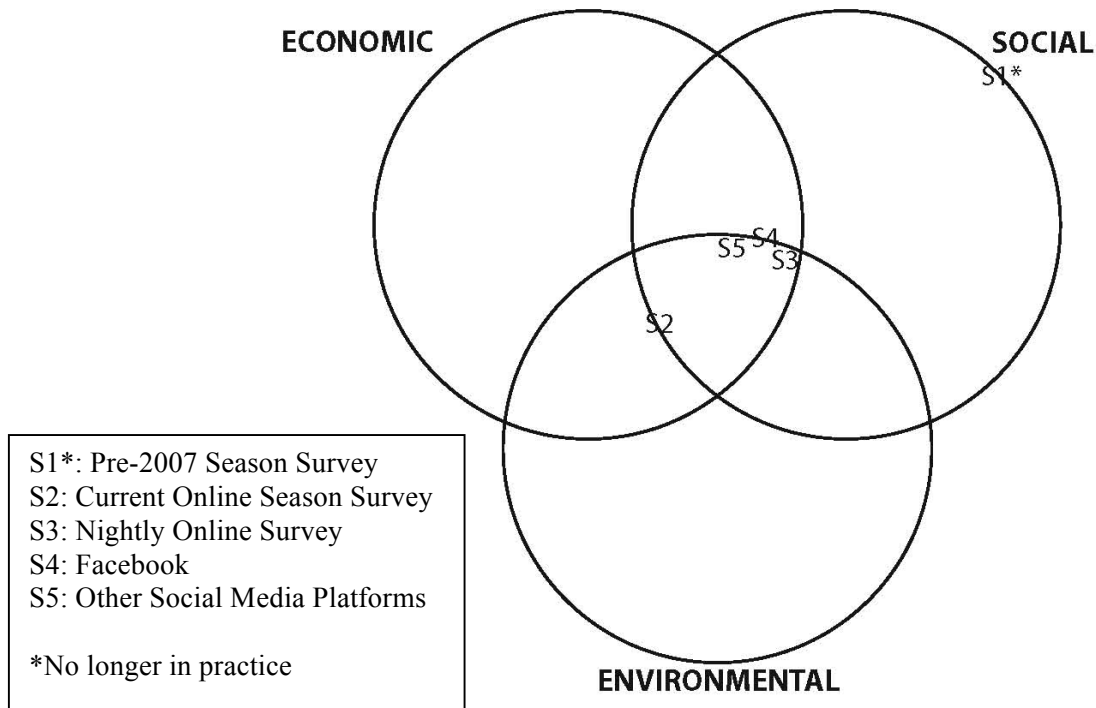
This collection of non-Facebook social media platforms provide Starlight with sustainable ways of connecting to a range of patrons. As with Facebook, there is little to no cost associated with these platforms (Economic Dimension). While users can post around the clock (a high workload potential), much of the content can be shared between platforms, which decrease the need for the Marketing Department to create text. For

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38. 4Square shows the least growth, but the platform does not require much monitoring by Starlight. 4Square is passive in that users "check in" at a location, which requires no action by the location/venue.

instance, posts on Facebook are frequently edited to lower the word count and reused on Twitter. So, overall, the total number of engaged patrons (Social Dimension) and low drain on physical resources (Environmental Dimension) combine to keep these platforms in the sustainable portion of the graph.

**Figure 6: Sustainability Snapshot of Social Dimension Focus Area #1 – Social Media Practices**



**Social Dimension Focus Area #2: Educational Programs**

Starlight’s internship program, the organization’s first education program, was started in 1984 to “create a bridge between the academic and professional communities, to give aggressive area students a chance to attain professional experience at an early

stage in their developments.”<sup>39</sup> During the 1995 strategic planning process, Starlight’s leadership decided to expand upon the organization’s existing education program:

Attempting to answer the question ‘what role should Starlight play within our community?’ led the conversation beyond what happens on the Starlight stage. As the theatre (Starlight) has long been associated with family entertainment and involvement of young people, the natural extension was to develop programs that touched more young people in meaningful ways.<sup>40</sup>

Starlight began to develop educational programming without a structured plan or timeline for the process. Rohlf directed his staff to brainstorm and “present those ideas which seemed to connect with the organization in the most meaningful ways.”<sup>41</sup> Despite an enthusiasm from staff, Starlight struggled to launch any new educational offerings. Through the years that followed, several Directors of Education came on board but progress was not made on new programming. Anne Johnston, Starlight’s Director of Education from 2005-2009, came into the organization with the understanding that education was put into the mission statement in 1995, “but then nothing happened. After seven years (2002), they decided ‘let’s focus on education or take it out of the mission statement.’”<sup>42</sup> In 2002, Starlight invested in education by hiring Courtney Adler was hired as Associate Producer and Director of Education. During her first year with Starlight, Adler helped launch two programs, the Blue Star Awards and Starlight STARS of Tomorrow. Currently, as of 2016, the Education Department is engaged in eleven

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39. Starlight Theatre’s *The Wizard of Oz* Program, 1984, 35. The internship program will be explored in Chapter 3, given the students’ sizeable impact of the organization’s workforce.

40. Bob Rohlf, e-mail message to author, May 1, 2008.

41. Ibid.

42. Anne Johnston, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, April 18, 2008.

programs: Bob Rohlf Internship Program, Blue Star Awards, Starlight STARS of Tomorrow, Camp Take-a-Bow, Frosty Fun Days, Act Like An Animal Camp, Master Classes, Vincent Legacy Scholarship, Just Imagine, Spring Break Camp, and Starlight ‘Customized.’

Through interviews with several of Starlight’s Directors of Education, past and present, a common problem for all was the need to fight for institutional support. Amy Reinert, Starlight’s current Director of Education, joined Starlight as Education Coordinator, under Johnston’s leadership. Johnston told Reinert the Education Department had to fight tooth and nail for everything within the organization, an Education Department perception that still exists.<sup>43</sup> While still with the organization, Johnston elaborated, “The main goal (of Starlight) is to produce Broadway shows. I schedule my classes a year in advance and then a concert comes in. I can’t compete with that revenue.”<sup>44</sup> Four years later, this same issue exists and was apparent to Elizabeth Ingram, Starlight’s 2012 Education Intern. Ingram has interned at both a children’s theatre (Lexington Children’s Theatre) and a theatre with an Education Department (Starlight). Ingram witnessed a difference between how the two theatre types engaged their respective educational programming:

Their (other Starlight Departments) main goal, their number one priority a majority of the time is not education. ...At the (Lexington) Children’s Theatre and at other children’s theatres I’ve seen, even the accounting people, even the people in costumes, even the people designing the sets and building the props, their goal is for children’s lives to be changed. I wouldn’t necessarily say that Donna (Thomason)’s priority at her job (Epic Entertainment) is seeing the lives of children changed. It shouldn’t be. That’s

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43. Amy Reinert, interview by author Kansas City, MO, March 26, 2013.

44. Anne Johnston interview, 2008.

not her function, that's not where she is. So, regardless of the mission statement, the entire company (Starlight) is moving in one direction and a lot of times it doesn't necessarily feel like that direction is education.<sup>45</sup>

Despite these internal struggles for space and resources, the Education Department has grown to offer nine educational and two outreach programs.<sup>46</sup>

### BLUE STAR AWARDS

The Blue Star Awards Program was inspired by and based upon the Paper Mill Playhouse's Rising Star Awards. The Rising Star Awards were started in 1996 to honor achievements in high school musical theatre. During a 2001 producers' conference Bob Rohlf attended a seminar about Paper Mill's program.<sup>47</sup> After hearing of the support Paper Mill had received during its seven years, Rohlf returned to Starlight with plans to launch a high school musical awards program for the Kansas City area. A year later, Adler was tasked with researching and structuring the new program. She attributed the ability to quickly get the program on its feet, within a year, to Paper Mill's willingness to share information and guidance.<sup>48</sup> At the same time Starlight was developing their program, the national Cappies Awards were preparing to begin a branch of their program in Kansas City. Meetings were held between Starlight and the Cappies to discuss their goals, in case the initiatives could be combined. Although both programs would be

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45. Elizabeth Ingram, interview by author Kansas City, MO, August 3, 2012.

46. For this study, the Education Department programs that do not charge a fee and are not open to the general population are categorized as outreach programs. All Business Is Like Show Business is an exception. While it did not charge a fee during its existence, the ultimate goal was to license the program for a fee.

47. Rohlf interview, 2012.

48. Courtney Adler, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, December 11, 2012.

presenting awards for high school musicals, the two programs felt they were both going in different directions. The Cappies included awards for plays and were adjudicated and decided upon by students. Starlight's program would be focused on musicals, reflecting the musical-centric offerings of the organization, and be adjudicated by theatre professionals. After reaching out to multiple donors and companies, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City sponsored the program and, inspired by the colorful name of its benefactor, the Blue Star Awards were announced.<sup>49</sup>

In the fall of 2002 packets were sent out to local educators detailing the adjudicating process, awards categories, and scholarship application requirements. Schools would pay a \$40 registration fee and provide production details. Theatre professionals would undergo training to serve as adjudicators and be paid \$35 and reimbursed mileage for travelling to the shows. Three adjudicators, who attended anonymously, watched each spring musical. After viewing the productions, adjudicators would provide feedback. Categories were judged on a four-point scale: Outstanding (1), Excellent (2), Very Good (3), and Good (4). High schools would be sent their commentary for each category, but not the scoring. Prior to the awards, a Nomination Committee would convene to determine nominees and winners in 22 categories, plus an Outstanding Achievement in Technical Production award and two Rising Star Scholarships (See Appendix 6 for a complete list of 2003 Blue Star Awards categories and Appendix 7 for the 2014-2015 Blue Star Awards categories). Starlight representatives would deliver nominations to schools. Starlight would hold the Blue Star Awards Ceremony on its stage in late May. Starlight downplayed the competitive nature

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49. Robert Trussell, "Stars bright: Theater and insurer establish high-school musical awards," *The Kansas City Star*, February 20, 2003, E-1.

of the program, but felt the physical awards were essential. “Walk into the main entrance of any high school in the country and what do you see? Sports trophies,” explained Rohlf. “You rarely see recognition of other activities.”<sup>50</sup> Starlight hoped a successful first year of the Blue Star Awards would lead to better recognition of theatre programs.

Before celebrating the accomplishments of local high schools, Adler would need to entice teachers to participate in the program. Eighty-eight area high schools were contacted. Adler recalls struggling to engage the arts teachers. A large launch event was held by Starlight, inviting teachers to learn about the new program, offer suggestions, and ask questions. Adler created packets, an informative PowerPoint presentation, and invited Rohlf to speak. Of the 88 invited teachers, only three were in attendance.<sup>51</sup> Some teachers sent letters declining to participate in the program, citing budget concerns, the competitive nature of the program, and the desire to not have their school’s work criticized.<sup>52</sup> Rohlf responded to these teachers and encouraged them to attend the awards ceremony in the spring to see how the program supported students. A total of eighteen high schools registered to participate in that year’s inaugural Blue Star Awards Program.<sup>53</sup>

Since that first year, the Blue Star Awards categories have been changed and adjusted, often to reinforce the focus on student-produced work. Some categories (Performance by a Teacher or Alumni, Lobby Display, Program Design, Performance by Character Actor, Group Ensemble) were eliminated completely. The Scenic Design

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50. Bob Rohlf, e-mail, 2008.

51. Courtney Adler interview, 2012.

52. Ibid.

53. Starlight Theatre Participation Information, Education Department internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.



(2005) and Costumer Design (2009) categories, altered in different years, became tiered categories. These categories now have two tiers, which are determined by the budgets of all participating productions. A Blue Star Award is presented to the winner in both tiers, with Tier I consisting of the smaller budgeted design work and Tier II being the larger budgets. The 2010 categories removed the category of Direction by a Teacher, Musical Direction, or Choreography and Staging. Instead, these categories became the Outstanding Artistic Contribution by a Student. This new category awarded a nominated student who accomplished excellent work within the areas of direction, music direction, and/or choreography.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to adjusting the categories, the adjudication process has been changed and streamlined. Through 2008, full-time Starlight Theatre employees would frequently serve as adjudicators and other employees made up the Nomination Committee. The adjudicators and Nomination Committee no longer includes Starlight employees. This was changed to keep Starlight as the impartial facilitators of the program. Adjudicators are theatre professionals, working artists, and educators with a master's degree in the area. Adjudicators must see at least three shows in a season, exposing them to the range of work being done by area high schools. The Nomination Committee, made up of 6 or more individuals who saw 6 or more shows in a season, meets to synthesize all of the scoring and commentary data. In 2015, the Nomination Committee met for a total of 46 hours to reach the final list of nominees and winners.<sup>55</sup> Originally, adjudicators filled out scoring and commentary sheets by hand. By the second year, this process became

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54. Category information gathered from Blue Star Awards Ceremony programs.

55. Ibid.

digitalized as a word document, which was then emailed to the Education Department. In the fall of 2011, SurveyMonkey collected the adjudicator responses online, the same website the Marketing Department utilizes for patron surveys. Once all of the shows are adjudicated, a Nomination Committee makes final decisions on nominations and winners.

During the 2012-2013 Blue Star Awards season, the program neared capacity for participants. For the fall and spring semesters, 43 participating schools presented 50 productions. Currently, there is no cap on the number of participating schools accepted within a given year. This specific year pushed the limit because of where the productions landed on the calendar. Of those 50 productions, 31 of them were staged during the month of November.<sup>56</sup> With three adjudicators attending each production, November 2011 required 93 adjudication spots. New schools were advised they might not be able to participate depending on the scheduling constraints of November 8-10 and November 15-17, the busiest show nights for that year's Blue Star Awards. In 2014, November weekends underwent a revised set of guidelines. For any given November weekend, the first ten returning schools to register are guaranteed admittance. Any schools past that 10-show maximum are only accepted into the program if Starlight's staff determines they can secure adjudicators and videography for the additional productions.<sup>57</sup>

Since its inception, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City (BCBSKC) has provided financial support for the Blue Star Awards. For the first couple of years, the cost of the program was \$30-35 thousand per year. More elements have been added to the

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56. These numbers were gathered from Starlight's Blue Star Awards webpage, which listed all participating Blue Star Awards productions.

57. 2014 Blue Star Awards Rules and Regulations, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

program, including a video crew who films each production for the Nomination Committee to reference, a raise in adjudicator payment (\$45 per show), printing cost for the awards ceremony, and materials for the increased number of participating schools. The cost of the program now ranges \$50-55 thousand per year.<sup>58</sup> Without financial support, Starlight would not be able to present this educational program.<sup>59</sup> During the 2014-2015 Blue Star Awards season, the Blue Star Awards materials referenced BCBSKC differently. Instead of “presented by” now Starlight uses the language “supported in part by” when referencing BCBSKC on its website. While the specifics of BCBSKC’s current contributions are private, this adjustment in language and minimizing of the company’s logo on materials suggest a decline in funding.

Overall, the Blue Star Awards is a highly sustainable program. Its consistent yearly growth marks interest from the community (Social Dimension). The organization needs to address different program elements that pertain to the Environmental and Economic Dimension. First, if Starlight wishes to continue growing the program, the carrying capacity of November weekends will ultimately come to a head. As of the 2014-2015 Blue Star Awards season, no school has been turned away in November, but it is likely to occur in the near future (Environmental Dimension).<sup>60</sup> On a financial front, securing full, multi-year funding for educational programs is ideal. It would increase

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58. This cost does not take into account Education Department personnel salaries. Additionally, the amount fluctuates every year depending upon the number of schools, shows, and printing costs for the nominations and ceremony.

59. This information was obtained through the March 26, 2013 interview with Reinert and details provided in conjunction with BCBSKC’s Broadway League National Award (2013).

60. Should Starlight enforce a stricter 10-show weekend policy it might see an initial decline in participating schools, because it will turn away productions. There’s the possibility that schools may slowly adjust their schedules and return, but it’s impossible to gauge these unknown factors.

sustainability, or at least the perception of it, if BCBSKC was still a full funder or another corporation took its place. However, given the program's large reach and history, it is likely Starlight would support the Blue Star Awards should no sponsor exist.<sup>61</sup>

### ACT LIKE AN ANIMAL CAMP

Now in its eleventh year, Act Like An Animal Camp is Starlight's earliest camp-model program. The Education Department offered classes under the umbrella title of Starlight Theatre Academy, but these programs met once a week for five to eight weeks for an hour or two, similar to a dance class. Currently, Act Like An Animal Camp brings campers, five to ten years of age, to Starlight from 8:50 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. for ten days (Monday-Friday). Reinert followed this successful camp model when Starlight Theatre Academy ceased to offer classes. This led to Starlight focusing on bringing students to the venue when they were out of school and the creation of three new camps (Camp Take-a-Bow, Frosty Fun Days, Spring Break Camp). This section will explore Act Like An Animal Camp's origin and structure, which will give insight into the sustainability of Starlight's camp model.

Act Like An Animal has seen growing success over the past eleven years, with management capitalizing of growth opportunities for the program. In 2006, Starlight's season included *Dr. Dolittle*, an animal-filled musical. This show was the inspiration for Talk to the Animals, a camp presented in partnership with Starlight's neighbor, the Kansas City Zoo. Talk to the Animals enrolled up to thirty campers, ages five to seven, at

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61. During a March 22, 2016 electronic correspondence with Andrew Lang, Starlight Theatre's Development Coordinator, he pointed out that the organization has multiple pools of money for education programs. So, even if BCBSKC covered a smaller percentage of the program's cost, money from the Stars of Education Fund or other sources may be put towards the funding gap.

a cost of \$300 per camper.<sup>62</sup> The campers, split into two groups, travelled together and spent their mornings at Starlight and afternoons at the Zoo. In 2007 the program was renamed Act Like An Animal Camp. In its second year, the camp cost \$350 and took campers to the Zoo in the morning, when temperatures were cooler. After two years of success the camp grew, and in 2008 Act Like An Animal Camp enrolled sixty campers. The campers were divided into four groups by age, with the younger two groups spending their mornings at the Zoo. In the afternoon the groups would rotate, with younger campers at Starlight. In its third year, Act Like An Animal doubled in size. Then, in 2010, the program underwent its last significant change. Instead of only one two-week session, Act Like An Animal Camp was offered twice during the summer, enrolling up to sixty campers in each session. Additionally, the age range expanded to include ten-year-old campers. Finally, in 2013, the enrollment cost increased to \$400. Over an eight-year period, the potential gross revenue went from \$9,000 (2006) to \$48,000 (2013).<sup>63</sup> The specifics of the partnership between Starlight and the Zoo are not made public, but given the longevity of the program and potential revenue growth, it is reasonable to assume Act Like An Animal Camp has been financially successful for both organizations.

Act Like An Animal Camp is a highly sustainable program for both Starlight and the Zoo. The partnership wisely started out small, making sure patron interest for such a

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62. According to page 3 of Starlight Theatre's "FY 2016 Annual Report," Talk to the Animals received funding from Magic Touch Cleaning, Inc., UMB Bank and an anonymous donor. The program received funding for only a few years, but the financial support would provide both organizations with financial security while they developed program logistics and costs.

63. All data was obtained from internal Starlight Education Department files, mainly the yearly Act Like An Animal Camp press release and registration form, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

program existed, while receiving financial support for the new camp. Through the years the program size and cost adjusted, allowing more campers to attend and increasing potential revenue. Currently, the program is self-funded. In 2013, the success of Act Like An Animal Camp inspired Starlight to offer Camp Take-a-Bow. This new offering, not in partnership with the Zoo, was for campers ages eleven to fourteen, and filled a programming gap for theatre students who were too old for Act Like An Animal Camp (Social and Economic Dimension). At Starlight, Act Like An Animal Camp requires two rooms and use of the restrooms for four weeks during the summer. Frequently camp days overlap the Broadway season shows or concerts. Concerts and sometimes Broadway shows need to use the same rooms, creating a space issue. The difficulty of maneuvering the summer calendar most likely means Act Like An Animal Camp has reached its growth capacity. Additionally, if Starlight was interested in expanding this offering, it could potentially explore a Starlight-only camp for this age group. The Zoo offers programming for this age range outside the Starlight partnership, and Starlight could do the same. By offering a program only at Starlight, the organization can potentially create a deeper connection between the memories of campers and Starlight (Social and Environmental Dimension).

### ALL BUSINESS IS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS

The final educational program examined in this section is “All Business is Like Show Business,” a three-week interactive business simulation for high school students. The curriculum grew out of existing materials being used in high school business classes. Students had traditionally used a generic Acme Business to explore the different

workplace departments and gain knowledge in how to run a business.<sup>64</sup> Launched in 2001, Starlight’s newest program engaged students with a more tangible, real world business simulation—in other words, the students would create their own classroom-based Starlight Theatre business.

In *All Business is Like Show Business*, students learned about the different departments of Starlight through a DVD, which contained interviews with key staff members. Next, the students interviewed for different positions available at the classroom-based Starlight. Students were responsible for selecting a musical to produce, setting ticket prices, budgeting for advertising, and responding to unexpected problems.<sup>65</sup> In the case of an outdoor theatre like Starlight, the hurdle thrown at students was frequently rain on a show night. At the end of the simulation, the final project took the form of a presentation for the Board of Directors, providing an overview of their businesses’ success or failings.<sup>66</sup>

The curriculum fulfilled seven objectives:

1. Comprehend state and national economics standards by working through a business application.
2. Develop and use techniques appropriate for investigating a given topic.
3. Synthesize and apply data to problematic situations without easy solutions.
4. Use critical thinking and problem-solving skills to analyze a business and its procedures, policies, and real-life emergencies.
5. Work together as a team, resolve conflicts and differences using techniques of persuasion, compromise and negotiation.

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64. “FY 2005 Annual Report,” Starlight Theatre publication, Kansas City, MO, 8.

65. Since this simulation was set at Starlight, the “unexpected problem” typically given to students was rain on a show night, which resulted in refunds and a drop in planned revenue.

66. “All Business is Like Show Business,” Instructor’s Guide: Project Overview, 4, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

6. Develop and demonstrate critical writing, listening and presentation skills.
7. Demonstrate acceptance of self and others by considering alternative views and strategies.<sup>67</sup>

The simulation program was funded by a grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Project Explore, creators of Earth Works, helped Starlight structure and package the curriculum. While curriculum was being developed, All Business is Like Show Business underwent testing at Liberty High School, located in Liberty, MO (21.12 miles from Starlight). The course was taught in four classes over four semesters. “Final test scores showed retention of the knowledge at higher levels than scores pre-simulation.”<sup>68</sup>

In 2008, Johnston explained that All Business is Like Show Business was currently on hold. Following the classroom trials, it became evident that the curriculum would need to undergo further revisions, making it more accessible to students and teachers. Due to time constraints, the project was put on the backburner in 2006, but was never reengaged.<sup>69</sup> “It was one of those projects, ‘yeah, this is a great idea,’ but it was never a big, huge priority.”<sup>70</sup> As of 2015, the program materials are still stored at Starlight, but no further action has ever been put forth with the simulation. Over the years, all of the Starlight staff that was part of the curriculum’s development and launch have left the organization, leaving a large information gap should Starlight Theatre attempt to revive the program. Finally, the program-carrying load of the Education

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67. Ibid, 5.

68. “FY 2005 Annual Report,” 8.

69. Ann Johnston interview, 2008.

70. Bob Rohlif interview, 2012.



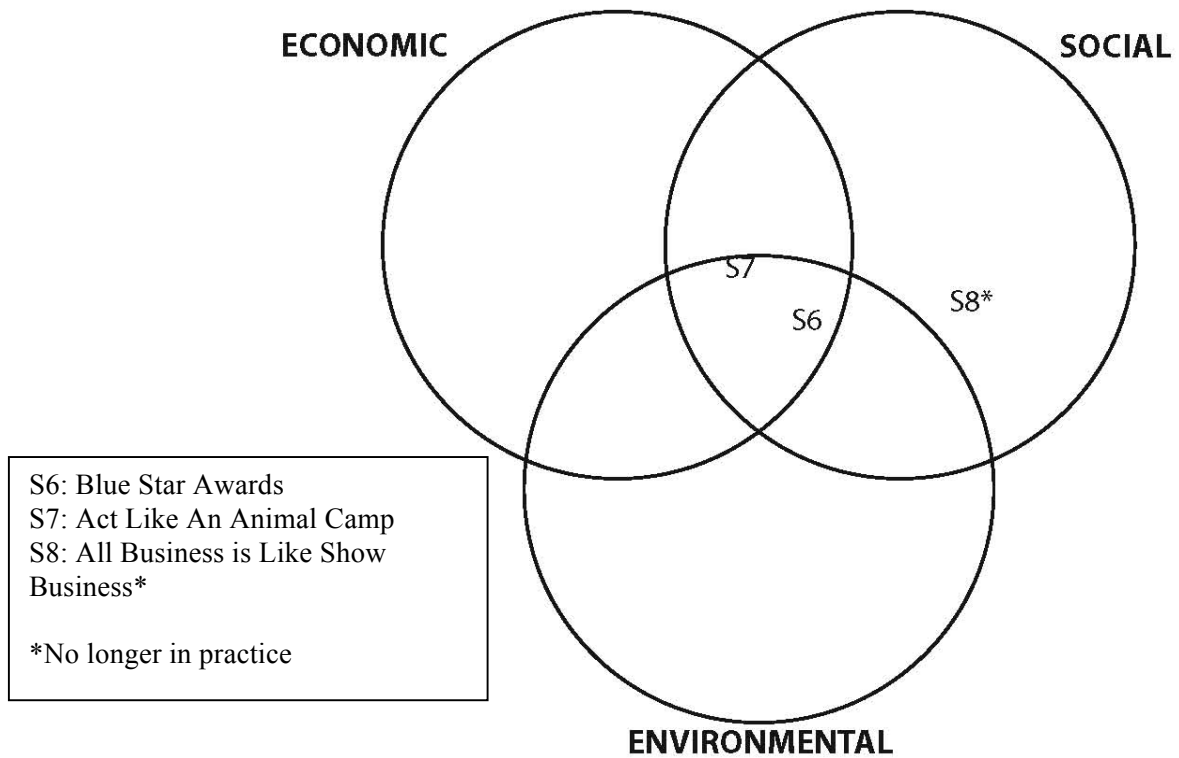
Department, which will be explored in the Environmental Dimension, has reached capacity. For any re-launching of All Business is Like Show Business, some other education or outreach program would need to be eliminated.<sup>71</sup>

All Show Business is Like Show Business suffered from being low on the priority list and requiring a high level of employee engagement (Environmental Dimension). The pilot schools showed positive results (Social Dimension) and the funding was subsidized during this time (Economic Dimension). So, the Environmental Dimension drain resulted in the suspension of the program. Even after being suspended, the Environmental Dimension suffers from this program because the hardcopy materials take up storage space. Ultimately, despite the suspension of the simulation program, this practice will be plotted on the graph as still existing, because the materials are causing a space issue in the present. After roughly eight years, Starlight must explore revamping and launching this program or minimize what is stored in the office. The current limbo stage is not ideal for the organization.

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71. Amy Reinert interview, 2013.

**Figure 7: Sustainability Snapshot of Social Dimension Focus Area #2 – Educational Programs**



### **Social Dimension Focus Area #3: Outreach Programs**

While one of Starlight’s outreach programs can trace its history back to Starlight’s opening night (Community Ticket Program), the other initiatives have only been around for the last decade. With a limited history and scope, this would indicate that the area of outreach programming could still be developed within the organization, but there are identifiable hurdles to such progress. The recent addition of outreach programs fits the history of Starlight’s financials. Given the necessity to stay afloat with the day-to-day operations, it would have been difficult for Starlight to dedicate many resources to outreach efforts.

The outreach programs can be placed into two different categories, passive and proactive. The passive programs (performance opportunities for local youth, signed performances for the deaf, descriptive listening performances for sight-impaired patrons, scholarships for classes) are available, but the opportunities must be sought out by the community members. When asked, individuals will be given the information on when signed performances are made available each run, where the Community Ticket Application can be found, or when Starlight will be holding youth auditions. Outside of an email blast or online posting, the onus is on the individual to find these outreach programs. The proactive programs (Community Tickets, Just Imagine, Vincent Legacy Scholarship, Community Stage Performers, Starlight On Site) reach out to community groups and schools. In these instances, Starlight attempts to raise awareness of the programs and engage any parties that would benefit from the initiatives.

#### COMMUNITY TICKET PROGRAM

As discussed in Chapter One, the Starlight Theatre Committee relied heavily on the MUNY as an organizational model. Much of Starlight's charter can be traced to the MUNY, from a \$1 symbolic rent to the city to the Community Ticket Program. A clear connection can be drawn from the MUNY's Community Ticket Program to Starlight's from a December 2, 1949 letter. In the letter, written by B. Baumes, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation of Saint Louis, to J.A. Lacy of Kansas City's Board of Park Commissioners, Baumes explains the MUNY's free seats. "The Association provides 1,500 free seats (at the rear) for each performance. In addition, approximately 2,000 seats

are provided each Monday night for distribution to the various welfare organizations.”<sup>72</sup>

When Starlight opened in 1951, the following appeared in the contract between the Park Board of the City of Kansas City and the Starlight Theatre Association:

(Starlight Theatre Association) will provide in at least seventy-five per cent (sic) (75%) of its performances up to four hundred (400) seats which will be made available to the public without charge, such tickets to be distributed by such method as may from time to time be approved by the Board of Park Commissioners.<sup>73</sup>

As a result of this agreement, 364 tickets are given to community groups each performance. Starlight’s Community Ticket Program was the source of much confusion and frustration during its first season, leading the Association to create a Free Seats Committee within its Board of Directors. According to meeting minutes, the distribution of the free tickets did not go smoothly and was a huge distraction to the box office.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, the board members became very focused on how much revenue was potentially lost by giving away tickets.<sup>75</sup> In fact, Starlight Theatre Association went as far as to have a lawyer review the free ticket clause in the contract. Although the lawyer saw no ground on which the Park Board could demand Starlight give away seats, it was also impossible to deny that both parties had agreed upon that part of the contract.<sup>76</sup> Similar to

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72. Baumes letter to Lacy, December 2, 1949, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

73. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1952), February 1, 1952, Free Seats Committee Meeting, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

74. Ibid.

75. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1951), October 9, 1951, Executive Committee, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

76. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1952), May 20, 1952, Executive Committee, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

the MUNY, Starlight began bringing allied charities to Monday performances.<sup>77</sup> It was decided that Starlight would try to distribute the free tickets to interested welfare and charity groups for Monday night performances, typically considered a preview night, and then any remaining ticket amount required by the contract would be distributed at the theatre on a first come, first served basis.<sup>78</sup> For the first few seasons, tickets were given out in large quantities to umbrella charitable groups, who in turn were suppose to allocate the tickets to their participating organizations. This practice was stopped in 1955 and individual charitable groups were required to submit an application and official request to Starlight for Monday night tickets.<sup>79</sup> Over the years Starlight strove to get the free tickets into the hands of charitable organizations, thus eliminating the need for any free ticket giveaways to the general public. It would be almost fifty years before the Community Ticket Program underwent any major overhauls.

In 2001, when Kelli Jenkins began working at Starlight Theatre as Rohlfs' assistant and Company Manager, one of her duties was to oversee the Community Ticket Program. She began working with the list of groups from the previous year. Until this point, groups would call and request a specific amount of tickets, contact information would be taken, and the tickets would be allocated and distributed. Jenkins added additional steps to the process. Interested groups had to fill out an application, defining their group and providing proof of a charitable status. Also, she began tracking how many

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77. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1952), July 15, 1952, Executive Committee, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

78. "Exhibit A: Report of Temporary Committee to Study Free Seat Situation at Starlight Theatre," Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1951), December 27, 1951, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

79. "Exhibit D: Application for Free Tickets, Starlight Theatre, 1955 Season," Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1955), January 20, 1955, Box Office Committee, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

tickets were allotted each group and how many were used. This information was particularly useful for groups who requested tickets, but had poor attendance the year before. In 2011, Bob Potemski, Starlight's House Manager at the time, took over the Community Ticket Program. Potemski moved up the application deadline for these tickets, requesting forms be returned to Starlight by March 15.<sup>80</sup> Potemski explained that having the requests turned in months before the season gave him more time to allocate tickets. For instance, he could contact groups that might have requested a Friday night that was unavailable and see if they could attend on a Tuesday. "The downside of doing it (the deadline) earlier," stated Potemski, "is that it is harder for organizations to anticipate their needs."<sup>81</sup>

The biggest problem facing this outreach program is lack of use. Many charitable groups will request tickets but not attend their designated production or arrive with a fraction of their projected group size. During the 2012 Broadway season, 6,963 tickets were distributed to 65 not-for-profit organizations (107 each on average), but only 3,511 were actually used and scanned at the venue. This resulted in only 50.42% of the community-allocated tickets being used.<sup>82</sup> The season's tickets can be broken down as follows:

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80. "2013 Community Ticket Application," accessed in 2012 via the Starlight Theatre website, 1.

81. Bob Potemski, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, February 15, 2013.

82. "2012 Community Relations Final Report," Starlight Theatre electronic internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

<b>Show Title</b>	<b>Tickets Distributed</b>	<b>Tickets Used</b>	<b>Percentage Used</b>
<i>In the Heights</i>	1447	801	55.36%
<i>RAIN</i>	493	288	58.42%
<i>Addams Family</i>	1288	683	53.03%
<i>Memphis</i>	1328	710	53.46%
<i>Peter Pan</i>	1192	751	63%
<i>La Cage Aux Folles</i>	1215	278	22.88% <sup>83</sup>

By giving out the tickets prior to the productions, Starlight loses the ability to easily control their use. Despite the distribution difficulty, the process used in 1951 would allow Starlight to offer tickets to the not-for-profits and then release unclaimed/unused tickets to the general public. As it is, 3,452 tickets were left unused by this outreach program, preventing it from being as effective as it was originally intended.

Another important step in analyzing the Community Ticket Program is to examine where the not-for-profits being assisted are located. The map in Appendix 8 shows most of the 65 not-for-profits from 2012 by zip code. There is a concentration of organizations located in North Kansas City and a good overall spread across the metro area. On the downside, there is a rather sparsely populated bubble of recipients around Swope Park and Starlight. For this program to not only benefit the Kansas City community, but also the immediate neighborhood, attempts should be made to increase the number of groups in Starlight's immediate area receiving these tickets.

A big change to this program came in 2013 when it was placed under the charge of Barb Schulte, Director of Communications and Outreach. Since Schulte's position encompasses outreach to the community, she is able to engage community groups more and monitor groups that underuse the tickets. Instead of sending tickets in the mail as her predecessors did, Schulte has several days when community group representatives come

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83. Ibid.

to Starlight to obtain their tickets. This step allows Schulte to meet representatives face-to-face and there is an ownership to the tickets one associates when making the trip to pick them up. When they come in the mail automatically tickets might be easier to ignore or undervalue. While Schulte is still striving to strengthen this program, her minor changes and focus moved the program from being passive to proactive. Additionally, in 2014 the program had a 59% utilization rate, roughly an 8.5% positive increase from the 2012 numbers.<sup>84</sup>

This program is sustainable, because it is built into the organization's agreements. Therefore, as long as the organization exists so does the Community Ticket Program. The graphing of this program is connected more to its effectiveness, because its sustainability is assured. Schulte has already improved the dreary utilization rate, and can strengthen the program by engaging community groups surrounding the venue. Additionally, even though the utilization rate could improve, the program did allow over 6,600 community members to attend a Starlight show in 2014. So, while the program has room for growth, it is already helping a sizeable population (Social Dimension). While the seats do represent lost potential revenue, the 364 Community Ticket Program seats aren't part of the equation when Starlight is considering the financials of a production. Also, Broadway shows rarely play to capacity audiences and this program allows seats that would likely go unused to serve a purpose (Economic Dimension). The venue additionally benefits from the audience looking fuller by filling these seats. The fuller venue adds to the "Starlight Experience," giving audience members the perception they are part of a popular event (Environmental Dimension). Overall, this is an effective, sustainable program with the potential for growth.

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84. Barb Schulte, e-mail message to author, March 23, 2016.



## STARLIGHT ON SITE

The Starlight On Site Program (S.O.S.) is seen within Starlight Theatre as an opportunity for the organization to bring theatre training to surrounding middle schools. Starlight wanted neighborhood students to see the organization as a beacon, a way to connect to the arts in their own backyard. Over seven years S.O.S. has spanned three Directors of Education and Outreach and been offered with varied success at three different schools. Starlight, using funds raised in recent capital campaigns and donations earmarked for educational programming, funds S.O.S. The structure of S.O.S. has undergone significant changes through the years. By funding the program itself, unlike other programs mentioned in this chapter (Blue Star Awards, All Business is Like Show Business, Just Imagine), Starlight is able to freely alter the content and methods of S.O.S. The downside of this ownership is that Starlight has not reached the point of being able to expand the program to more than one school per year, although Reinert was hopeful that might change following the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>85</sup>

For the first two years, during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years, the program concept was launched as “Bringing Theatre to Life.” Starlight partnered with University Academy (3.55 miles away from Starlight) to present an after-school program twice a week, made available to a maximum of 25 fifth and sixth grade students. Bringing Theatre to Life ran from October to April and utilized three teaching artists. At the end of the six-month program, students present a performance for friends and family.<sup>86</sup> Several issues arose during the first year, including attendance issues, lack of

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85. Reinert interview, 2013.

86. *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, Spring 2008.

interest, behavioral issues, and production constraints in creating a new work. Starlight attempted to refine the program's structure for the second year of Bringing Theatre to Life. The first change was an interest-gathering audition that was held at the school before the program started. The goal of this audition was to expose students to what the program would be like, which would hopefully help alleviate past engagement issues. Parent meetings were held to present the scope and expectations of the program. Additionally, rehearsals and classes were conducted with more rules and structure than the first year. Despite these changes, the same issues occurred during the second year at University Academy.<sup>87</sup>

Following the two years at University Academy and the hiring of a new Director of Education and Outreach (Johnston to Brad Jackson), Starlight retooled the curriculum and scope of Bringing Theatre to Life, renaming it Starlight On Site. For the 2009-2010 school year, Starlight partnered with the administration of the Afrikan-Centered Education Collegium Campus (ACECC), which was located a mere block away from Starlight's Swope Park home. S.O.S. became a once-a-week program and the fifth and sixth grade students met separately. Flexibility in the ACECC schedule allowed sixth graders to meet at the end of the day, 2:45-3:45 p.m., starting before classes let out. Fifth graders would attend S.O.S. from 4:00-5:00 p.m.<sup>88</sup> It was felt that beginning during the school day would help previous attendance issues and ACECC's late bus program, which was available to students after extra-curricular activities, would support S.O.S.'s efforts.

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87. Education Department internal documents, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

88. "ACE 2010-2011 At A Glance Important Information," electronic document, Education Department, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

The ACECC students would perform twice, once in December and again in April. Another change between Bringing Theatre to Life and S.O.S. was a mid-year evaluation. Students were evaluated “based on their level of self-discipline, dedication, respect, and commitment demonstrated during the fall semester” and a determination would be made as to whether they would continue with S.O.S. in the spring semester.<sup>89</sup> The biggest hurdle facing S.O.S. at ACECC was holding sessions separately for the two grade levels, but having them come together for a performance. The fifth and sixth grade students being located in different buildings, creating a logistical headache for the teaching artists, exacerbated this problem. Although the program was not without some of the same issues faced at University Academy, S.O.S. followed the same format at ACECC the following year (2010-2011).

Reinert, who was Education Coordinator during the University Academy and ACECC years, became Director of Education and Outreach going into the 2011-2012 school year. The S.O.S. program was adjusted once more, based upon Reinert’s experiences in previous years. The program was now offered to seventh and eighth graders, meeting together, who might be more responsible with attendance. Another perk of changing the grade levels of participants was that both of these grades were located in the same building, eliminating the logistics issues of previous years with ACECC. S.O.S. students would spend the first semester learning theatre basics and then switch into rehearsal mode for a spring performance of *Once On This Island Jr.* The final change was that the program would occur within the school day, 12:40-1:46 p.m., during ACECC’s

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89. Ibid.

study period.<sup>90</sup> Attendance was much improved with the new grade levels and meeting time. What appeared to suffer was engagement, with students becoming burnt out and disinterested before the program ended.<sup>91</sup> During the summer of 2012, the Kansas City School District reabsorbed ACECC and took over operations of the programs.<sup>92</sup> The new administration was contacted about S.O.S., but it became apparent that the school would have to focus on rebuilding during the 2012-2013 school year. This led Reinert to search for a new S.O.S. school partner, but also provided the opportunity to once again reevaluate the program's structure.

A core problem Reinert saw with S.O.S. was the schedule. The program lasted for months, unlike theatre productions that will typically rehearse and be performed within a month. Additionally, meeting once a week led to a large memory gap between sessions. Under Reinert's leadership, S.O.S. became a 5-week program, which would meet more frequently. The first two weeks would be focused on skill building and students would meet twice a week. The third week would begin focusing on the performance the students would be putting on and consisted of Monday-Thursday sessions. Week four was a 5-day schedule and the final week was also Monday-Friday, with the final performance being on the last day. For this new five-week envisioning, classes were lengthened from the previous 1-hour session to a 2-hour format. With a new concept in place, S.O.S. was presented at Hogan Preparatory Academy Middle School (Hogan Prep) in the spring of

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90. "ACE 2011-2012 Introductory Letter," electronic document, Education Department, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

91. Amy Reinert interview, 2013.

92. Susan B. Wilson and Sylvia Maria Gross, "Leadership Change At African-Centered Schools," KCUR.org, July 9, 2012, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://kcur.org/post/leadership-change-african-centered-schools>.

2013.<sup>93</sup> Though not as close to Starlight as ACECC (1.46 miles), at 2.73 miles, Hogan Prep is still a nearby neighbor. Although the goal was 15-20 students, S.O.S. at Hogan Prep only had eight consistently attending students. Reinert attributed this lower student number to Hogan Prep offering the program in an after school setting, where S.O.S. was competing with music activities and sports.<sup>94</sup> The following year, S.O.S. was included in the Hogan Prep school day as an offshoot of the music and art electives. Starlight piloted this new approach for only one year. Hogan Prep utilized a block schedule and on alternating days reversed the order of the classes. This led to two sessions of S.O.S. being offered, which led to confusion over scheduling. Additionally, attempting to have an in-school program for only part of the semester resulted in varied success with teacher support and student engagement. Ultimately, following the 2014 approach to the program, S.O.S. went on hiatus. In the future, Reinert hopes S.O.S. can return in conjunction with student-oriented Starlight productions. She envisions a program that teaches theatre basics in the classroom, brings students to Starlight for a show, and then does a post-show classroom visit to dissect the experience.

This study will graph S.O.S. up to 2014 as a practice and then the theoretical new structuring as a separate entity. The previous versions of S.O.S. proved unsustainable. First, the program taxed the Education Department resources. In 2014, both fulltime Education Department staff members needed to attend each session, taking them out of the office for several hours at a time (Environmental Dimension). Additionally, the program was connecting a limited number of students to theatre, but not to the physical

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93. "Hogan Prep 2013 Schedule," electronic document, Education Department, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

94. Amy Reinert interview, 2013.

location of Starlight (Social and Environmental Dimensions).<sup>95</sup> S.O.S. never had a direct sponsor, despite several factors that might appeal to grant funders (Economic Dimension). Reinert's reimagined program requires less time in the classroom and has the ability to reach more students (Social and Environmental Dimensions). Also, by bringing students to Starlight, the program would physically connect students to the presenting organization (Environmental Dimension). Hopefully the reduced in-school time would lower costs and perhaps the organization could obtain partial or full sponsorship (Economic Dimension). If these positive changes come to fruition, the revamped S.O.S. is more sustainable than its previous version.

### JUST IMAGINE

The origins of Just Imagine can be traced to another Starlight program, Only Make Believe (2007-2008). Starlight's Only Make Believe was a satellite version of Dena Hammerstein's 1999 New York-based program, which brought theatre to hospital-bound children in the New York City area. Starlight was the first satellite location for this program. Starlight's Spring 2008 Spotlight Newsletter included a description of the outreach initiative. "Professional actors perform a series of one-hour workshops, arriving at host facilities with a trunk load of colorful costumes, props, (and) backdrops to use in leading children on their theatrical journey."<sup>96</sup> The performance was extremely

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95. Starlight struggled with a similar problem when the Education Department offered classes at satellite locations throughout the metro Kansas City area. Individuals would associate the class with the physical location instead of Starlight. So, if a class was at the Liberty YMCA, parents would refer to the experience as "my child took a theatre class at the Liberty YMCA," not connecting the class with Starlight. This is why Starlight eliminated the satellite classes and focused on offering onsite camps when school was on break.

96. *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, Spring 2008, 5.

interactive, with audience members being encouraged to get lost in the imaginative world of the show. Starlight became associated with Only Make Believe after Kelli Jenkins, who was then Starlight's Community Relations Director, read about it online and visited one of the performances in New York City. "Only Make Believe provided these kids an escape from the mental, physical and emotional burdens that they live with every day. It also gives parents a chance to see their 'sick child' as a 'normal kid' if even for a short while," explained Jenkins.<sup>97</sup> The program was underwritten by David and Darlia Morris and was presented in Children's Mercy Hospital (Kansas City) and Hope House (Lee's Summit). After the first year of Only Make Believe, Rohlf had several meetings with the parent organization. The founders of Only Make Believe were interested in the possibility of expanding the program to more satellite locations. As this expansion occurred, the New York organization proposed changes to the licensing agreement for the script and score, which would ultimately make Only Make Believe financially unsustainable.<sup>98</sup> Rohlf retired in 2008 and within Yockey's first year as President and Executive Producer of Starlight the organization ended its partnership with Only Make Believe.

Starlight was put in an odd position when it decided to cease Only Make Believe performances. The program had a donor and hospital partner, making the concept still a feasible one. To utilize this opportunity, Starlight began developing a new program that would bring theatre to some of Kansas City's "most vulnerable kids."<sup>99</sup> With a new script and goal to reach beyond the hospital partners, Starlight launched Just Imagine. The show contained the same basic interactive elements and energy present in Only Make Believe.

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97. Ibid.

98. Bob Rohlf e-mail, 2008.

99. *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, December 2011, 9.

As before, Starlight’s goal for the program was to provide an opportunity for children in difficult situations “to be on stage and ‘star’ in our show.”<sup>100</sup> The program has shown steady growth since its re-launch. In 2011, 103 children experienced Just Imagine.<sup>101</sup> In 2014, that number rose to 152 children.<sup>102</sup> Just Imagine began serving hospitals and related care services (shelters, Ronald McDonald House, schools for behavioral issues). One of the elements that contribute to the program’s longevity is the target audience. The populations of the hospitals and care service facilities are constantly changing, eliminating the need for new scripts or materials. By being able to use the same material and approach, the program cuts down on creative expenses and can retain the same core group of performers.

Just Imagine brings theatre to a population that might strongly benefit from the exposure. The program allows those students to display their own talents during the show and teaches them how to use their imaginations when they need an escape from their situations (Social Dimension). The program welcomed a new, unnamed donor in 2015 who is supporting the program in the memory of Richard J. Van Winkle Jr. Just Imagine spends money on costumes for each performance and pays each of the performers. Starlight saves money by utilizing Reinert (a salaried employee) as one of the performers (Economic Dimension). The program has a similar issue to S.O.S. in that it doesn’t tie those it serves directly to the physical location of Starlight. So, individuals may

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100. Ibid.

101. “Education and Outreach One Sheet, Fiscal Year 2011,” Starlight Theatre internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

102. “Education and Outreach One Sheet, Fiscal Year 2012,” Starlight Theatre internal document, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.



potentially associate the location of the performance to the experience instead of connecting it to Starlight (Environmental Dimension).

### VINCENT LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

In 2003, Starlight Theatre launched The Future Generations Campaign, Act 1. The capital campaign sought to secure \$15.25 million in funding to complete facility improvements, create a Starlight Theatre Endowment, fund educational programming, and upgrade administrative capabilities.<sup>103</sup> Act 1 of the campaign was completed in the fall of 2007. As part of that fundraising effort, Greg and Rebecca Reid donated an initial endowment of \$50,000 to setup the Vincent Legacy Scholarship Fund (VLS).<sup>104</sup> Named after Greg's son who died in infancy, VLS provides low-income, minority students with an interest in the arts "the opportunity to pursue professional training in the performing arts."<sup>105</sup> The scholarship is open to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The application process requires an essay by the student, a recommendation letter from both a teacher and an arts instructor, and a letter of support from a parent or guardian. After evaluating all of the applications, selected students audition with a song, dance, or monologue.<sup>106</sup> After the auditions, two students receive a \$2,500 scholarship to be used for arts training and instruction. Starlight holds the money in an account for each VLS scholar. When the scholar takes a class or attends a workshop, the training provider bills Starlight directly.

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103. "Act 2: Future Generations Campaign Overview Booklet," Starlight Theatre publication, Kansas City, MO.

104. "FY 2006 Annual Report," Starlight Theatre publication, Kansas City, MO, 18.

105. "Vincent Legacy Scholarship," Starlight Theatre Website, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.kcstarlight.com/education/vincent-legacy-scholarship>.

106. According to internal documents, in 2013, fourteen students were invited to audition.

By handling the funds in this manner, Starlight can verify they are being used for their intended purpose, and the scholars' families do not have to be concerned with payment steps. The scholar has until his or her senior year in high school to spend the scholarship funds.<sup>107</sup> Starlight's Education Department checks in with scholars, helps them find training opportunity, and provides updates on remaining funds. After the 2015 awarded scholarships, VLS matured into a program of 27 scholars, seven males and twenty females:

(VLS) has grown in a very positive way. It's definitely been a long time coming, because sometimes it is difficult to maintain communication with our VLS scholars. They move, they change phone numbers, and change emails and they don't think to tell us. So, sometimes it's a game of hunting them down, trying to find them and reforming that bond with them. ...I feel like I have been persistent enough in recent years, by making myself appear to them time and time again. ...Slowly but surely I feel like that program is growing. The first scholarship winners are now in college and they are starting to assume leadership and mentorship positions with the younger kids in the program. So it is kind of naturally allowing everybody to be a part of it and have more of a relationship and build on that.<sup>108</sup>

Greg and Rebecca Reid approach the scholars as a family, trying to stay connected with the current and past scholars. VLS scholars often keep the Reids abreast of any performances they will be part of, contacting them directly. In 2010, the Reids began holding a yearly holiday party in the winter, giving the scholars the chance to come together as a group. This gathering reinforces that VLS is more than just providing

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107. "Vincent Legacy Scholarship," Starlight Theatre Website, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.kcstarlight.com/education/vincent-legacy-scholarship>. Unused funds are returned to the program's endowment fund.

108. Amy Reinert interview, 2013.

money by keeping scholars in touch after they've spent their funds.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, as Reinert indicated above, VLS has been around long enough that the initial winners have matured and further defined their areas of interest. The program, in another example of how scholars stay connected to VLS, invited two previous winners to sit in on the 2013 VLS auditions. Courtney Germany (2006) and Kalen Allen (2009) provided the Reids and Starlight staff with feedback on the auditions. All involved agreed that having the scholars take more ownership of the program, and partner with its future recipients, marked a strong new direction for VLS.<sup>110</sup>

As discussed earlier, VLS is one of Starlight's proactive outreach programs. The Education and Marketing Departments strive to make the Kansas City area aware of the scholarship opportunity. They do not target any specific areas of the city, which results in winners coming from a range of neighboring communities (Lee's Summit, Overland Park, Kansas City on both sides of the border). However, there is crossover from Starlight On Site into VLS, with S.O.S. students frequently auditioning. The Education Department makes S.O.S. participants aware of the opportunity. The positive part of this natural occurrence is that students within the immediate surrounding neighborhoods are touched by another outreach program. In 2013, one of the winners, A'Rya Pratt, was a Hogan Preparatory Academy Middle School student who participated in Starlight On Site. S.O.S.'s ability to train A'Rya and promote VLS could be used as a benchmark of the program's success. Since most programs are less than a decade old, natural growth into a collection of connected education and outreach programs is still in its infancy. As

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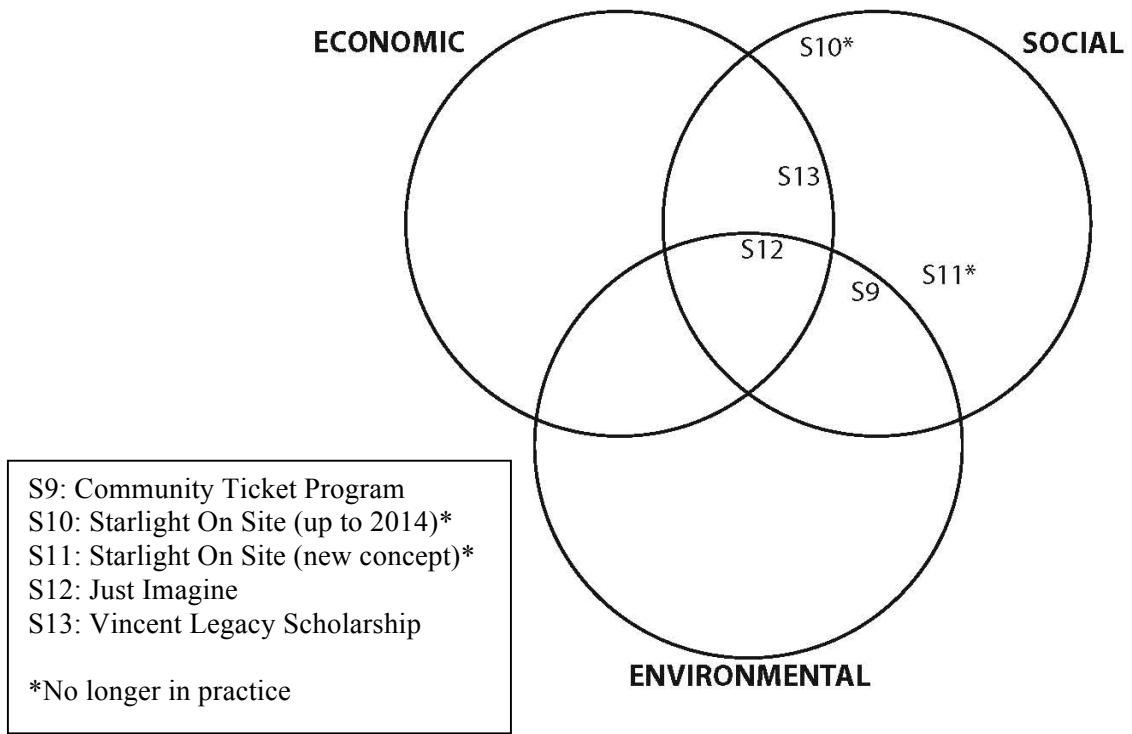
109. Ibid.

110. Observed by the author during the 2013 audition process.

more individuals are made aware of all Starlight's education and outreach options, similar instances of interactions should be expected and be made an organizational goal.

In 2015 VLS received funding from the Black Community Fund. That year they were able to award scholarships to five students, bringing the total Scholar count to twenty-seven (Economic and Social Dimensions). In 2015, from a suggestion by Baker, the Education Department hosted an audition master class for those auditioning, which included some students who had never auditioned for anything before this experience. This addition allowed all participants to experience an educational component, even those who wouldn't ultimately receive the scholarship (Social Dimension). This master class brought applicants to Starlight, which helps connect students to the venue. While some scholars use their funds on Starlight educational programs, finding more ways to tie more of them to Starlight would strengthen the program and connection to the organization (Environmental Dimension).

**Figure 8: Sustainability Snapshot of Social Dimension Focus Area #3 – Outreach Programs**



**Social Dimension Focus Area #4: Audience Enrichment**

Each of the four Social Dimension focus areas has its own part to play in engaging a community and audience base. Social media grabs individuals’ attention and input. Educational programs teach future generations about the craft of theatre while connecting them to Starlight and creating potential future audience members. Outreach programs make theatre accessible to new patrons. Audience enrichment, the fourth Focus Area, helps engage an audience with a specific show or theatre and should deepen the aesthetic experience they have at the theatre. This could mean enrichment programs give them insight into the creative process, illuminate the world of the play, and/or allows audiences to engage in further discussions about a production. By providing multiple

avenues for audience members to engage and approach a show, enrichment programs have the ability to help audiences gain a stronger bond to the production and, in turn, the theatre as an organization. Despite the potential positives associated with audience enrichment initiatives, Starlight has not grown or expanded this area past a few initiatives.

### PRE-SHOW TOURS

The tradition of Starlight presenting nightly tours before its Broadway season performances can trace its roots to the 1963 formation of the Women’s Committee. The Women’s Committee was a volunteer group that would promote Starlight within the community, help sell tickets, and conducted tours when the need arose.<sup>111</sup> In 1968, the group held the “Open House,” a pre-season event that allowed the general public to come to Starlight and have a guided tour of the facilities. A 1977 season program estimated that more than 1,000 people toured Starlight as part of that year’s Open House.<sup>112</sup> A tour script from 1975’s Open House shows an endless wealth of dates, figures, technical terms, and an end goal of selling tickets to the season.<sup>113</sup> It is easy to follow the history of Starlight through the many archived tour scripts, which pointed out changes to the facility, lighting or sound equipment, and provided humorous stories from the previous seasons.

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111. Starlight Theatre’s *Carousel* Program, 1968, 30.

112. Starlight Theatre’s “Bobby Goldsboro and Donna Fargo In Concert” Program, 1977, 19.

113. “Starlight Tour Script,” internal document, January 17, 1975, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

The current tour script is similar in structure to the Women's Committee's outline, providing fun facts and stories while moving through the venue, with one exception; it takes patrons backstage on a performance night. Tours are now led by the Starlight Ambassadors. In 1993, the Ambassador program was formed. This new program was open to both men and women. Each night of a Broadway performance, Ambassadors provide three opportunities to take a free tour of Starlight. In 2012, estimating a conservative 15 patrons per tour group, three times a night, over the span of 38 performances, gives a possible 1,710 guests being given a tour.<sup>114</sup> Ambassadors will still give tours to groups during non-show nights by appointment. Although the ballpark figure of how many patrons took tours for the Women's Committee Open House and the accumulated tours given on show nights are close, there is an important difference in the two approaches. The Open House allowed non-ticket holders a chance to explore Starlight. These potential patrons were conveniently taken to the box office at the end of the tour. Tours given on performance nights only reach current customers. A case could be made for bringing back a form of the Open House, which would make the tours not only a source of audience enrichment but also a possible platform for audience development.

The tours are a nice value-added benefit for ticketholders and save money by utilizing Ambassadors (Economic Dimension). While this practice could be expanded to encompass non-ticketholders, tours are provided on non-show days to groups who contact Starlight and schedule a visit. So, although there is room to grow the practice, a sizable population benefits from tours (Social Dimension). The tours utilize the venue, exposing individuals to parts of the facility they wouldn't normally see. On show nights

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114. Bob Potemski, interview with the author, Kansas City, MO, May 15, 2013.

the venue is already in use. The tours are a great way to use these spaces in multiple ways (Environmental Dimension).

### FAMILY SHOW ACTIVITIES

For most of Starlight's history, the previously discussed pre-show tours were the only source of enrichment provided to audience members before a production. Sometimes show programs would offer insight into the production, a practice more common from 1950-1980. From 1990-present, show programs are more advertisement and sponsorship driven. In 2004, Kelli Jenkins, then the Company Manager and Assistant to the Executive Director, was tasked with putting together activities for a high-selling production of the family favorite *Annie*. The goal was to provide families with something to do once they arrived at the venue and were finished with the pre-show tours.<sup>115</sup> This activity sheet included a search for names among the venue's Walk of Stars, which includes many famous performers who passed through Starlight. These walkway stars are displayed throughout the venue and required some detective work to locate specific names. Information was also provided about the show.<sup>116</sup> It wasn't until 2010's tour of *Little House on the Prairie, the Musical*, six seasons after *Annie*, that the organization revisited the idea of having activities prior to the family-oriented productions.

*Little House on the Prairie, the Musical* opened the 2010 Broadway Series at Starlight. The Marketing Department wanted to entice more families to the show. One way of growing the audience was by increasing the ticket value. This could be accomplished by providing pre-show activities for young patrons to enjoy. The north

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115. Starlight Theatre Archives, internal communication.

116. *Annie* Activity Sheet, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.



pavilion and lawn of the Starlight venue, a typically underused area, was chosen as the spot for the different activities. The Marketing Department sought out individuals and organizations that would donate their services in return for the ability to advertise and publicize themselves to Starlight's patrons. The activities selected were loosely tied to the productions and included hair braiding, paper doll making, old-time washboard clothes cleaning station, friendship bracelets, and mini-exhibits about prairie life. All of these stations were offered at no cost. There were also horse-pulled hayrides offered in the lawn, but those cost three dollars per ride. The reason for this cost was associated with the upkeep of the horses.<sup>117</sup> Although SurveyMonkey wasn't utilized at this time for nightly surveys, staff members reported receiving strong feedback from families that attended the pre-show "Party on the Prairie" event. Schulte cited this event as what "got the ball rolling" for future pre-show activities.<sup>118</sup>

Starlight has since continued to offer pre-show events before family-oriented shows, always tweaking the offerings to reflect the show selection. In 2011, a production of *Cinderella* brought about a royal gathering. Paper crowns, thrones for picture taking, face painting, and pre-show performances spotted the north pavilion. Then, 15 minutes prior to the show, a prince and princess parade occurred. During this, a royal fanfare played throughout the venue and Starlight employees led participating children in a parade through the main seating area. *Peter Pan* arrived at Starlight in 2012 and provided another chance for pre-show fun. Families could "walk the plank" built into one the fountains and have their pictures taken. Then the Marketing Department uploaded the

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117. "Little House on the Prairie, the Musical Party on the Prairie press release," Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

118. Barb Schulte, interview with author, Kansas City, MO, March 29, 2016.

photos to Starlight’s Facebook page for sharing, which was also a smart way to grow the number of Facebook fans for the organization. Tinkerbell and pixies from the Renaissance Festival roamed the northern part of Starlight, greeting families. Other offerings included a giant inflatable pirate ship slide and bounce house for kids explore, sword fighting demonstrations on a side stage, and a coin dig with pirate booty prizes, donated to Starlight by US Toys.<sup>119</sup> Starlight offered similar activities for Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* (2013) and *The Wizard of Oz* (2014).

By 2012, Starlight utilized SurveyMonkey to gather nightly feedback from its patrons, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This coincided with *Cinderella*, which gives some insight into the pre-show activities. For instance, there were comments about bad organization and timing of the activities from the first two nights. “Special activities for children should be better orchestrated. We waited nearly an hour in the sun and heat for a face painting and just got in before they stopped. DOZENS of children were not as lucky.”<sup>120</sup> By Wednesday, Starlight spoke with the face painters and had the elaborate designs scaled back to quicker face paint designs. They also instituted a ticketing system, which guaranteed parents a spot with the face painters. After distributing the allotted tickets, organizers informed parents the face painters were fully booked, preventing parents from needlessly waiting in line.<sup>121</sup> From this feedback and similar observed adjustments, a pattern emerged that the first night or two of pre-show activities arrive with unforeseen kinks. Given the number of outside vendors and volunteers, not knowing

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119. “*Peter Pan* pre-show activity map,” handout during production, Kansas City, MO.

120. “*Cinderella* Nightly Survey for July, 25, 2011,” comment from question #6, stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

121. Witnessed by author while attending the *Cinderella* pre-show events, 2012.

which stations will receive the most traffic, and other variables, it might not be within Starlight's power to correct this learning curve as it is impossible to "rehearse." Finally, the pre-show activities for family shows tended to be more entertaining than enriching. Entertaining pre-show activities do add to the experience and memory of attending the theatre, but playing on an inflatable pirate ship does not have the same learning value as experiencing life on the prairie by trying to wash clothes by hand with a washboard. Moving forward, for these activities to remain part of the Social Dimension and not move into an item of the Economic Dimension, more input from the Education Department or brainstorming on what is to be gained from each activity would be important.

The pre-show activities, referred to more recently as the pre-show festival, can be somewhat deceiving. While they are popular, surveys show they don't drive ticket sales, which was one of the original intents during *Little House on the Prairie, the Musical*. That means the benefit of the activities is found in entertaining families who arrive to the venue early. While this is a positive, these activities have the ability to educate and enrich the experience of attending the theatre or a specific show (Social Dimension). A lot of planning and work goes into the pre-show activities. As mentioned previously, interns normally undertake this project each summer, meaning there is always a learning curve involved. This results in a lot of man hours devoted to the project. The man hours are offset by a majority of the booths being run/hosted by volunteers (Environmental and Economic Dimensions). Perhaps the strongest aspect of the pre-show activities comes from the Environmental Dimension. The north part of the venue is frequently ignored, and these events help bring attention to this area of the facility and spread out the audience throughout the entire venue (Environmental Dimension).

## CHILDREN'S THEATRE STUDY GUIDES

In 2012, Starlight launched a children's theatre series, presented during the winter and spring at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. When the series was launched, the Education Department brainstormed multiple audience enrichment elements to supplement the performances. In addition to public performances, Starlight planned weekday matinee performances for student groups. A bulk of the enrichment concepts centered upon the school matinees. For the first season of shows, which consisted of two productions, the Education Department created content for two study guides. These were made available to teachers and patrons on the Starlight website. Study guides included a glossary of terms, an introduction to theatre concepts, individual activities, group/pair research activities, classroom acting exercises, and information about the creative process of the original script and Starlight's production.

After the first production of Starlight's Children's Theatre Series, Disney's *Aladdin* (Theatre for Young Audience Script), Starlight sent out an online survey to the middle and grade school teachers who brought students to the matinee performances. Twenty educators responded and provided guidance for how Starlight should approach future shows. For instance, 13 teachers did not use the study guide, five did (25% of those responding), and two teachers did not recall receiving the guide. The survey asked teachers if they would be interested in staying after the show for 10-15 minutes for a "post-show activity." This was an initial idea that came out of brainstorming by the Education Department, but Starlight was not sure how likely teachers would be to stay after a production. Of those surveyed, 18 (90%) responded that they would be interested in this offering. When asked what topics teachers would like to be part of the post-show

option, “demonstration of special effects” (75%) and “Q&A with cast member(s)” (70%) topped the list. Both “theatre/show trivia” and “careers in theatre” tied at the bottom with only 20%. Finally, survey results indicated teachers preferred the study guide available two weeks before the show. The *Disney’s Aladdin* guide was sent out a week before the matinees.<sup>122</sup>

Starlight sent out a similar online survey following the children’s theatre production of *Narnia*. The study guide saw an increase in use (52.9%) from the 34 teachers surveyed. Teachers provided feedback on which study guide sections “were of most interest/value to you and your students.” Their responses, from most to least interest/value are below:

- 50% Terms/Definitions
- 50% Theatre overview- behavior expectations and definitions of performance elements
- 45% Fun facts/quizzes
- 40% Theatre team- definitions of creative roles
- 35% Plot summary
- 35% Setting description
- 35% Suggested class activities
- 25% Q&A with cast member
- 10% Author biography
- 10% Q&A with director

Middle and grade school teachers once again showed an interest in staying for post-show activities, with “demonstration of special effects” and “Q&A with cast member(s)” still being the top selected options.<sup>123</sup>

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122. *Disney’s Aladdin* Matinee Post Show Survey, SurveyMonkey results, stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

123. *Narnia* Matinee Post Show Survey, SurveyMonkey results, stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

For its second children's theatre season, Starlight presented *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley* and *Peter Cottontail III*. Attendance declined for the second season of shows, likely due to a combination of performance dates (which included Easter weekend) and show selection.<sup>124</sup> Despite interest from the previous year, no pre- or post-show activities were added. Instead, Starlight created study guides following the previous year's format and emailed teachers an online link to download the files. This distribution method meant public performance audiences did not have access to the study guides on the Starlight Website like they did the previous year. Additionally, no further surveys were conducted following the matinees. Although the offerings were the same as the previous year, the fact that the matinees and public performances did not expand to include any additional audience enrichment is a sign that Starlight became less engaged in the children's theatre series. Starlight's Children's Theatre Series was abandoned after its second year. This was the result of a lack of profitability and an inability for Starlight to select its production dates at the offsite theatre.<sup>125</sup> Additionally, unless provided by a national tour's offices, summer Broadway Series shows do not have study guides provided to audience members. More study guides would require more resources from the Education and Marketing Departments, but would be a natural progression for this enrichment program.

Survey results found the study guides provided a clear benefit to school groups. By educating students about the show and theatre in general the guides enriched the theatre-going experience for patrons (Social Dimension). Starlight distributed the guides electronically. This cut down on wasted paper and provided a connection between

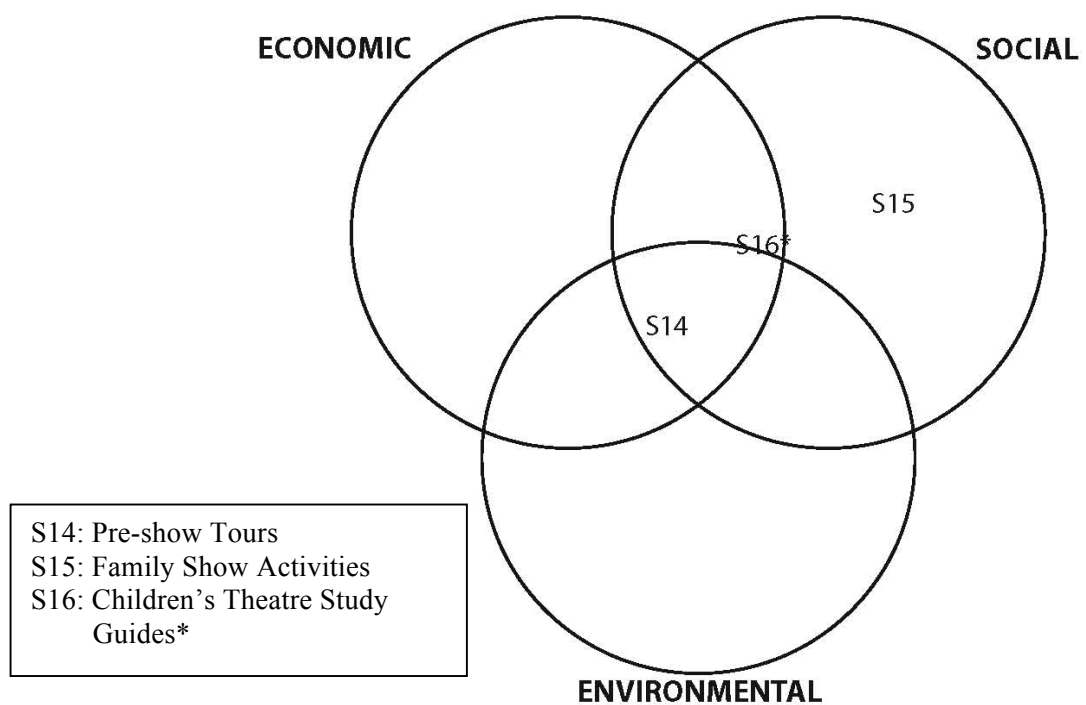
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124. "2013 Mid-year fiscal report," Starlight Theatre Board Meeting, March 2013.

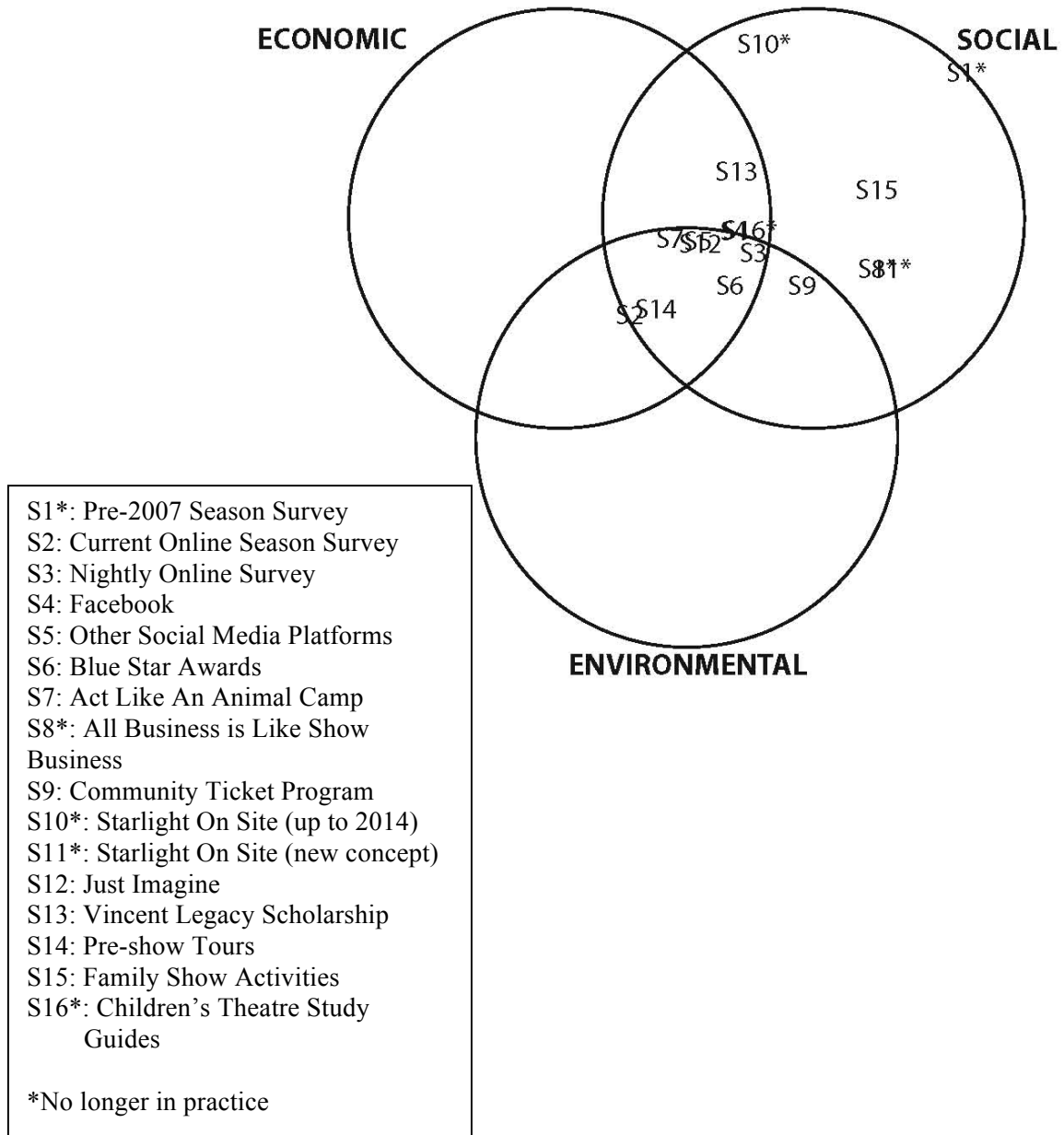
125. Denton Yockey, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, September 12, 2013.

Starlight and the guests prior to the performances, an important element given that performances weren't at Starlight (Environmental Dimension). Starlight created the guides internally, avoiding any associated costs. The materials served as a value-added item to patrons (Economic Dimension).

**Figure 9: Sustainability Snapshot of Social Dimension Focus Area #4 – Audience Enrichment**



**Figure 10: Overview of All Social Dimension Focus Areas**



Nine of the sixteen practices examined in the Social Dimension land in the centralized area of the Venn Diagram, finding a balance between the three dimensions of sustainability. A balance occurred with one subtopic landing in the Social/Environmental area and one in the Social/Economic area. Although it is ideal to have programs and



practices land in the middle zone, it should be expected that the Social Dimension might have some items that land within the Social Dimension or the combination of the Social Dimension and another of the zones. The items falling in two zones can indicate a few possible scenarios. First, these items are still being adjusted and perfected by Starlight. For instance, only three years ago the Blue Star Awards wouldn't be in the middle zone, it would have fallen in the Social/Economic zone, due to the amount of paper and office storage space it utilized. Over time, the Blue Star Awards program has been refined and is now highly sustainable. The Vincent Legacy Scholarship has a strong financial backing and is an excellent program for the community, but it could do better at bringing individuals into the Starlight facility. With VLS, funds often go to other organizations, because Starlight does not have an acting-only or dance-only class to offer scholarship recipients. So winners can be part of this program without ever being a larger part of the Starlight Education Department. Fixing this situation would allow VLS to better engage the environment (organization's venue/programs) and shift it toward a more centered spot on the diagram. Another explanation for these outlying items would be that items might have once been centralized, like the early years of the Community Ticket Program when more tickets were used, but have since moved to a less sustainable position. The final five items solely in the Social Dimension exhibit practices that need to secure funding and bring individuals into the venue (S.O.S. and the defunct Business Simulation Program) or they consume too many man hours, slowing down the organizations effectiveness (Family Show Activities). Of these five items, four are salvageable; Pre-2007 Season Survey has already been replaced with a more sustainable option.

Of all the focus areas, Outreach Programs Focus Area (S9-13) shows the most potential for growth. With the exception of Just Imagine (S12), the programs fall outside an ideal sustainable range. S9, the Community Ticket Program, is the closest to center, highly sustainable area. Increasing the utilization rate of the tickets and engaging new partners within the immediately surrounding communities will help increase program sustainability. Schulte will hopefully continue to improve in these areas as she familiarizes herself with the program and potential areas of growth. This focus area would benefit from the potential launch of the overhauled Starlight On Site. This program, even with its administrative challenges, allowed Starlight to positively engage its neighboring community. Hopefully the new approach to the program will reach multiple schools in a given year. It is important to note that S10-13 programs are facilitated by the Education Department and any program growth will need to be accompanied with an increase in staffing, as was previously highlighted by Reinert.

The best approach Starlight Theatre can take when dealing with the Social Dimension is taken from the 1975 Women's Committee tour script. Every tour began with the greeting, "Welcome to YOUR Starlight Theatre."<sup>126</sup> For a not-for-profit theatre, built by donations and tax-related funds, the idea of "YOUR Starlight Theatre" reminds the organization its purpose is to benefit the surrounding community and highlights the fact that the community has an investment in the success of the theatre. Within this chapter, the majority of focus area items falling in a centralized location on the Venn Diagram exhibited elements of community input, constant reevaluation of the practice, and partnerships between the community and organization. Frequently, discussions of

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126. "Starlight Tour Script," internal document, January 17, 1975, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

arts management and business review changing audience trends and how to adjust business models to engage potential patrons. What this chapter demonstrates is the importance of focusing on how the needs and wants of the audience changes, effecting the mix of offerings within the Social Dimension. Sustainability focuses on planning for the long-term success, but it also requires organizations to have a willingness to learn and grow. By listening to the community, the organization is able to provide the most beneficial and balanced version of “YOUR Starlight Theatre.”

## Chapter 3

### The Economic Dimension in Business Practices of Starlight Theatre

Nonprofit arts and cultural organizations (in Kansas City) account for more than \$273 million in annual direct expenses, 8,364 full time-equivalent jobs and \$237 million in household income.

— Alan Goforth, *The Kansas City Star*

#### **Starlight Theatre and the Economic Dimension**

As discussed in Chapter Two, much of Starlight Theatre's original structuring was based on what city officials observed at the MUNY in Saint Louis. In addition to season planning and administrative elements, the MUNY provided Starlight with a vision for how finances might be handled. In his October 4, 1949 letter to Kansas City Parks Board President John Moore, architect Edward Delk stressed that the MUNY did not rely on one single benefactor for financial support:

(The MUNY) is entirely divorced from the old aristocratic idea that a season of musical production must be supported by gifts from the State or from the rich. I have a list of the thousand guarantors that make up the Municipal Theater Association, as well as the blanks that the guarantors fill out each season.<sup>1</sup>

Starlight followed suit, establishing its own coterie of guarantors. This pool of citizens provided financial support when Starlight's expenses outpaced its revenue during a given season. As time went on and more and more money was borrowed from guarantors, it became apparent that this financial system was unsustainable. Starting in the 1970s, as Starlight diversified its revenue streams, the organization continued to mirror some of the business plans of MUNY and established new Starlight-specific models.

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1. Delk letter, microfilm, Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department Archives.

Starlight has continually modified its season in an attempt to increase revenue or limit expenses. Through the years, Starlight's season included as many as ten productions or as few as four. By adjusting the size of the season, Starlight effectively managed its available budget, producing or bringing in less shows when money was low. Starting in the 1970s, Starlight and the MUNY adjusted the type of productions they housed. Both venues began bringing in variety shows, national tours, and concerts. Over time, the MUNY returned to its original model of self-produced seasons. Starlight continued to present seasons including tours, self-produced productions, co-produced productions with other theatres, and concerts. For a brief period, due to financial hardship, Starlight attempted to limit its financial risk by serving as a landlord and renting the venue to the KC Symphony and Theatre League. For the 1994-95 season, after rebounding from the thin financial years of the 1980s, Starlight expanded its season to include "Starlight Indoors." Starlight Indoors was Starlight's first venture in producing theatre outside of its Swope Park facility. Although the first iteration of this concept was unsuccessful, recent reboots by Starlight were more successful. By being flexible in its offerings, Starlight has adjusted to its audience's preferences and avoided risking its success on any individual season model.

Once a patron purchases a ticket, that individual will have the opportunity to spend additional money at Starlight. First, there is the cost of parking. All Starlight events require patrons to pay a parking fee, whether parking in the surrounding grass fields or the paved lots shared with the Kansas City Zoo. Once in the venue, ample concession counters allow patrons to purchase food and beverages, including a catered, sit-down option in Starlight's Applause Club. In 2014, parking and concessions accounted for just

over two million dollars in revenue for the venue.<sup>2</sup> Starlight sells sponsorships for the Broadway and concert seasons. Sponsorship packages vary, from sponsoring a single Broadway show to underwriting the entire concert series. Businesses that purchase sponsorships with Starlight see their name/logo included in all marketing materials, announced from the stage, listed prominently on show programs, and other high visibility platforms. In return, Starlight adds an additional revenue stream to their portfolio. Sponsorship revenue totaled \$466 thousand for 2014.

On any given night the venue is managed by year-round employees and staffed by seasonal workers. The venue serves as a training ground to paid interns, provides adults in the Ambassador Program a chance to volunteer their time, and welcomes community groups to serve as ushers with Starlight's Moonlighter Program. As this chapter's opening quote indicates, Kansas City's economic welfare is significantly impacted by its arts and cultural organizations. Through the course of a year, Starlight employees over 500 individuals and provides volunteer opportunities for more than 200 individuals. In 2014, Starlight paid out over \$3.3 million in salaries, other compensation, and employee benefits to fulltime and seasonal staff. Part of this chapter will analyze the variety of employee and volunteer structures utilized by Starlight.

Not all of Starlight's revenue streams are connected to the Broadway and concert series. Some of the entrepreneurial endeavors were successful, like Rock the Light, a two-day Christian rock festival that Starlight produced for over a decade.<sup>3</sup> Other concepts hurt the bottom line. For instance, in 2002 Stage Fright at Starlight attempted to

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2. Starlight's FY 2013 Form 990 listed \$15,816,972 in "program service revenue." \$2,164,004 came from parking and concessions.

3. Rock the Light was a standalone event and not considered part of the concert series.

turn the venue into a Halloween hotspot. Unfortunately, a multitude of factors led to the event costing Starlight money. The organization's most successful non-production revenue stream came from event planning, mostly offsite. In 2000, following the enclosure of the stage, the venue began hosting weddings, corporate events, and community gatherings year round. The events became so lucrative Starlight was forced to launch Epic Innovative Events, a wholly-owned, for-profit subsidiary of Starlight. Additionally, Epic assists Starlight's Development Department with its yearly, lucrative gala. Although ticket revenue is Starlight's strongest revenue source, accounting for 80% of the \$15.8 million Earned Revenue listed below, these additional revenue sources support the organization's bottom-line.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Starlight granted the author access to numerous financial documents and a decade's worth of Form 990s are available online providing additional insight into the organization's financial history. Even with this higher level of access, many specifics of Starlight's splits with partners are unknown. Throughout this chapter, all resources will be utilized to give the clearest, most informative look possible at the different Economic Dimension business practices of the organization.

## Financial Overview of Kansas City Performing Arts Organizations<sup>5</sup>

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Earned Revenue</b>
Coterie	2013	1,163,978	1,275,389	716,918
	2014	1,204,830	1,234,649	631,640
Culture House	2013	1,028,118	999,768	674,928
	2014	1,001,112	1,071,625	751,870
KC Ballet	2013	9,391,256	8,722,749	3,730,261
	2014	10,141,072	9,298,992	4,381,903
KC Rep	2013	7,265,158	6,705,481	2,603,711
	2014	10,157,928	6,056,017	3,187,699
KC Symphony	2013	32,913,540	12,427,726	5,266,317
	2014	27,197,215	16,034,297	6,027,294
Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre	2013	457,209	463,577	239,631
	2014	503,712	500,747	187,977
Musical Theater Heritage	2013	704,161	698,435	553,211
	2014	unavailable		
Paul Mesner Puppets	2013	450,959	433,370	245,317
	2014	462,273	471,597	198,824
Starlight Theatre	2013	12,595,230	13,135,744	11,302,106
	2014	17,937,275	16,215,478	15,852,972
Unicorn Theatre	2013	991,742	1,029,932	435,213
	2014	1,901,404	962,902	343,829

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5. All figures were obtained using the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation website ([gkccf.guidestar.org](http://gkccf.guidestar.org)) on April 14, 2016. Theater League, which presents Broadway productions in Kansas City and several other markets, does not isolate its Kansas City income on tax filings or in its annual report. After contacting the organization it was determined that omitting them from the chart would be the best option to avoid skewing or manipulating data.



## **Economic Dimension Focus Area #1: Season Planning**

Throughout its 65 seasons, Starlight has presented over 430 musical productions. Considerable time and effort goes into planning each of those seasons and certain production bookings may be years in the making. The makeup of seasons has changed over the years. Originally the venue opened with seasons solely consisting of self-produced musicals. In the 1970s, variety shows became popular and touring productions outnumbered self-produced shows. In recent years, seasons include a mix of self-produced, co-produced, and touring musicals, with the company presenting a separate concert series. To determine a season, Starlight's staff attempts to garner insight into its patrons' preferences in the form of the season survey discussed in the previous chapter. Finding the right blend of shows to entice season members (numbering around 14,000 in 2012) and single ticket buyers is always a calculated risk, but crucial for a financially successful season.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the show selection, each type of musical production (self-produced, co-produced, and touring) has strengths and weaknesses. In the 2000s, the financial hierarchy of the production types changed from co-produced musicals, as the least risk/surest profit maker, to self-produced, with touring productions being the least cost effective. Currently, Brenda Mortensen, Starlight's Vice President of Finance and Human Resources, believes the financial hierarchy has shifted and now ranks touring musicals at the top, followed by co-produced, and self-produced shows. Of all categories, family musicals are the most profitable.<sup>7</sup> Although Starlight is a not-for-profit organization, the current focus is on making money from productions to support

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6. Robert Trussell, "Starlight heads indoors for 'Aida,'" *Kansas City Star*, July 31, 2012, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.inkkc.com/content/starlight-heads-indoors-for-aida/>.

7. Brenda Mortensen, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, May 15, 2015.

education and outreach programs.<sup>8</sup> The following section of this chapter explores elements for consideration by Starlight in order to manage a fiscally balanced season.<sup>9</sup>

### TOURING MUSICALS

“Because the majority of our patrons have indicated through surveys that they like Tony Award-winning shows, contemporary shows coming from Broadway,” explained Denton in 2013, “...we tend to do more tours. (Tours are) less expensive and (they offer) more of what the public wants.”<sup>10</sup> Typically, that means Starlight must bring in a tour, because the producing rights are not available. For newer titles, rights will not be available to regional theatres because national tours might still be on the road. The scheduling of these tours can sometimes begin before the musical even hits the Broadway boards. Sometimes Starlight will financially back a Broadway production. In doing so, they are hoping that it becomes a coveted title and that their financial support will result in an advantage to booking the tour. This approach was successful with *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, which launched its national tour at Starlight in 2003.<sup>11</sup> Other titles, such as *Copacabana* and *Wonderland*, proved to be unsuccessful investments. During Rohlf’s tenure, such an investment virtually guaranteed that an investing theatre would book the

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8. In the early years, Starlight’s financial approach to season planning was to break even. Later, with financial loss mounting, season planning focused on minimizing financial risk. Since the 2000s, the season mix has focused on clearing enough profit to support operational costs, outreach program needs, and venue improvements.

9. Starlight granted access to their financials for this section of the study with the stipulation that items are used in general terms. The details of the organization’s Broadway and concert negotiations are not public knowledge and it was agreed upon that such specifics would not be included in this chapter. The information provided is sufficient enough to track trends.

10. Denton Yockey, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, September 12, 2013.

11. “OVRTUR,” *Thoroughly Modern Millie* 2003 tour information, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.ovrtur.com/production/2894033>.

tour. Nowadays, investing isn't the sole deciding factor and, for hit shows, might simply put a theatre in the running to book the tour.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the financials, another difficulty Starlight faces regarding tours is the calendar. Starlight's main outdoor season runs from late May through the end of September, which limits the dates available for tours. Finally, if a tour is available and in the area, sometimes Starlight's massive seating capacity prevents a booking. Each tour is unique, but some of the bigger hits (*Wicked*, *The Lion King*, *Jersey Boys*) prefer to remain at one theatre as long as possible. "The blockbusters want to sit more than a week. That's their economic model. They're big. They travel with eight trucks. Their basis of amortization of covering the cost for that is to sit down and gather more (profit) in a specific market."<sup>13</sup> In 2008, for instance, when *The Lion King* first played the Music Hall in Kansas City, it enjoyed almost a month-long residency. Starlight's house size allows it to seat over three times that of the Music Hall. So, a week at Starlight would be an equivalent of over three weeks at Music Hall, but many of these tours do not want to change their scheduling rubric for a weeklong run. For this reason and the limited programming calendar window, Starlight has struggled to land some of the "blockbuster" tours.

Typically, the financials of touring musicals can be broken down to two payments. The first transfer of funds covers the tour's guaranteed amount. In the past 15 years, the amount a tour asks for can range anywhere from \$180 thousand for smaller tours or lesser-known titles to \$335 thousand for "blockbuster" titles. The average guarantee typically falls between \$250-285 thousand. A tour is given its guarantee

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12. Bob Rohlf, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, August 24, 2012.

13. Denton Yockey interview, 2013.

amount via check upon arrival at Starlight. At the end of a tour's run the production's management and Starlight executives go through "settlement." When settling, the process begins with the gross intake collected from ticket sales; certain predetermined amounts are then subtracted (money spent on advertising, percentages of different tickets types, musical rights). An important figure in contracts is a set amount for Starlight, typically around \$155 thousand, which the venue keeps to cover front of house operation costs. After all contractually agreed upon amounts are deducted from ticket sales gross intake, the remaining amount (should there be any) is split between the tour (65%) and Starlight (35%).<sup>14</sup> When comparing expenses, the touring productions are typically \$100-150 thousand less than the self-produced and co-produced musicals. The lower touring production expenses are a result of the tour's pre-existing technical aspects (set, costumes, wigs) and the fact that no rehearsal time is needed prior to performances.<sup>15</sup>

Each type of production included in Starlight's season comes with its own positives and negatives to potential audience members. Touring productions are sometimes perceived as being more professional than co-produced or self-produced musicals.<sup>16</sup> This perception may aid ticket sales. Some patrons, however, prefer to see local actors performing in self-produced, and sometime co-produced, productions.<sup>17</sup> In 2015, the touring production of *Camelot* in Starlight's season cast 1-3 local young actors

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14. Mortensen indicated that some of the "blockbuster" tours have a four-wall financial split, which means they keep all profits from the gross intake. If they were to come to Starlight, the venue would get the front of house line item (\$155 thousand) and rely on the title driving season subscription sales to bolster profit splits for the non-blockbuster shows.

15. Brenda Mortensen interview, 2015.

16. Author witnessed comments from Starlight's Facebook account.

17. Ibid.

to perform in the show.<sup>18</sup> This is a rare instance of a touring slot in the Starlight season allowing local involvement. Additionally, *Camelot* is an example of a non-equity touring production in the Starlight season. A segment of Starlight's audience differentiates the types of touring productions (equity or non-equity) that play the venue. Although minimal, social media chatter and comments made in the press suggest non-equity productions are inferior.<sup>19</sup> Overall, the positive perceptions of touring productions appear to outweigh the negatives, particularly with single ticket purchasers, swayed by individual production titles.

When putting together the mix of a given season, touring productions currently financially benefit Starlight, one of the leading factors in the strong sustainability of this business practice (Economic Dimension). One important element to consider when discussing touring productions is availability. Some years the musicals touring might not be shows with big, recognizable titles. So, there will always be some year-to-year ebb and flow with musicals, however, when there is a popular touring musical, the public gets excited, buying single tickets or adding to season ticket sales (Social and Economic Dimensions). Finally, these productions put less strain on Starlight's production team. There is less demand for rehearsal spaces. Tours typically do not need to perform technical rehearsals on stage prior to opening, allowing more concerts to play the venue (Environmental Dimension). For multiple reasons, scheduling touring productions is a sustainable practice.

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18. Starlight Theatre *Camelot* audition call, e-mailed by Caroline Gibel, Starlight's Company Manager, on May 8, 2015.

19. Author witnessed comments from Starlight's Facebook account.

## SELF-PRODUCED MUSICALS

Starlight started with the concept of self-produced musicals. Early productions featured star names for the leads, but the majority of the ensemble consisted of local performers, with area children filling out the chorus when needed. Starlight can select and self-produce a family-friendly musical if a touring option is not available, allowing Starlight to fill gaps in the season programming. Starlight-produced shows typically rehearse for ten days before opening. Rehearsals can be difficult to schedule in the midst of touring productions, concerts, and educational programming. Currently, Rich Baker does not see self-produced musicals dominating a season.<sup>20</sup> This is a reasonable approach to the season production mix, given that there are only two full-time staff members directly connected to these productions (Production Manager and Company Manager). During Yockey's tenure, Starlight seasons typically contained two self-produced musicals; five from 2011-2013.<sup>21</sup> Out of those five musicals, only one fell into the category of "family musical," *Cinderella* (2011), which is typically a higher grossing category.<sup>22</sup> As long as no major tours or revivals of desired musicals are occurring or planned the performance rights are not difficult to obtain. Instead, the decision becomes what show/s to mount and if there is the capacity (calendar room and human resources) to include one or more self-produced shows in a season.

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20. Richard Baker, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, April 1, 2014.

21. Number of self-produced musicals obtained from documents provided to author by Mortensen during May 15, 2015 interview.

22. Although these self-produced musicals broke even or made a profit, the overall revenue of these productions did not match previous trends. During this period emphasis was placed on bringing in more prominent stage names and artistic staff. Coupled with titles that did not pull in families (*The Producers*, *Xanadu*, *Miss Saigon*), these productions seem unsuccessful by the standards put forth by Starlight's Board of Directors. This highlights a different leadership view of what a not-for-profit's mission should be and how resources should be allocated. Currently, Baker appears to approach these productions from a position of reducing/managing costs for higher profit margins.

Self-produced musicals incur a multitude of additional steps and expense that touring and even co-produced shows do not. First, Starlight handles the casting, which means the Production Manager and Company Manager spend time sorting through agent submissions for lead roles. Additionally, Starlight staff travels to New York City and sometimes Chicago for casting purposes. The organization hires key production roles, such as a director, choreographer, music director, and stage management. The costumes frequently are rented or built by Kansas City Costumes, depending upon availability. Likewise, Starlight must seek out scenic elements. Sometimes an entire set is available for a specific title and sometimes the Production Manager must piece together the needed pieces from multiple sources. Starlight provides airline transportation for out-of-town cast members. Housing accommodations also are provided in equity-approved hotel rooms during the rehearsal and performance period, which is typically 2.5 weeks. During those 2.5 weeks, the cast is paid for their rehearsal time. In comparison, up to this point, touring productions have these costs built into the contract's guarantee check Starlight issues upon the touring company's arrival. Considering the additional resources needed for a self-produced show, it is not surprising that their expenses can be \$100-150 thousand above those of a touring production.

Many current Starlight patrons share stories of appearing in the children's chorus of a self-produced show, which highlights the importance of Starlight allowing local citizens to appear on stage. There is a nostalgia associated with the experience, which creates a lasting connection with the organization and venue. The hiring of local cast members helps tie the organization with the community in a highly visible manner. Starlight is the only Kansas City theatre regularly self-producing and bringing in national

tours as part of its season.<sup>23</sup> This season mix, which may present a national tour one week and then provide a local high school student the opportunity to perform on the same stage the following week, helps create Starlight's unique position in the community. Starlight is both a place to see the latest Broadway show and an obtainable goal for area performers dreaming of making it "big." Self-produced musicals carry the stigma of not being of the same quality as the touring productions. The self-produced show titles are frequently classics. The number of patrons not interested in seeing local performers are likely offset by the number of family and friends those same performers bring into the audience.

Self-produced musicals are an important part of Starlight's season. They harken back to the early years of the organization, when local talent would frequent the stage. There is something wholesome and familiar about seeing metro Kansas City students (elementary through high school) in the chorus and seeing their families in the audience. In fact, the high school students in self-produced chorus must be connected to Starlight's Education Department, whether through the Blue Star Awards or another program. This stipulation strengthens the connection students create with the organization and parents appreciate the professional performance opportunity (Social Dimension). Additionally, for local Equity actors, self-produced musicals provide opportunities to work in the summer when many of the area's theatres aren't producing. While Starlight assumes a large financial stake in self-produced musicals (cast, set rental, artistic team, rehearsal costs, etc.), the organization can earn more when these productions result in strong sales. It is important Starlight's artistic staff manage production costs effectively, which has not always been the case (Economic Dimension). A decade ago, before Starlight

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23. Kansas City Repertory Theatre will sometimes present a similarly mixed season with co-produced shows, but does not do so on a regular basis.



strengthened its concert series, self-produced musicals benefited the Environmental Dimension by using available space. The rehearsal period and technical rehearsal time on stage limits available dates for profitable concerts. Self-produced musicals need several spaces, which can make it difficult for the Education Department to fit in its typically six weeks of camps each summer (Environmental Dimension). Overall, self-produced musicals are moderately sustainable for the venue, gravitating toward the Social Dimension.

### CO-PRODUCED MUSICALS

Co-productions function most like self-produced musicals. The main difference being co-produced expenses are diversified across the multiple theatres presenting the mounted production. If a specific title interests multiple theatres but is not currently touring, working together on a co-production is a cost-effective approach. In the hierarchy of financial profitability, this type of production ranks above self-produced musicals because of the shared expenses. Also, since more theatres are contributing financial support, production elements might be of a slightly higher quality than self-produced shows. In the instance of the co-produced *Disney's The Little Mermaid* (2013), the co-producing theatres agreed to build a new set, which carried a high cost. While the upfront, undisclosed cost of the set may hurt initial profitability breakdowns, the theatres will split profits from future rentals of these scenic elements, creating an additional revenue stream.

Co-produced shows involve Starlight and an out-of-town theatre working together. There are two types of co-produced musicals. In the first type, Starlight is the

lead theatre and the co-produced show opens at Starlight. In this version, the production rehearses at Starlight and uses its resources and space like a self-produced show. The other version resembles a touring production. Starlight assumes its portion of the expense to mount the production and the musical arrives at the venue rehearsed and ready to perform. Similar to touring productions, the co-produced slots frequently don't offer opportunities for local performers and don't create the same community tie. So, while they might gain a financial edge over the self-produced musicals, they do not contribute as much to the Social Dimension.

Co-produced musicals are more sustainable than self-produced shows, because they reduce financial risk, require less space, and sometimes still utilize local talent (Economic, Environmental, and Social Dimensions). Like touring productions, co-productions vary from year to year depending upon availability. Although, co-productions are slightly more complicated, because they require the right show title and other available theatres with which to work. Starlight's president will engage other producing theatres years in advance in order to coordinate a title choice everyone is interested in for a given season. Even with the uncertainty of co-produced musicals, when they are scheduled in a season they historically have a positive effect on the organization's bottom line (Economic Dimension).

### CONCERT SERIES

For decades concerts were part of the Starlight season, but they were inconsistent and unprofitable until recent years. Before 2002, whenever Starlight wanted to bring in a concert the organization would contact individual booking agents, negotiate each contract

on a show-by-show basis, and handle the event marketing. In 2002, after Starlight's 2000 stage renovation, Starlight and Live Nation Entertainment entered into a partnership. Live Nation Entertainment agreed to serve as the booking agent for Starlight. Live Nation Entertainment has a large network of artists and musical acts; they book in venues around the country and are able to connect Starlight with many concert options. Despite this new partnership, concerts still struggled to succeed in the venue. "We did concerts, but there was really a prevailing attitude that everyone's job here (at Starlight) was to do Broadway and concerts were this extra work that then we didn't really even get paid for. It was just sort of like extra work. We didn't really make any money," explained Bill Waugh, Starlight's Concert and Information Technology Director.<sup>24</sup>

Waugh, whose Information Technology title expanded in 2007 to include concerts, was instrumental in shifting the concerts into a standalone, profitable series. Waugh credits the concert series' recent success to several key points, including having a staff person who handled concerts as a main part of his position. A second factor was frank discussions between Starlight and Live Nation regarding finances. "Why are we doing this show every year? I mean, it's not making any money," Waugh remembered as part of those discussions. "We were cancelling shows all the time. It became a bit of one of those cycles of 'well, we lose money so often, we're now really afraid to take a chance on a bigger show, because that's a bigger risk,' but it's obviously a bigger reward when it works out."<sup>25</sup> In his new position, Waugh convinced Starlight to take bigger risks with artists and the amount of guarantee the organization could cover. "(Starlight was) slowly

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24. Bill Waugh's roundtable with interns, Starlight Theatre, Kansas City, MO, Summer 2014.

25. Ibid.

ratcheting that threshold (of guarantee amounts) up. ‘We did that show for \$75 thousand, why can’t we do (this one) for \$140 thousand?’<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Starlight slowly expanded its operating system, doing a mid-May concert in 2008 and an April show in 2009. These changes proved successful. The concert series grew from nine (2006) and 11(2007) concerts to seventeen in 2008. In a 2008 press release Rohlf stated, “Total concert attendance for the season is estimated to be nearly double of what we totaled in 2007.”<sup>27</sup> Jeff Miller, currently in a fulltime, concert-specific position, Concert Sponsorship and VIP Sales Manager, joins Waugh in the Concerts Department.

The financials of a concert booking operate differently from those of a Broadway show. While both have guarantee checks for the artist or show, concert guarantees range from \$60-320 thousand, with the average landing somewhere in the vicinity of \$200 thousand. Whereas Broadway shows have a week to sell tickets, concerts must make enough to meet this guarantee with a one-night-only event. This is the main reason tickets for concerts are more expensive than Broadway tickets at Starlight. Additionally, Starlight, Live Nation Entertainment, and the artist’s management determine the ticket prices for an event. Although Broadway tickets may vary slightly from show to show (seven shows in 2015), concert pricing is negotiated for each individual show (at least 21 in 2015). This is seen in the following four concerts of Starlight’s 2015 season. Peter Frampton and Cheap Trick had four pricing tiers (\$35-\$95), the New Jack Swing Tour featuring Keith Sweat had five tiers (\$35-\$126), Train with The Fray and Matt Nathanson offered a four-pack discount for terrace and side plaza seats, and Phish had only one price

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26. Ibid.

27. “Starlight Theatre’s Grand Finale Lineup to Close 2008 Concert Season with a Bang!” Starlight Theatre’s website, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.kcstarlight.com/common/cms/documents/Press%20Room/StarlightTheatre-Season2008.pdf>.

level (\$65) for every seat in the house.<sup>28</sup> Waugh prefers concert arrangements where he can cover the guarantees if the front half of the venue, typically the higher-priced seats, sell.<sup>29</sup> With this approach, Waugh is banking on the premise of finding one to two thousand fans of an act who will buy the premium seats, thus removing the pressure of needing every concert to sell out. The next difference in contract structures is that Live Nation Entertainment has a larger split than the touring musicals and a better backend deal for the financials. The split has three thresholds, which are dependent upon the gross revenue. In the current structure, the more money a concert brings in, the higher split Live Nation Entertainment gets of the pot, which drives Live Nation Entertainment's incentive to bring in larger acts. Additionally, Live Nation Entertainment receives a percentage of the ancillary concert business, concession sales for instance.<sup>30</sup> In 2013, Starlight was making an estimated \$35 thousand per concert.<sup>31</sup> Even though the specifics of the Starlight and Live Nation Entertainment partnership financials are not made public, Live Nation Worldwide, Inc. is listed on Starlight's 2013 Form 990, Part VII – Compensation of the Five Highest Paid Independent Contractors. For the fiscal year of October 2013 to September 2014, Starlight paid Live Nation Worldwide, Inc. \$6.85 million. Even if that sum included the artist guarantees for the 20-plus concerts, Live Nation Entertainment appears to financially benefit from the partnership.<sup>32</sup>

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28. Ticket amounts found through accessing Starlight's website on May 12, 2015.

29. Bill Waugh's roundtable, 2014.

30. Mortensen confirmed this backend split during the 2015 interview, but exact figures are not made public.

31. Denton Yockey interview, 2013.

32. Starlight Theatre's 2013 Form 990, 57, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

The scheduling of concerts is quite different from scheduling the Broadway season. Baker may schedule Broadway tours 1-2 years out, and begin negotiations even earlier in the process. Waugh must wait for musical acts to announce a concert tour before he can submit an offer through Live Nation Entertainment. Even after a tour is announced, it is up to Live Nation Entertainment to determine what size venue should be booked. Starlight can hold 4-8 thousand patrons, making it larger than the Midland and smaller than Sprint Center, which are both handled by Live Nation Entertainment. If the concert is a fit logistically, then the exact date need to be determined. Early in the year, Waugh might place 50+ concert holds on Starlight's booking calendar. This represents all the potential acts he has submitted offers to and any possible date they may play the venue. Since the Broadway tours are playing one or more weeks at a venue, it is easier for them to geographically lay out their schedule then it is for a concert tour that is going from city to city each night. The booking timeline affects the Education Department, Epic Innovative Events, Inc., and any other entity with onsite programming. Finally, Miller must sell VIP Season Packages to clients without a complete layout. With the recent success of the Concert Series, VIP clients have a better understanding of the typical number and types of concerts Starlight will bring in during a given year which aids ticket sales.

Starlight tries to bring in a mix of concerts, satisfying a wide variety of crowds. Miller's VIP clients prefer classic rock artists, Broadway subscribers lean towards James Taylor or Prairie Home Companion, and the urban area surrounding the venue prefer New Jack Swing Tour featuring Keith Sweat or Janet Jackson. Despite the goal of bringing in a variety of genres, Waugh can only put offers out to acts that can be

profitable (based on guarantee amount and potential revenue) and are available. When a specific genre is missing from the Concert Series, there is pushback from different entities. “When I got here,” Yockey recalled, “the Parks and Recreation Department met with me and they said ‘we need more diversity in your concert programming.’ Agreed. ‘Well, we’d like to create a committee to help select the concerts.’” Yockey declined the offer, explaining he already had internal staff selecting concerts in tandem with Live Nation Entertainment, but most individuals struggle to realize that there are many factors at play. “This isn’t just a Chinese à la carte menu where you go down the list and pick one.”<sup>33</sup> From time to time, Starlight meets with community leaders or responds to criticism on Facebook explaining the difficulty of scheduling the Concert Series. Unlike the Broadway Series, due to contracts with Live Nation Entertainment, Starlight cannot self-produce concerts to fill programming gaps in the Concert Series.

Concerts are highly sustainable from a profitability standpoint. Starlight has a strong partnership with Live Nation, and has refined the associated revenue streams (Economic Dimension). Concerts create countless holds on the venue calendar, making scheduling difficult for other Starlight programs. Sometimes concerts aren’t confirmed until a few months out, and by then it is too late to plan other programming. Similar to the other items in the season mix, product availability varies from year to year. Even though concerts are difficult to finalize, they utilize the venue a lot throughout the summer. So, these events keep the venue in operation more often now than a decade ago (Environmental Dimension). Concerts bring large crowds, with several concerts a summer resulting in near- or at-capacity audiences. While those crowds are great for the Economic Dimension, they result in long lines (concession, restroom, tour merchandise),

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33. Denton Yockey interview, 2013.

more patron problems during the event, and frequent problems when tickets go on sale. The concert mix during any given summer normally includes a wide range of genres, appealing to many potential audience members (Social Dimension). Concerts may never actually fall within the area of high sustainability, given the numerous associated variables, but they are moderately sustainable.

### STARLIGHT INDOORS (PRE-2015)

In 1993 Starlight embarked on a new concept: Starlight Indoors. For the first time in its history the organization planned a winter series to be presented at Kansas City's Midland Theatre. "The motivation for Starlight Indoors was [that] there appeared to be an opportunity to control the musical theatre market in Kansas City," explained Bob Rohlf. "In order to seize that opportunity we would need to do an indoor season during the winter months."<sup>34</sup> The new programming would run in direct competition with Theater League, which presented "Broadway in Kansas City" at the Music Hall during Starlight's off months.<sup>35</sup> Originally opened as a movie palace in 1927 under the name Loew's Midland Theatre, the venue underwent a city-backed \$400 thousand renovation as part of the planned Starlight Indoors series. According to Rohlf, Starlight Indoors happened very quickly that first year, with only about a six and a half month turnaround from being approached with the option to launching the series. Starlight's advertising agency conducted research and found season ticketholders were interested in a winter series. From this research, and given the constraints of mounting a season with little lead-time, Starlight selected its season. The shows were *Lost in Yonkers* (November 16-21), *The*

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34. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

35. Broadway in Kansas City, still in existence, presents touring musical productions.



*Who's Tommy* (February 15-20), *Sayonara* (March 15-20), and *The Secret Garden* (April 20-24).

Unfortunately, the shows were not a financial success, and Starlight abandoned the indoor series after the first year:

(Starlight Indoors) failed for two reasons. Number one, the research results were inaccurate. The current customer at Starlight didn't respond at all. And two, some of the shows that were listed on that research effort, and you didn't have time to analyze it properly which was a big problem, were based on faulty information. At the conclusion of (Starlight Indoors) we had lost money. And at the conclusion of that we went 'should we continue this? If so, why? If not, why?' I was actually in favor of continuing it, thinking with the proper amount of lead-time we could do something right. But again, there was a lot of risk adverseness and we had only been making money for about five years and the Board went 'nah, let's not do it.' It was an opportunity I still think, hindsight even, we should have pursued, but we didn't.<sup>36</sup>

The opportunity to try something similar to Starlight Indoors presented itself in 2011 with the construction of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. The Kauffman planned to house three resident companies, the Kansas City Ballet, Lyric Opera, and Kansas City Symphony, but wanted to expand its offerings. Kauffman and Starlight executives met and discussed programming options. Ultimately, Theater League was selected to present a Broadway season and Starlight a children's theatre series in the venue's Muriel Kauffman Theatre. To Denton Yockey, this new series allowed Starlight to cultivate a new audience. "There are many ways we as an organization can reach out to the community, and the Kauffman Center was the golden opportunity," Yockey told *The*

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36. During the August 2012 interview, Rohlf explained that the advertising agency relied on focus groups to determine shows to include for the indoor series. Starlight prefers to utilize larger sample pools for its data. Rohlf felt the focus groups slanted the data heavily towards the opinions of a few and led to unwanted production choices.

*Kansas City Star*. “This is not a money-making venture. This is mission-based. This is audience development.”<sup>37</sup> The inaugural Starlight Children’s Theatre Series season consisted of *Disney’s Aladdin Jr.* and a musical adaptation of *Narnia*. The run of each show included school matinees and public performances. During its first year the shows brought in a combined audience of about 19,000 over the course of eighteen performances, roughly 58% capacity for the 1,800-seat Muriel Kauffman Theatre.<sup>38</sup>

The second season of Starlight Children’s Theatre Series included *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley* and *Peter Cottontail III* and did not perform as well as the previous year’s lineup. Starlight struggled with programming because they were not in control of date selection. Instead, the Kauffman Center would present Starlight with their date options. For *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley*, performances occurred in mid-January, when weather and schools’ newly begun spring semester made for tricky field trip scheduling. The Series’ second performance slot overlapped Holy Week and Easter two years in a row, and Starlight struggled to sell tickets during these dates. As discussed in Chapter Three, Starlight offered study guides to schools, but failed to expand their enrichment opportunities to entice schools. The difficulty in obtaining ideal dates and the rental costs associated with the Kauffman Center partnership proved too much for the emerging series.<sup>39</sup> After the second season of Starlight Children’s Theatre Series,

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37. Robert Trussell, “Starlight conjures a children’s series with ‘Aladdin’ at the Kauffman Center,” *The Kansas City Star*, accessed January 27, 2012, [www.kansascity.com/2012/01/27/v-print/3393902/starlight-conjures-a-childrens.html](http://www.kansascity.com/2012/01/27/v-print/3393902/starlight-conjures-a-childrens.html).

38. Robert Trussell, “Starlight heads indoors for ‘Aida,’” *The Kansas City Star*, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.kansascity.com/entertainment/article306184/Starlight-heads-indoors-for-%E2%80%98Aida%E2%80%99.html>.

39. In his interview with the author, Yockey indicated the rental fee for the theatre, a third party contract that amounted to \$50/hour for the first seven or eight stagehands, and a minimum \$1,800/performance cost for the front of house staff all led to the financial struggle that “sunk” the series.

Starlight and the Kauffman Center unceremoniously ended the joint venture.<sup>40</sup> Looking back, Yockey felt the programming could have survived with a few tweaks.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, all of the attempts that fall within Starlight Indoors (Pre-2015) were highly unsustainable. The shows failed to engage the interest of the Social Dimension. While the Starlight Children's Theatre Series utilized local performers, that didn't result in enough of a boost in ticket sales (Social Dimension). Since the ticket sales lacked, Starlight found itself losing money (1995 and 2013) or barely profiting from the productions (2012) (Social Dimension). Finally, these productions resulted in audiences attending non-Starlight venues. So, while the productions were by Starlight, audiences might associate the experience with a different organization. This is similar to the struggle the Education Department faced with its satellite classes (Environmental Dimension).

#### STARLIGHT INDOORS (2015 AND BEYOND)

In 2015 Starlight made its third attempt at an indoor, non-summer show. Following his first summer with Starlight, Richard Baker made plans to test the interest in an indoor production. Unlike previous iterations of the concept, Starlight would house the production on its own stage. When the Starlight stage was enclosed in 2000, which included the ability to control the temperatures and keep inclement weather out, it became possible to hold events on site during the colder months. With rented risers, 500 chairs, and curtained-off sections, the Starlight stage is transformed into a 12,000-square-

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40. By not addressing the deserted partnership with Kauffman Center, both organizations walked away without much fanfare. The fact that the series disappeared without much attention suggests that it was not making the desired impact.

41. Denton Yockey interview, 2013.

foot black box. Starlight booked eight performances of *50 Shades! The Musical Parody*, a touring production, to test the new format. This show would also test Starlight's traditional audience's interest in "racier," adult-g geared content. Baker explained, "While I definitely wanted a show that audience members would enjoy (they did, as evidenced by hoots, hollers and uproarious laughter at every *50 Shades* performance!), our bigger mission was to determine 'if we build it, will they come?'"<sup>42</sup>

The *50 Shades! The Musical Parody* "experiment" had promising results. Roughly 3,400 seats were sold over the show's run, representing nearly 85% capacity for the 500-seat house.<sup>43</sup> 1,193 patrons purchased tickets, which comes out to approximately 2.85 tickets per order and indicates potential for group sales with similar programming. Perhaps the most striking statistic associated with this production is that 42% of those 1,193 patrons were new to Starlight. Starlight sent surveys to patrons after each show, which yielded the following information:

- 96% felt they received good value for the ticket price they paid
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being excellent), (patrons) rated production quality a 4.58, seating configuration a 4.31, and parking a 4.26
- 99% were likely, very likely or definitely willing to recommend the Starlight indoor experience to family, friends and colleagues
- Fully 100% were likely, very likely or definitely willing to see another show indoors at Starlight

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42. Baker on Broadway blog post, Starlight Theatre's website, March 4, 2015, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/blog-detail/blog-03-04-2015>.

43. Since Starlight is just beginning to schedule programming of this size and nature, there is now data on the finances. From current negotiations it appears the guarantees for this 500-seat series will land in the \$10-15 thousand range. This range makes sense when analyzed against the amounts of the 8,000-seat summer guarantees.

- (Patrons) were most interested in seeing adult theatre (91%) and off-Broadway musicals and plays (84%)<sup>44</sup>

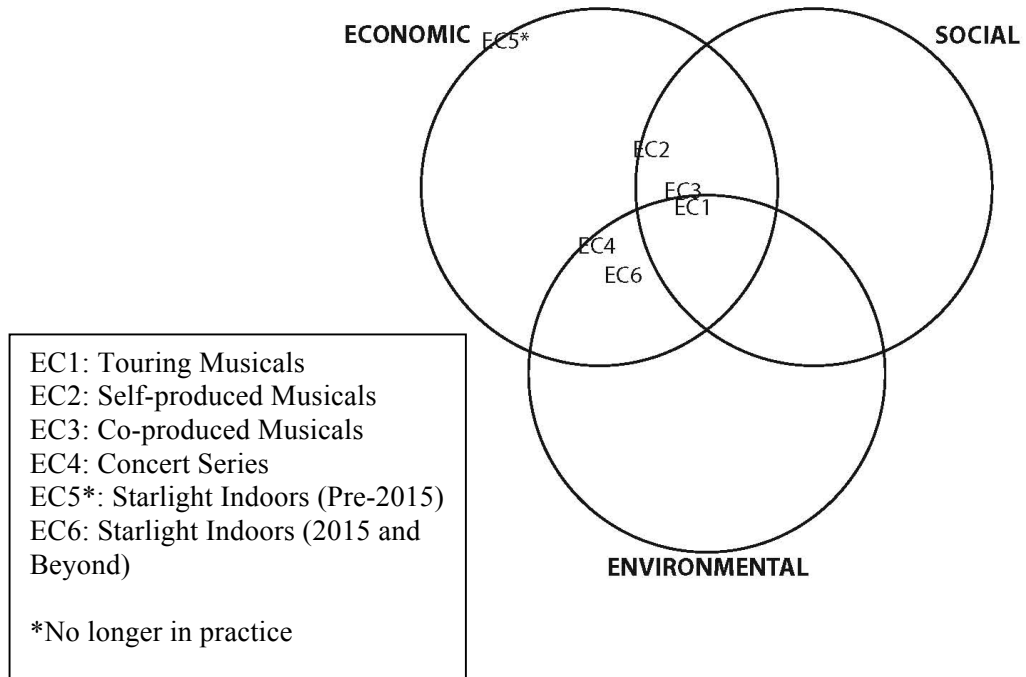
Additionally, Starlight brought in their new caterer, PB&J Restaurants, Inc., to handle the food service for the Indoor Series run prior to the summer series' high volume. Baker confirmed Starlight planned to present similar programming in future years. In this new structure, with Starlight controlling the schedule and venue, several of the hurdles from previous indoor attempts are eliminated. Finally, unlike previous iterations at Midland Theatre and Kauffman Center, patrons to these shows are brought into the Starlight venue and there is no possible confusion over which organization is presenting the production, directly connecting the Indoor Series with Starlight Theatre.

*50 Shades! The Musical Parody* demonstrated this new production model might be successful for Starlight. The production made money as the new concept's inaugural production, a promising fact for future incarnations (Economic Dimension). Starlight Indoors (2015 and Beyond) utilizes the venue in a previously "off season." While Starlight's event planning subsidiary, Epic Innovative Events, used the space during this period, their bookings are rarely guaranteed annually. Additionally, the presenting approach from 2015 brought audiences to Starlight, a huge improvement over the past offsite seasons (Environmental Dimension). Starlight should find ways to engage the Social Dimension more in future seasons. The organization will need to compete for audiences, because more theatres present during the fall and winter months. Strengthening the Social Dimension has the potential to move this practice from a moderately sustainable placement to highly sustainable.

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44. Baker on Broadway blog post, March 4, 2015.

**Figure 11: Sustainability Snapshot of Economic Dimension Focus Area #1 – Season Planning**



**Economic Dimension Focus Area #2: Season-Driven Revenue**

In 2014, according to Starlight’s Annual Report, 287,936 audience members attended concerts and Broadway productions at the venue. With 287 thousand patrons coming into the venue, it is important for Starlight to maximize profit opportunities beyond just ticket cost. 74% of the organization’s revenue came from ticket sales, but parking and concessions accounted for 12%, amounting to \$2.16 million in revenue. The additional revenue streams are value added services for customers who are willing to pay for these items; onsite restaurant, gift shop, and off-duty police and security patrolling the parking lots/venue.

As was the case with the yearly survey, technology has aided Starlight in engaging their patrons in new, easier ways. Internally, Starlight’s management team uses

technology related to ticket sales and scanning to track and identify trends in the spending habits of patrons. For instance, management can track what type of programming (show type, concert type, etc.) tends to draw early-arriving patrons, bringing them into the venue with more time to visit concessions and the gift store. Additionally, technology allows management to collect and analyze sales data quicker, empowering them to be proactive during a weeklong run rather than reactive following the show or season. Furthermore, this same data mining provides potential Broadway or concert sponsors with vital quantitative information about Starlight's patrons; those who will see the branded sponsorship. Added by recently added technology and through decades of experience, Starlight has found ways to shrink revenue leakage from its events and stabilize its own financial structure. By diversifying their revenue streams, Starlight increases its ability to weather financial downturns in the economy.

#### PARKING AND CONCESSIONS

As previously stated, with \$2.16 million in revenue for the 2014 season, parking and concessions add a significant contribution to Starlight's profitability. There are two cost levels to the venue's parking. General parking is available for \$7 and Preferred parking (closer and/or on pavement) costs \$10.<sup>45</sup> Season subscription pricing includes one general parking pass for each Broadway production. To improve the parking experience, Guest Assist members drive courtesy shuttles throughout the parking lots before and after the show. This service benefits those general parking patrons who are unable or do not wish to walk the distance to and from the venue. If all of 2014's 287,936

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45. "Parking Information," Starlight Theatre's website, accessed May 16, 2015, [http://kcstarlight.com/plan\\_your\\_visit/parking\\_information.aspx](http://kcstarlight.com/plan_your_visit/parking_information.aspx).

audience members carpoled four to a car, there would still be 71,984 vehicles entering Swope Park; a potential parking revenue of \$500 thousand if they all select the \$7 general parking. Since parking and concession revenue are never reported separately on Form 990, the only way to estimate revenue concessions is by subtracting the above parking revenue estimate from the Form 990 total. Using that hypothetical equation results in concessions producing upwards of \$1.65 million in revenue. Historically, Starlight hasn't always benefited from the concessions portion of the venue.<sup>46</sup> Currently, Aramark operates Starlight's concession stands for an undisclosed revenue split. In 2015, eight locations throughout Starlight offered food and beverages through Aramark.<sup>47</sup>

Patrons frequently indicate that the area of concession pricing and quality could be improved. Each year Starlight and Aramark meet to determine the season's offerings and pricing. One reason for the concession prices, which are similar to sporting arena prices, is the revenue split. Starlight and Aramark must find the right price point, one that covers cost and benefits both parties, but also does not alienate consumers. Season subscribers, the most frequent visitors to the venue, are offered fifty-cent discounts off every item during Broadway shows.<sup>48</sup> The food and beverage pricing will be discussed further in the Dynamic Pricing section of this chapter. In an effort to control quality and loss prevention of inventory (losses incurred primarily from inaccurate purchasing and

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46. For a long period of Starlight's operations, the concession business was operated as a rental, with a vendor operating all locations and keeping all revenue. Once that contract expired, Starlight contracted a vendor to operate the stands, negotiating for a revenue split.

47. The concession stand count is found utilizing Starlight's "Plan Your Visit" webpage, accessed May 16, 2015, and does not include the Applause Club in the figure. The Applause Club operates independently of the Aramark contract, though likely is included in the reported concessions revenue, and will be discussed later in this section.

48. This benefit was added for the 2013 Broadway Season. As of the October 30, 2012 Board of Directors' Meeting, the fifty-cent discount was absorbed through Starlight's split of the concession revenue.



preparation), Starlight created the fulltime position of Concessions and Merchandise Manager. Katie Lohe was hired to fill this position prior to the 2015 summer season.<sup>49</sup> As Concessions and Merchandise Manager, Lohe oversees Aramark concessions, tour merchandise, and Starlight's Ovation Gift Shop. Prior to the creation of this position, the Operations, Marketing, and Accounting Departments all oversaw different aspects of the concessions. Through restructuring departmental organization and implementing a new management-level position dedicated to concession and merchandise control, Starlight has positioned itself for positive (future) revenue results in this area.<sup>50</sup>

Since the 1980s, Starlight has found ways to adjust its approach to concessions and parking, creating two reliable revenue streams. It will be important to monitor concessions moving forward to ensure the practice remains profitable and manageable. Currently, both areas are highly sustainable for the Economic Dimension. While profitable, the costs associated with parking and, even more so, concessions can be a source of frustration for patrons. Additionally, quality of product and service vary and may frequently suffer during events with higher attendance (Social Dimension). Parking wears heavily on the surrounding grounds. Starlight avoids parking in grass if there is rain or moisture, because cars will damage the grass parking lots. Despite that, lots of vehicles and individuals cover this terrain in a summer, definitely leaving an impact on the area (Environmental Dimension). Low to moderate sustainability of the

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49. "Starlight Theatre Staff," Starlight Theatre's website, accessed May 16, 2015, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/about-us/contact-us/staff>.

50. As indicated in the author's interview with Baker, there is the potential that all concessions will be controlled and operated by Starlight once the Aramark contract expires. Should this transition occur, the Concessions and Merchandise Manager will play a key role in developing the revised revenue stream.

Environmental and Social Dimensions hinders Parking and Concessions' practices from progressing into the highly sustainable area.

### APPLAUSE CLUB

One of the ways to increase a practice's or area's potential economic sustainability is through loss prevention. In terms of sustainability, this means an organization must analyze potential lost revenue and/or patronage then try to adjust its practices accordingly. In 1983 Rohlf and Starlight's Board of Directors discussed how many of the venue's patrons would go out to eat at restaurants prior to shows, thereby bypassing the concession stands.<sup>51</sup> These conversations led to the Applause Club opening the next season. The Applause Club is an onsite restaurant providing patrons the opportunity to sit and enjoy a meal at Starlight.<sup>52</sup> A local restaurant in partnership with Starlight provides the food for the Applause Club. The restaurant underwent expansion in 1997 and again in 2006. The most recent renovation included the addition of indoor seating, which doubles as the VIP Club during concerts.

Since 2006, a handful of restaurants served as the exclusive Applause Club caterer. The list of past and present caterers include Jack Stack BBQ, Hereford House, Plaza Catering, and new for 2015, PB&J Catering. In recent years, Starlight has adjusted its reservation policies to protect sales. In the past advance reservations were accepted, but payment wasn't received until patrons finished dining. Frequently, advanced reservation counts were high, but patrons did not eat at the Applause Club, resulting in

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51. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

52. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," Starlight Theatre Commemorative Program, 2000, 11.

large quantities of wasted food. Now reservations require pre-payment for dinner and must be made or canceled by 3 p.m. on the day of the selected performance.<sup>53</sup> Minimal information is released regarding the Applause Club's financial history and status. On Starlight's Form 990 covering the 2004 season, Jack Stack BBQ is listed as receiving a \$223,529 payment from Starlight as one of its five highest paid independent contractors. That amount does not indicate the amount of labor and food costs Jack Stack BBQ accrued during its Applause Club operation. Additionally, it wasn't until after Jack Stack BBQ's tenure with the Applause Club that the advanced reservation payment policy was implemented. While Starlight is still adjusting its approach regarding Applause Club profitability, the dining option provides patrons with an additional food and beverage option within the venue.<sup>54</sup>

Overall, the Applause Club is moderately unsustainable. In relation to the Economic Dimension, Starlight is still refining how to profit from this business practice. The organization has positively modified its approach to the space and partnerships, bolstering future achievement of a profitable balance. The Applause Club provides an unique experience within the venue for all patrons. Concert patrons come and go from the space all night. Broadway patrons sit down and eat prior to seeing the shows. All of them enjoy a climate-controlled space. While the price may be a deterrent to some patrons; other food and dining options are available throughout the venue at lower prices (Social Dimension). The Applause Club utilizes the space well, although higher attendance

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53. "Pre-Show Dining," Starlight Theatre's website, accessed May 16, 2015, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/your-visit/dining>.

54. Starlight could also take over the food and beverage operations for the Applause Club if it assumes control of the fast food concession stands. Should this transition occur, the Concessions and Merchandise Manager will play a key role in developing the revised revenue stream.

would strengthen its sustainability. Increasing the profit margins and maximizing space usage will prove more effective and sustainable (Environmental Dimension).

### DYNAMIC PRICING

Dynamic pricing follows the basic principle of supply and demand, allowing sellers flexibility to adjust prices as the ebb and flow of product demand fluctuates. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ticket price levels for concerts change for each artist, because each act is able to value the worth/demand of its seats differently. With advancements in technology and the ability to structure complex price levels, Starlight is slowly moving towards pricing seats by section, day of the week, and availability.<sup>55</sup>

In 2003 there were eight price levels: Producer's Circle, Orchestra, Side Orchestra, Place/Side Plaza, Terrace, Side Terrace, and Grass.<sup>56</sup> Historically this was the traditional approach, setting prices based upon the seating section. The ability to purchase tickets online opened the door for Starlight to vary pricing because visual charts made it easier for online buyers to see the different price sections. Before this added technology, it was quite difficult to explain price levels over the phone. By 2014 there were nine price levels, but they were not by seating section. Rather, the pricing corresponded with seats being centered and their distance from the stage. The "Plaza/Side Plaza" section of 2003 became four different price levels in 2014.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Yockey added another pricing change in 2013, based upon the day of the week:

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55. Historically, Starlight's approach to seating price levels focused on keeping areas easily identified.

56. 2003 Starlight Theatre Broadway Season mailer, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

57. Internal 2014 Ticket Office seating chart, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

I was analyzing where everyone was going with single tickets for *Spamalot* and I realized everyone still leans towards Fridays and Saturdays and we still have this antiquated system of charging the same across the board. ... There's nothing that prevents us from keeping ticket prices across the board for subscribers. It makes for easy exchanges, which is good for them. But we should be charging more on the weekend of single ticket buyers because these are still the (preferred) dates. So, I raised those tickets by \$4 in most sections for the rest of the season on Fridays and Saturdays.<sup>58</sup>

Yockey's weekend pricing is still in place for select seating sections. The most recent adjustment in seating price levels came in 2015. Starlight added three new levels, charging a premium for the preferred aisle and front row seat in Orchestra, Box, and Preferred Plaza.<sup>59</sup> Although prices are still set from Broadway show to show, with the exception of Friday and Saturday pricing, the gradual shift suggests Starlight will continue to embrace dynamic pricing for their venue. The future of this model will likely include price increases as seating sections begin to sell out, or even lower prices if unfavorable weather threatens a performance.

At the March 1, 2013 Board of Directors' Meeting, as part of his President's Report, Yockey announced a new pricing structure for 2013's upcoming summer concessions:

One of our challenges has been making sure the pricing at the concession stands is not so stiff that it sends our Broadway clients away from us and unhappy. They seem to be the most sensitive to concession prices. Concert audiences are much less sensitive to prices. They're accustomed to spending \$10-\$11 for a beer at concerts and things like that. ... (In 2013) we'll have a different set of

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58. Denton Yockey interview, 2013.

59. Internal 2015 Ticket Office seating chart, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

prices for Broadway than we do for concerts. That will allow us to hold the line on prices for Broadway (audiences) who are more sensitive on prices than our concert audiences. Then we'll change out the pricing (menus) each event here.<sup>60</sup>

Starlight's management tracked spending trends, which highlighted the opportunity to gain more revenue from the concert audiences. In the meeting, Yockey stated that, on average, concession sales are conservatively \$6-\$7 more per concert patron than for a Broadway patron.<sup>61</sup> "That means a lot of our Broadway audiences are not going to the concession stands at all."<sup>62</sup> The pricing strategy was successful and continued in future seasons.<sup>63</sup> For example, in 2015, the pricing for a generic beer and peanuts was \$13.00 (Broadway productions) and \$15.75 (Concert Series) and a premium beer and peanuts cost \$12.00 (Broadway productions) and \$13.75 (Concert Series).<sup>64</sup> As Yockey suggested, this pricing strategy allows Starlight to capitalize on one segment of their audience through dynamic pricing practices.

Dynamic pricing is a financially smart business practice. It allows Starlight to obtain the best margins possible for a variety of products (concessions and tickets). Starlight will want to employ this practice judiciously, because of the fine line between a good profit margin and the territory of price gouging (Economic Dimension). Patrons complain about pricing, but that occurred prior to applying dynamic pricing. While this

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60. Starlight Theatre Association Board of Directors Meeting, Starlight Theatre, Kansas City, MO, March 1, 2013.

61. Given the sensitive nature of the per patron amounts, the exact figures stated are not included, but rather converted into a comparative number.

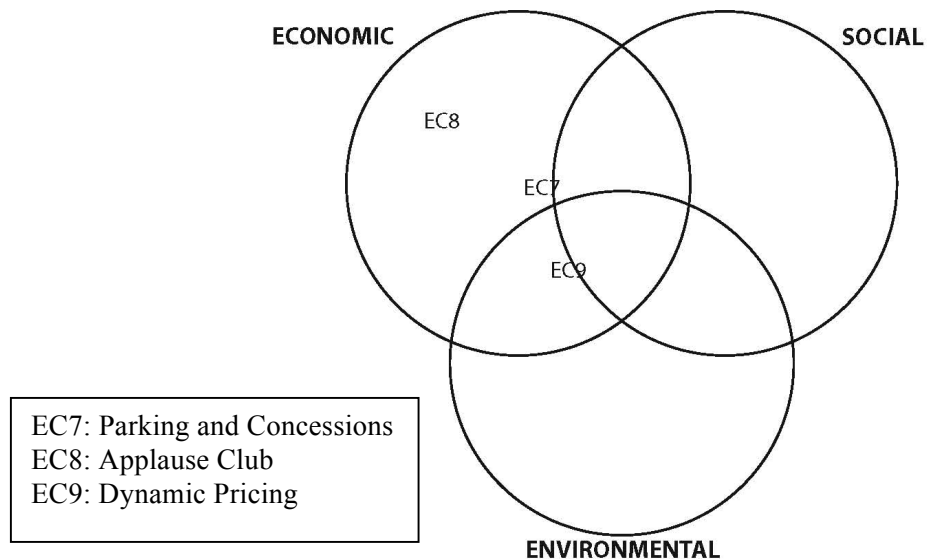
62. Starlight Theatre Association Board of Directors Meeting, March 1, 2013.

63. Cindy Jeffries, Starlight's Vice President of Marketing, Sales, and Development, confirmed the pricing strategy was in place for 2015 through an e-mail exchange with the author on May 16, 2015. From previous seasons, the most successful price strategy corresponded with beer sales.

64. Katie Lohe, electronic message to the author, May 17, 2015.

practice isn't solely responsible for complaints, the possibility exists that potentially higher ticket prices will fuel negative feedback (Social Dimension). Dynamic pricing also provides Starlight with an avenue to better manage ticket sales. Whether filling the audience by reducing the price of surplus seats or value pricing premium seats, dynamic pricing will optimize the efficiency with which available space is used (Environmental Dimension). Currently, Starlight utilized a balanced approach to dynamic pricing, generating a highly sustainable business practice.

**Figure 12: Sustainability Snapshot of Economic Dimension Focus Area #2 – Season-Driven Revenue**



**Economic Dimension Focus Area #3: Non-Season Revenue Streams**

Starlight's summer season typically runs from late May through September, with concerts sometimes occurring in April or October, leaving up to eight months when the venue is not being fully utilized. This section of the chapter will analyze several Starlight business practices implemented to utilize the venue outside the Broadway musicals and Concert Series timeframes. Some ideas were unsuccessful (Stage Fright) and one idea

was so profitable it was spun off into a for-profit subsidiary (Epic Innovative Events, Inc.). Unlike the previous section (Season-Driven Revenue), the business practices reviewed in this section may benefit from patron nostalgia associated with Starlight, but are not driven by tickets sales or show titles. Each of the practices exist as part of Starlight's strategic plan; a forward-looking approach to the organization's future and sustainability.

### STARLIGHT GALA

Starlight held its first gala in 1986 and continues the festive event, now an established tradition as well as an additional revenue stream. In 1986, the organization had eliminated its debt, but was still not profitable. Starlight resolved to use its gala to raise funds for general operating costs and educational programming. The gala revenue has sometimes been the sole extenuating factor in Starlight's profitability, alleviating the necessity of reporting a loss for that fiscal year. The annual event is held on the Starlight stage and is planned and executed by Starlight's Development Department and Epic Innovative Events, Inc. The themed evening includes a pre-gala cocktail hour, dinner, musical entertainment (often highlighting Starlight's season or history), and post-gala dance and cocktails. Board members are enlisted to solicit donations and identify individuals who may be interested in purchasing individual tickets or a full table at the event. The 2014 gala grossed \$49,700 in tickets sales (355 attendees at \$140 per seat) and donations totaling \$549,070. Once \$93,519 in expenses was subtracted, the gala contributed \$505,251 (net) to Starlight's budget.<sup>65</sup>

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65. Starlight Theatre's 2013 Form 990, 50.



### **Financial Impact of the Starlight Gala (net income)<sup>66</sup>**

2014: \$505,251  
2013: \$526,546  
2012: \$465,965  
2011: \$462,420  
2010: \$419,071

In 2014 Starlight hired a new President/CEO and a new Development Director and Coordinator. How their approach and changes, if any, to future gala events and how those will impact the financial contributions has yet to be determined. In one modification, Baker encouraged Starlight to move the 2015 Starlight Gala from its traditional second week of May date to a September timetable. Another idea Baker floated internally was dedicating all the proceeds from a given gala to finance the Education Department's programming.<sup>67</sup> While it is too early to assess any of these adaptations, new management is approaching the annual gala with fresh eyes, which may prevent the gala and resulting revenues from plateauing.

Recent adjustments to both the Development Department and Starlight Gala indicate a positive outlook for this Starlight tradition. The current placement of the Starlight Gala is directly on the line of highly sustainable, with new concepts promising to strengthen all three dimensions. By moving the gala to fall, following the Starlight season, heightened excitement about the venue will animate attendees. Formally, the gala occurred before the Broadway Season, creating the added task of rekindling the attendees' love for Starlight (Social Dimension). The idea of incorporating new bidding options and connecting the funds to cherished programs (children and outreach) may

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66. All figures were obtained from Starlight's yearly Form 990.

67. Richard Baker interview, 2014.

boost revenue for the traditionally successful gala (Economic Dimension). By moving the gala to fall, Starlight optimizes use of venue space, expanding the more valuable preferred May availability for musical productions or concerts (Environmental Dimension). So, while currently highly sustainable, there's the potential future plans will only solidify the importance of the Starlight Gala.

### STAGEFRIGHT AT STARLIGHT

When one mentions StageFright at Starlight (SAS) to anyone who was at the venue in 2002 the name elicits an unguarded, visceral response. SAS was Starlight's one and only foray into the haunted house business. Bill Hartnett, who was brought on to help develop non-Broadway programming, worked at Universal Studios as the Director of Events and Entertainment for two years prior to arriving at Starlight. During his time at Universal, Hartnett worked on the theme park's haunted houses and Halloween-themed events. The goal of SAS was to create a new Kansas City tradition and make "the community aware of Starlight as an entertainment venue for other times of the year."<sup>68</sup> As conceived, SAS was expansive and utilized a majority of Starlight's venue. Three separately themed haunted houses, thrill rides backstage, a roaming Chain Saw Drill Team, sci-fi movies projected like a drive-in movie in Starlight's outdoor arena, and carnival-like concessions were included in the event's plans. Starlight scheduled SAS for 22 evenings in October 2002. General admission to the event was \$18, with groups of 13 charged \$13. Unfortunately, delays and uncontrollable circumstances plagued SAS.

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68. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (2002), November 14, 2002, 1, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

At the September 12, 2002, Starlight Board of Directors' Meeting, Hartnett invited members to a VIP preview night of SAS planned for October 3, 2002. At that time one haunted house was complete with the other two under construction at Illusions in Independence, a local Missouri company. SAS had already secured sponsorships with Time Warner, US Army, and Kansas City Costumes.<sup>69</sup> The timeline derailed in the weeks that followed. On October 4, the day after the scheduled opening and VIP preview night, Starlight put out a news release with the heading "StageFright at Starlight Delays Opening of Haunted Houses; Scares Continue with FREE Entertainment on Friday, October 4 and Saturday, October 5."<sup>70</sup> SAS did not charge any entrance fees for the opening weekend, negatively affecting a budget already expected to lose money in its initial year. "We regret the delay, but while our haunted houses are being fine-tuned for the best possible Halloween experience, we hope that our patrons will still come to enjoy all of the frightening adventures that StageFright offers," Harnett said in the release. When SAS opened October 10, its first full weekend of four nights resulted in 1,800 tickets sold, outpacing its projected budget of 1,000 tickets for those dates. The October 17, 2002, Board of Directors' Meeting Minutes recorded "SAS will need to sell 26,000 tickets in the remaining 15 nights in order to maintain the proposed budget. Bill Hartnett added that SAS had challenges that are often associated with the establishment of a new concept. ... The upcoming weekend will be a true test of the draw."<sup>71</sup>

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69. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (2002), September 12, 2002, 1, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

70. Starlight Theatre News Release, October, 4, 2002, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

71. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (2002), October 17, 2002, 2, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

SAS experienced a delayed opening, operating for a weekend without ticket revenue, an extremely cold October with temperatures in the 30s and 40s, and precipitation on eleven of the nineteen operating days. SAS brought in revenue of \$384,511, but accrued expenses totaling \$602,321, resulting in a net loss of \$217,810.<sup>72</sup> Rohlf, after a review of SAS, provided the following report to Board of Directors in December 2002,

Mr. Rohlf shared that any new event in 2004 would be [held for] five weeks and only on Friday and Saturday nights; the expenses would be \$250,000 which is significantly less (than) last year, and the marketing targets would be clearly defined and would include the Starlight brand of fun family entertainment. It was decided that the carnival type rides would not continue and the event would utilize less geography of the complex in order to hold labor costs down. However, due to their popularity with customers surveyed, the Chain Saw Drill Team and Lichtor's Meat Market will be retained for the next event.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the references to future reiterations of SAS, Starlight did not pursue the venture beyond its 2002 launch. Although SAS wasn't financially successful, it had potential to tap into a market that only had one competitor—haunted houses in the West Bottoms of Kansas City.<sup>74</sup> SAS represents another instance of Starlight eliminating a programming attempt after an unsuccessful first year; Starlight abandoned the indoor series, Starlight Indoors (1993/94), after the first year.

StageFright was clearly unsustainable in its first year, but it was a promising concept. Without a second operational year, the practice will remain in the moderately

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72. Budget included as an appendix with the December 12, 2002, Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (2002), found in Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

73. *Ibid.*, 2.

74. Halloween Haunt at Worlds of Fun, which most resembles Hartnett's vision for SAS, did not open until 2006.

unsustainable area. Financially, there was the potential for StageFright to succeed despite its late opening, but the weather was not favorable to Starlight's outdoor venue (Economic Dimension). The late start, mixed messages, operating costs, and lack of crowds positioned the practice to be moderately-highly unsustainable. The concept's placement on the Venn Diagram improves because it used the venue when it would traditionally be empty (Environmental Dimension) and patrons attended despite the shifting calendar and the fact Starlight was unsure about its target market (Social Dimension).<sup>75</sup>

#### EPIC INNOVATIVE EVENTS, INC.

One winter Rohlf received a phone call from the City Office (Kansas City, Missouri) asking for Starlight to help plan entertainment for an upcoming convention. "Well, we did that and a bunch of people were there, not just visitors, but Kansas City people. So I started getting phone calls. 'Could you do this? Could you do that?'" These additional calls came during the winter off-season. "To generate some additional revenue for Starlight I would take on those projects," recalled Rohlf, "and that grew to the point where our auditors mentioned during one of our annual audits, 'the amount of revenue that you're generating is becoming borderline according to internal revenue service rules for non-profits.'" Through a series of opportunities, Starlight started an events business. In order to prevent jeopardizing Starlight's 501c3 status, the organization researched how to continue bringing in money through special events:

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75. The October 17, 2002, Board Minutes, indicate the event budgeted for roughly 28 thousand patrons. The minutes for the next meeting, November 14, 2002, reports "attendance was one third of anticipated," or around seven thousand. In that same meeting a report indicates Starlight marketed to audiences 16-24 years of age, but StageFright saw heavy traffic from those over 25 and under 18, causing the organization to adjust its marketing mix during the event dates.

In examining it (the event business), we figured out how to structure it in such a way that the new entity wouldn't have any employees. They would be Starlight employees loaned to the entity, which helped offset the cost of those employees. Plus, equally important, if not more important, it enabled us to bring some new people on staff who had skill sets we felt were important to the organization. So we formed the for-profit Epic Entertainment, hoping it would grow and that one day it would need to pay taxes.<sup>76</sup>

In 1999, Starlight hired Hartnett as Vice President of Events and Entertainment, a new position for the organization, and he ran Epic Entertainment.<sup>77</sup> In 2003 the events division became too profitable, as the auditors foreshadowed. Starlight restructured Epic Entertainment as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Starlight Theatre Association of Kansas City.<sup>78</sup>

The subsidiary began operating in the community event sector, planning and executing events at Starlight and offsite venues. Over time the company expanded its offerings and rebranded as Epic Innovative Events, Inc. (referred to as “Epic” for the remainder of this chapter). Epic hoped the new title would help potential clients understand the business offered more than just entertainment components. Currently, Epic’s revenue streams divide into four areas: Corporate, Non-profit, Bayer, and Onsite.

Bayer Animal Healthcare was one of Epic’s first major clients and, in the early years, represented the majority of their revenue. While Epic still assists with the planning and execution of a variety of Bayer trade shows, Epic is trying to diversify its revenue

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76. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

77. Hartnett LinkedIn Profile, accessed May 15, 2015, [https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=4202448&authType=NAME\\_SEARCH&authToken=yTYQ&locale=en\\_US&trk=tyah&trkInfo=clickedVertical%3Amynetwork%2Cidx%3A1-1-1%2CtarId%3A1431950036658%2Ctas%3Abill%20hart](https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=4202448&authType=NAME_SEARCH&authToken=yTYQ&locale=en_US&trk=tyah&trkInfo=clickedVertical%3Amynetwork%2Cidx%3A1-1-1%2CtarId%3A1431950036658%2Ctas%3Abill%20hart).

78. This founding date (1999) corresponds to the date listed by Hartnett in his online resume and with the first mention of Epic Events in any Starlight Form 990.

streams, pursuing a myriad clientele list. Lindsey Rood, Epic's Event Producer, cites Non-profit clients as the company's most successful segment in the last five years, but it is also the area that requires the most time and effort. "So, from an efficiency standpoint, (non-profit events) don't always make the most sense," explained Rood. "Part of what we're looking at moving forward is clearly corporate, where you command a better return on our time investment and the amount of money we can actually make against it."<sup>79</sup> When dealing with non-profit clients, Rood credited Epic with assisting in getting a variety of individuals, with differing ideas to become a cohesive unit, working towards a successful event. Epic's function with corporate clients is that of an event executor; typically Epic is involved from event conception through its completion. Often the event has a theme, budget, and key components requiring professional assistance in executing the event. Onsite events at Starlight include proms, weddings, non-profit fundraisers, corporate events, holiday parties, and Starlight's own annual gala.

In the past year Epic added a Venue Coordinator position "with primary responsibilities in coordinating and managing events in the Starlight Theatre Cohen Community Stage House and Applause Club during the private season."<sup>80</sup> Prior to authorizing this position, the venue events were smaller in nature primarily due to the lack of a dedicated staff member championing Starlight's venue assets. Previously, without the Venue Coordinator, all Epic personnel assisted with executing onsite events but because of their other primary responsibilities onsite events took less precedence. Following the addition of this position, Epic's onsite events segment has seen tremendous

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79. Lindsey Rood, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, May 14, 2015.

80. Epic Innovative Events, Inc. website, "Our Team," accessed May 14, 2015, <http://epic-kc.com/about-us/our-team/>.

growth. “It is the unit right now, according to our financials, that’s almost tripled what we projected in terms of revenue,” indicated Rood. At the same time, the expansion of Starlight’s presenting calendar into April, October, and now potentially the winter months, Epic is seeing their booking window at the venue shrinking. When Rood first came to Epic she recalls they could book the venue from September to June, which is now October 16-April 21. “So, we lost a lot of time that sort of prime booking time for out here, especially for what people associated with the theatre. They think of it as an outdoor venue, therefore they’re thinking about it as a private event space when the weather is nice, not when there’s snow on the ground.”<sup>81</sup> While the onsite segment has become more profitable due to management changes, its ability to grow will vary depending upon Starlight’s approach to programming, specifically Starlight Indoors.

The decline of the economy in 2007 brought about a change in Epic’s service fees:

As the economy went into the recession, events were seen as a luxury and so the whole way that people did business with events turned on its head. Where a lot of things at the time were turnkey and people would give you a pot of money and say ‘go do an event for this amount of money,’ coming out of that we’ve seen a great deal more push for transparency. The way we bill changed. A lot of what we used to do was charge for our service hours, we’re really service hour based, but we couldn’t command a great deal for our service hours. So we made a lot in incremental revenue, essentially in markup within those kinds of pots of money. That’s had to shift, because people of course want to see reconciled receipts and everything for expenses, which was a good thing for us. ...It means we’re able to command more at an hourly rate, day rates, for our time versus trying to make it up on the back end.<sup>82</sup>

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81. Lindsey Rood interview, 2015.

82. Ibid.



Rood sees event management shifting towards a model similar to marketing and public relation agencies and billing hourly for all aspects of an event.

As a for-profit entity, Epic's financials are not fully available, but Starlight's Form 990 can provide insight into its profitability and support of Starlight. On the 2013 Form 990 (10/01/13 to 9/31/14) Epic's revenue was reported as \$1,759,075 and its expenses totaled \$1,661,975, totaling \$97,100 profit.<sup>83</sup> A lot of those expenses are directly tied to Starlight. Epic pays monthly rent for their onsite offices (\$3,000/month). Additionally, for onsite events, Epic is charge a rental fee by Starlight. When Starlight purchases equipment or makes improvements to the facility that may also benefit Epic, the for-profit covers a portion of those expenses. Financially, Epic does not fund a permanent staff. Rather, as it was originally structured in 2003, Starlight Theatre Association loans staff members to assist with the running of Epic. Rohlf explained that the revenue of Epic covers the staff's salary and is allocated depending upon how much of an individual's time is spent working for Epic. "How much time does that take? Oh, it takes 10% of my time. Ok, 10% of your salary will hit the books of Epic. So, when Epic makes this money, it's paid back to Starlight to cover my 10% or Donna's 80%, which reduced the amount of net gain which the company has made, which the company needs to pay taxes on." The staff associated with Epic, in so much that 80-90% of their time is spent on Epic events, is currently a 5-6-person team. Outside of those individuals, Epic utilizes the Starlight Operation and Accounting staff the most and pays portions of their salaries.<sup>84</sup> In 2013, \$521,672 was spent on "sharing of paid employees with related

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83. Starlight Theatre's 2013 Form 990, 35-36.

84. The portion of pay covered by Epic is determined on an employee-by-employee basis. For fiscal year 2013, Epic paid 20% of the Vice President of Finance's salary, almost two-thirds of the salary of

organization(s).”<sup>85</sup> Given the financial support contributed by Epic, Starlight has an unquestionable vested interest in seeing the business succeed.

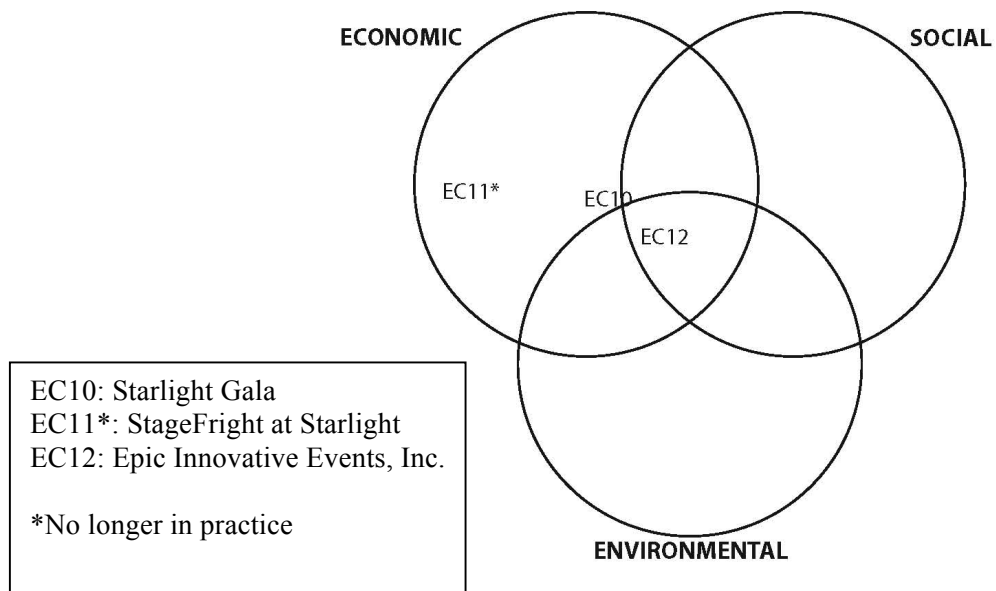
While many venues may host events or rent their space, Epic Innovative Events demonstrates Starlight’s creative approach to potential revenue streams. The organization didn’t shy away from the venture when auditors questioned its success, but found a way to help the practice thrive (Economic Dimension). The for-profit’s clientele is diverse and Epic offers numerous services. Those two factors combined, allowing Epic to reach a broad audience, increasing the ability to profit from positive word of mouth (Social Dimension). By utilizing Starlight’s venue during the off-season months and offsite locations, Epic’s business model is highly sustainable (Environmental Dimension). It will be important to monitor the impact Starlight’s Indoor Series has on Epic.

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Epic’s President, but only 5% of the salary of Starlight’s President. These figures are reported on the Form 990, because the individuals are Starlight Officers. Other staff salary splits are unknown.

85. Starlight Theatre’s 2013 Form 990, 61.

**Figure 13: Sustainability Snapshot of Economic Dimension Focus Area #3 – Non-Season Revenue Streams**



**Economic Dimension Focus Area #4: Non-Traditional Work Force**

Starlight contributes to Kansas City’s economy through its patrons staying at hotels, eating out before a show, and exploring the city. Starlight also provides over 500 employment opportunities in a fiscal year. While the organization’s 2014 Form 990 lists 508 employees, that number does not include the employees of subcontractors (concession workers, parking attendants, and off-duty officers). Additionally, the organization had 209 volunteers during the same fiscal year. Of those volunteers, many were part of the Moonlighters program; a program designed to donate to not-for-profit organizations in exchange for volunteer hours. Through streamlining employee positions, utilizing volunteers, and fostering an internship program, the organization strikes a nice balance between opportunities for employment and controlling salary expenditures.

## BOB ROHLF INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Started in 1984, Starlight’s internship program is meant to “create a bridge between the academic and professional communities, to give aggressive area students a chance to attain professional experience at an early stage in their developments.”<sup>86</sup> The program initially featured several technical theatre positions. Over time other departments asked Rohlf for an intern. “People on staff were saying ‘you know, could we have an intern?’” explained Rohlf. “Oh, could you use one? ‘Well yeah.’ And it was just a natural extension.”<sup>87</sup> From the beginning, Starlight has paid interns for their work. Interns’ rate of pay is slightly above minimum wage. Starlight considers the hands-on experience, ability to build resumes, and establish professional contacts as a value added component.<sup>88</sup> Rohlf began the program with a focus on obtaining affordable labor, but also expanding Starlight’s educational reach:

If properly managed, it is very beneficial to Starlight and very beneficial to the kids. The emphasis, I think, needs to be on the kids, because it is an internship. And by definition, a student who enters an internship program is looking to learn something. If an organization that has an internship program looks at it as cheap labor only, that’s a problem.<sup>89</sup>

The internship program, renamed the Bob Rohlf Internship Program in 2010, is overseen by Starlight’s Education Department, which ensures the interns’ experiences include networking and educational opportunities. For example, eight to ten times throughout the

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86. Starlight Theatre’s *The Wizard of Oz* Program, 1984, 35.

87. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

88. In 2015, the majority of positions paid \$8.00 per hour plus overtime. The highest paid positions, in Accounting, made \$11.50 per hour plus overtime. For the State of Missouri, minimum wage in 2015 amounted to \$7.65 per hour, as listed on the Department of Labor’s website.

89. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

summer, interns will be invited to a brown bag lunch where one of Starlight's management team describes his/her current position and their career path. This allows interns to gain insight into multiple departments and ask questions of management staff in a relaxed atmosphere.

As Rohlf indicated, internships allow Starlight to obtain specialized labor at a reduced cost. In 2015 the program offered fifteen positions, with the potentially totaling 6,440 or more hours of employment, averaging \$9.08 per hour (not including time-and-a-half overtime earnings). Created to bridge the academic and professional communities, interns focus on professional development. In contrast, Starlight's Guest Assist program hires part time workers for events at the pay rate of \$10 per hour, but their main requirement is to be customer-friendly. At the current pay rate, the potential 2015 savings for Starlight through utilizing an internship program equals just under \$6,000. Starlight's research found they are paying above industry standards for not-for-profit theatre interns. An additional intangible benefit of the internship program is found in the new perspectives each intern contributed to his/her department. They inject information regarding current programming and infuse fresh ideas for approaching established organizational practices.<sup>90</sup>

Currently, there is no structured career path to allow Starlight interns to transition into fulltime employment. Previous interns watch for Starlight position openings and may initiate the application process. Currently, seven employees of the approximately 40 year-round staff are former interns; production interns return from time to time in a seasonal

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90. The fifteen students hired as part of the 2015 Bob Rohlf Internship came from twelve universities. This diversity allows Starlight to garner various ideas and perspectives because the students add a pool of knowledge from different collegiate training programs/departments.

capacity for self-produced show positions.<sup>91</sup> This network of potential employees, who already have experience with the organization and a known work record, has the potential to save Starlight resources and money when hiring vacant, fulltime positions.

The Bob Rohlf Internship Program is beneficial to both Starlight and the students it serves. As an educational program, the internships received funding in the past. Currently, the program has some funding sources, including a general education fund, but no one source to cover all hourly intern salaries. While the positions save Starlight money, there is the potential to save more by finding financial support (Economic Dimension). Although Starlight's building capacity is covered in following chapters, it is important to note here the physical impact the internship program has on the venue facilities. Summer interns influence Starlight's facility space issues; the arrival of interns causes a shortage of cubical space. So, while they bring life and new ideas to the organization, it does create a space issue (Environmental Dimension). The program serves students from around the country, with an unsurprising concentration from Kansas and Missouri colleges. Additionally, interns may transition into fulltime positions, increasing the program's credibility (Social and Economic Dimensions).

### AMBASSADORS

The Starlight Theatre Ambassadors trace their roots back to the 1959 founding of the Starlight Theatre Women's Committee. The Women's Committee, mentioned previously, led tours, hosted cast parties, sold season subscriptions, and assisted in miscellaneous administrative duties in the Starlight office. Membership into the group

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91. In 2015 Starlight promoted Justin White, a former intern, to Vice President of Operations, making him the highest-ranking former intern.

required an invitation from a current member or member of Starlight. In the 1980s members of the group began assisting with auditions, telemarketing efforts, and various fundraisers. In 1992, those duties expanded once more to include conducting tours of the venue several days a week and every night prior to the Broadway productions. Starlight restructured the organization in 1993. Now operating as the Starlight Theatre Ambassadors, the group opened enrollment to anyone interested, including men.<sup>92</sup>

According to the Ambassadors' December 2014 newsletter, the group had 201 members and served Starlight in multiple functions for a grand total of 8,092 hours. The following is a breakdown of the Ambassador volunteer hours by area:

**Area – Hours Volunteered**

Advisory Team Captain – 100  
Auditions – 10  
Cast parties – 159  
Community Outreach – 435  
Concerts – 3,582  
Horticulture – 32  
Facility Tours – 464  
Guest Information – 852  
Membership – 201  
Ovation Store – 185  
Recruiting/Retention – 10  
Special Events – 463  
Spotlight Stage – 128  
Ushers – 1,471<sup>93</sup>

As shown in the above list, the Ambassador duties now encompass a variety of areas throughout Starlight's operations.

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92. Ambassador History, Starlight Theatre's website, accessed May 10, 2015, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/common/cms/documents/Community%20Prog/StarlightTheatreAmbassaorHistory.pdf>.

93. December 2014 Ambassador Newsletter, e-mailed by Nick Rojas to author, May 6, 2015.

The Ambassadors is a self-governing group, but it works closely with Justin White and Nick Rojas, Operations Department members, who serve as Starlight liaisons. The Ambassador Advisory Team and Operations Department's open line of communication is key to the program running smoothly and assisting Starlight efficiently. The Ambassadors contribute many volunteer hours to Starlight and through the open lines of communications are kept in the loop of venue happenings. The Operations Department manages the bulk of Starlight's season employees and at the same time must be able to assign and trust the Ambassadors with a variety of duties. Following his retirement, Rohlf noted that a key to having a symbiotic relationship between Starlight and the Ambassadors was to allow them to be independent within Starlight's predetermined parameters. With six ambassadors receiving their 20+ years of service pin in 2014, it is apparent both entities have found a cooperative balance.<sup>94</sup>

The Ambassador Program adapts to the needs of Starlight. That component of the volunteer group cannot be undervalued. Ambassadors help set the tone for a given event, with a lot of patron interactions. In addition to being highly dedicated, the Ambassadors exceptional level of annually returning volunteers maintains a well-trained group that follows Starlight's protocol and organization expectations. The members encompass a variety of ages, careers, and geographic locations (Environmental and Social Dimension).<sup>95</sup> As previously expressed, the program saves Starlight money. They serve

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94. Bob Rohlf interview, 2012.

95. Both Starlight and the volunteers themselves benefit from the Ambassadors unparalleled contributions. In 2011 the Broadway League honored longtime Ambassadors Jan and Lee Morevitska with the Star of Touring Broadway Award, shining national attention on the couple and venue. Even former Ambassadors benefit Starlight. Current Board Member and Chair of Starlight's Education Committee, Tammy Peterman, first became involved at Starlight as an Ambassador. After returning to The University of Kansas Hospital, where she is Executive Vice President, COO, and Chief Nursing Officer, she ended her involvement with the Ambassadors but continues assisting Starlight as a board member.



in important positions that would require paid staff if the program did not exist (Economic Dimension). Finally, Starlight gave an unused storage and multipurpose space to the Ambassadors to serve as a space for meetings and breaks. The Morevitska Room, named after Ambassadors Jan and Lee Morevitska, optimizes space for productive uses (Environmental Dimension).

### MOONLIGHTERS

Starlight's Moonlighter Program allows local not-for-profit organizations to volunteer at Starlight and receive a donation to their organization for their time. It is similar to programs found in sporting arenas. Currently, Moonlighters are only used for Broadway programming, not concerts. There are three areas of positions available.

**Greeters:** up to 8 needed, 3 hour commitment, \$90 per show/per organization (\$450 for 2014 season)  
**Ticket Takers:** up to 30 needed, 3.5 hour commitment, \$300 per show/per organization (\$1,500 for 2014 season)  
**Ushers:** up to 30, 4.5 hour commitment, \$330 per show/per organization (\$1,650 for 2014 season)<sup>96</sup>

Depending upon the area and number of members in a Moonlighters group, the pay rate works out to \$2.44-\$3.75/hour. As an added incentive for the Moonlighters, once individuals are finished with the assigned duties, volunteers sit in a designated section and attend the remainder of the performance. The program allows groups to fundraise easily, provides the opportunity to see a show at Starlight, and keeps Starlight's operation costs down.

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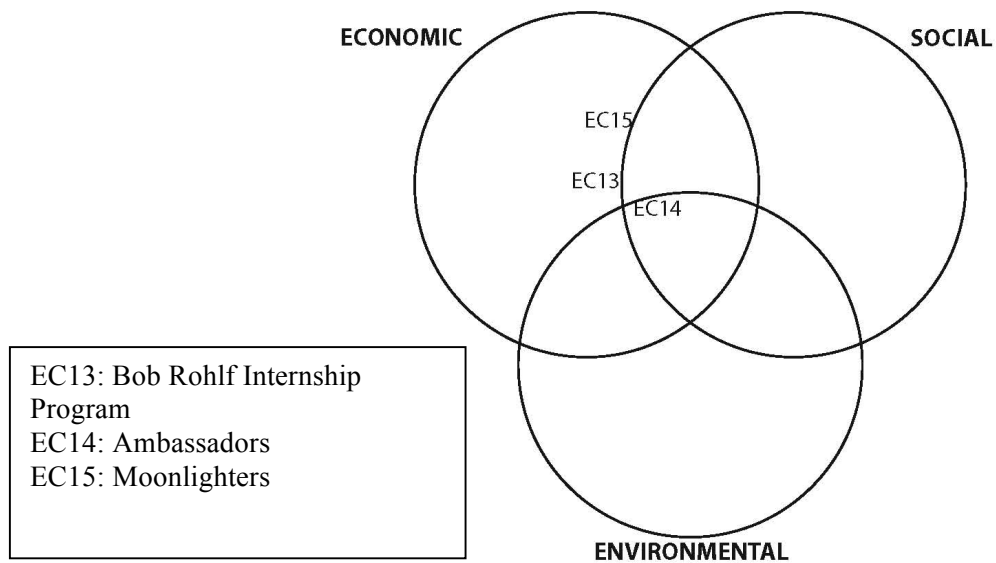
96. "2014 Starlight Theatre Moonlighter Job Responsibilities," Starlight Theatre's website, accessed May 10, 2015, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/common/cms/documents/Community%20Prog/2014-Starlight-Theatre-Moonlighter-Job-Responsibilities.pdf>.

The 2014 Starlight Broadway season presented 31 performances. Hypothetically, if all the Moonlighter groups brought the maximum number of volunteers and remained on duty for the estimated maximum amount of time, it would total roughly 8,184 contributed hours. Given the estimated pay rates, this program would cost Starlight just under \$16.5 thousand in donation expenditures to organizations. Starlight's financial windfall from the Moonlighters program is staggering. For example, if the venue needed to cover the Moonlighters' hours with entry-level Guest Assist employees at \$10/hour, the cost for fulltime employees in those positions would jump from the current \$16.5 thousand in donation expenditures to an \$81.8 thousand salary expense. Operating as an outreach opportunity rather than a cost-savings structure, the program benefits Starlight and participating volunteer organizations.

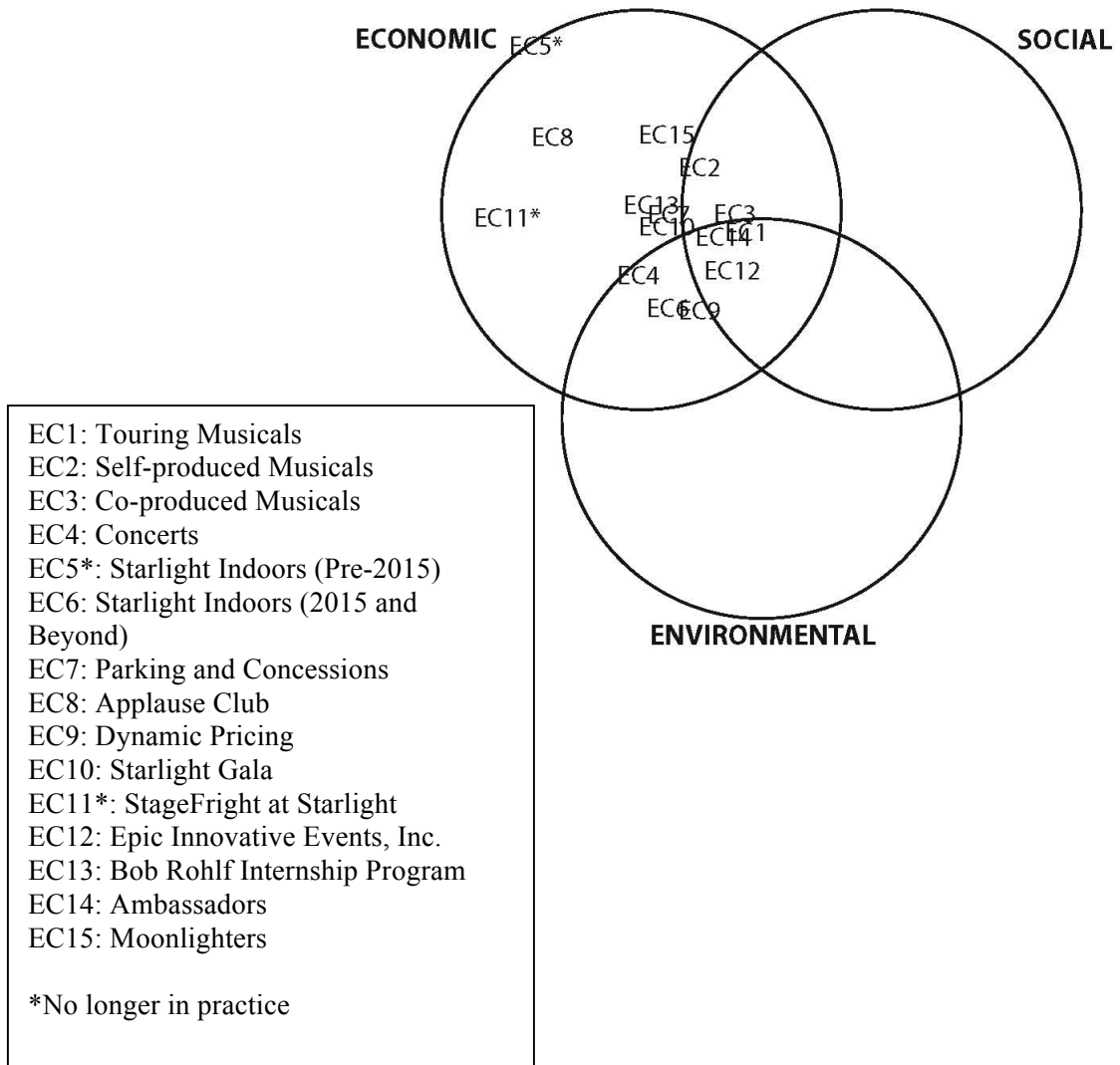
The Moonlighter Program provides Starlight with the opportunity to support other charitable organizations, creating a positive attitude towards Starlight. Starlight aligns the Moonlighters with their outreach programs; however, it is not advertised to the same extent as the others. Modifications in marketing the program is an important point, because visibility is crucial so that all qualifying groups are aware of the opportunity to raise funds through Starlight's Moonlighters (Social Dimension). Unlike the Ambassadors, it is difficult to ensure Moonlighter volunteers engage with patrons to Starlight's standards. Their service engagement is brief and while an organization may always participate, the group might bring different volunteers each time. So, Moonlighters might not contribute to the "Starlight Experience" as much as employees or Ambassadors. Sometimes the groups also fall through or bring a smaller group than promised, creating a last minute problem for Starlight (Environmental Dimension).

Starlight would benefit by developing a way to hold groups accountable for not following through on the expected volunteer commitment. As previously discussed, the program saves Starlight money each summer (Economic Dimension). The financial benefit makes this a moderately sustainable program. With a few adjustments in visibility, training, and accountability, the Moonlighter Program can increase its sustainability.

**Figure 14: Sustainability Snapshot of Economic Dimension Focus Area #4 – Non-Traditional Work Force**



**Figure 15: Overview of All Economic Dimension Focus Areas**



Six of the fifteen subtopics examined in the Economic Dimension align in the centralized area of the Venn diagram, finding a balance between the three dimensions of sustainability (EC1, EC3, EC9, EC10, EC12, EC14). Three of those are positioned completely in the middle area (EC1, EC12, EC14). The mix of Starlight’s season (EC1-4 and EC6) somewhat balance each other out, considering each business practices’ benefits and challenges. Two of the current practice subtopics land almost exclusively in the

Economic zone (EC8, EC13), indicating they are structured primarily to financially benefit Starlight. This approach to economic-oriented areas is acceptable if it is balanced with Social and Environmental practices elsewhere.

The two least sustainable practices have already been eliminated by Starlight (EC5, EC11); the organization has a pattern of ending a practice if it exhibits too much risk in the first year. Both of these endeavors, while not without their financial hurdles, had the potential to corner a Kansas City entertainment market. Of the two least sustainable practices, the initial Starlight Indoors had the most to gain if Starlight had continued to nurture the concept and retool the practice.

The Applause Club has the most room for improvement, although this postulation relies upon assumed financials. Since there is not a clear cut Applause Club line item in the Form 990s, this study must interpret the Jack Stack BBQ amount listed for one season and the high turnover rate of caterers as indicators that the ideal financial model has yet to be found for this area.

Epic Innovative Events, Inc. has the strongest positioning of the practices surveyed in this chapter, which is not surprising given its for-profit status. Despite the recent addition of a Venue Coordinator, the subsidiary could likely use one or two additional staff members to spread the workload as they refocus on corporate clients.

The analyzed practices in this chapter highlight a trend within the past few decades; a pattern of Starlight structuring and adjusting practices to be profitable. Starting with Rohlf's tenure, Starlight has identified its revenue streams, diversified them, and strove to eliminate leakage or loss. Yockey was willing to put more money into self-produced and co-produced musicals, but he was also instrumental in bring about an

increase in parking fees and dynamic pricing practices. Baker came to Starlight from a background in accounting and for-profit theatre. It is likely he will continue the trend of making decisions to strengthen the Economic Dimension. In his first year, the venue saw a tighter budget for the self-produced musical (*The Sound of Music*), which was as profitable as that summer's touring productions.<sup>97</sup>

The anticipated benefits from the addition of the Concessions and Merchandise Manager position have yet to be seen. With this new management control, an increase in food quality and a decrease in inventory waste will increase Starlight's profitability. Concessions might see some major shifts in the future. With some managers supporting food and beverages to be Starlight-run, that area has the potential to undergo drastic shifts within this model. The gravity of such a move, where the potential growth may outweigh initial decline or loss of revenue, necessitates cautious expectations prior to Starlight's entering into this endeavor.

As the financial structure of Starlight stabilizes and grows, some of the programs may benefit from a boost in investment (Bob Rohlf Internship Program and Moonlighters). For the internships, which are already paid above not-for-profit market value, this may mean expanding the positions and utilizing more students. The Moonlighters, while volunteering, do have an extremely low return for their time, and the reimbursements might be slightly increased without significantly impacting Starlight's bottom line.

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<sup>97</sup> Brenda Mortensen interview, 2015.

## Chapter 4

### The Environmental Dimension in Business Practices of Starlight Theatre

I sat in the Starlight Theater [sic] tonight and gazed at the heavens. Memories came flooding through my mind as I looked at the bright moon shining over the crowded seats.

I was eight years old on the magical night when man first set foot on the moon... We were at Starlight watching *Peter Pan*, a mythical adventure that had my young head spinning with dreams of flying and reaching the heavens if only I believed... The silence in the crowd was tangible as a hundred eyes turned upward to gaze at the moon, and for a moment, we all shared a common bond I was too young to understand.

— “Making Memories for 50 Years!”

#### **Starlight Theatre and the Environmental Dimension**

Since Starlight Theatre’s founding in 1950, the venue’s operation, including all season planning, venue improvements, and daily maintenance, is the responsibility of the Starlight Theatre Association (STA). The Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO) Parks and Recreation Department is the main factor in Starlight’s stable management. As mentioned in the first chapter, since Starlight is owned by the city, the government and Parks and Recreation Department are major stakeholders in the venue’s viability.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, Mark Funkhouser, KCMO City Auditor, conducted an analysis of the Starlight Theatre Concession Agreement to evaluate the benefits the city received from allowing STA continued use of the venue. Funkhouser proposed a competitive bidding contract for the management of Starlight, putting STA’s continued operation of the venue in jeopardy. In his written response to the report, Mark McHenry, Director of KCMO Parks and

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1. Other studies include local government as its own dimension or as an influencer of the three dimensions utilized by this study. Since Starlight and the Kansas City government are so interconnected, they are included here as a stakeholder because they are heavily invested in Starlight’s success.

Recreation Department and member of Starlight’s Board of Directors, opposed the study’s proposed bidding process:

We disagree with this recommendation. The value of the fifty-five year relationship with the Starlight Theatre Association seems to have been lost or underappreciated in this audit. In addition, any arrangement with the Starlight Theatre Association that would reduce the confidence level of potential donors in the management of the theatre would have potentially devastating effects on fund-raising for the facility and on the professional management of this property.<sup>2</sup>

While this response references all three areas of sustainability, it draws a particular connection between creating a managerial environment that fosters stability and, in turn, promotes sustainable business practices.<sup>3</sup> To successfully create a sustainable future, Starlight’s management must consider the organization’s past and present. In some instances, what is best for the Environmental or Social Dimensions is not for the Economic Dimension. A competitive bidding process emphasizes the immediate economic value over the long-term sustainability of the entire institution. Some of Starlight’s plans for the Environmental Dimension are five to ten years in the making and the result of balancing all three dimensions of sustainability. This chapter explores the Environmental Dimension in terms of Starlight’s physical facility, guest experience, approach to the environment, and human resources. In all of these areas, Starlight’s operational approach is refined and informed by previous experiences and the knowledge accumulated through 65 years of managing the unique facility.

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2. “Performance Audit; Starlight Theatre Concession Agreement,” Kansas City Auditors Office, December 2005, 40, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://kcmo.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2013/12/20051220-StarlightConcessionAgreement-Audit.pdf>.

3. McHenry emphasized that STA is more likely to improve the venue when it is clear they will remain in charge of the theatre and its environment. Additionally, he reinforced the organization’s contributions to the Social Dimension, which is harder to place a monetary value on.



McHenry pointed out STA's continued investments in the city-owned facility as a positive outcome of the STA-city relationship. In Starlight's 2013 Form 990, the organization cites \$29,355,348 in leasehold improvements and \$2,568,029 in equipment, approximately \$498 thousand worth of investments per year.<sup>4</sup> When listing the benefits of Starlight's agreement with the city, McHenry included "a commitment of the entire Starlight organization to create a beautiful, comfortable and safe environment at Starlight Theatre, as evidenced by the scores of millions of private dollars invested in the Starlight Theatre complex over the years, thereby also tremendously expanding the value of this city-owned asset."<sup>5</sup> Starlight grew from its original ground plan to include the enclosed and expanded stage house, on-site administrative buildings, and continuously updated restrooms and concessions. Starlight's management is continually evaluating the venue and planning future improvements. Members of the Board of Directors form a Starlight Strategic Planning Committee and meet to discuss the current and future states of the venue. They create a proactive list of improvements, which contain items several years out and the budget to complete these items. The venue improvements are planned for a variety of reasons. Some are done to improve management of the venue (administrative building), others to provide a better guest experience (restrooms and concessions), and the stage renovation allowed Starlight to pursue larger touring productions.<sup>6</sup>

In Starlight's 2014 Audience Survey, respondents cited the unique Starlight atmosphere as the leading reason that they attended; "Enjoy the Starlight experience"

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4. Starlight Theatre's 2013 Form 990, 32, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

5. "Performance Audit; Starlight Theatre Concession Agreement," 43.

6. The reasons for the various venue improvements are found in newsletters and blog posts by Starlight.

rated second. “Wanted to see this particular musical” was rated as the primary reason the responding patrons attend Starlight. In terms of what “makes the experience at Starlight Theatre preferable to other performing arts events and/or venues,” the open-air theatre aspect and relaxed atmosphere were ranked first and second, respectively. Throughout the survey, elements like “unique entertainment experience” and “longstanding tradition” surface again and again.<sup>7</sup> Starlight does not ignore these statistics and a lot of effort goes into creating what the organization considers the “Starlight Experience.” From Starlight Radio playing throughout the venue to personnel being trained in the organization’s Guest Interaction Guidelines, the goal is to create a memorable and enjoyable environment for patrons. Some of the environment-building elements may go unnoticed, like the venue-wide sound system, but others are hard to ignore, like the new cream and green-colored guest service kiosks.

Due to its size and exposure to the elements, an almost 8,000-seat outdoor theatre has a lot of inherent environmental issues in its operation. For instance, the waste created by a near-capacity crowd is tremendous. Starlight’s approach to cleaning up and disposing of this waste has a sizeable impact on the Environmental Dimension. Additionally, the venue is often faced with time constraints to complete this task, depending upon the performance schedule. Some procedures reflect modern approaches to the topic (recycled waste) while others still exist from the venue’s first season (hosing down the venue after a performance). Starlight employs a horticulture team to bring the beauty of Swope Park inside the venue’s gates. To do so, the team works throughout the year and maintains its own greenhouse. Although rain is an obvious foe of the outdoor

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7. Data obtained using the Starlight Theatre 2014 Audience Survey, specifically questions ten and eleven. Results are stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

venue, heat can be equally detrimental to ticket sales. Starlight has conducted heat studies and implemented several venue improvements to offset some of the negative impact of hot summer days. Part of this chapter will delve into the myriad of ways Starlight has cultivated its own unique environment and experience.

### **Environmental Dimension Focus Area #1: Facility Improvements**

Starlight is not timid about expanding and updating its physical property. The facility improvements encompass both large and small endeavors, structural and cosmetic. Structural improvements include the addition and renovation of more restroom and concession options for guests, a continuous project throughout the venue. In 2006, Starlight completed construction on a new administrative building to the east of the stage. This two-story complex provides office space, rehearsal rooms, the Ovation Gift Store, and an indoor dining option. The most notable venue update came in 2000 with the completion of the \$10-million Jeannette and Jerome Cohen Community Stage, which enlarged and enclosed the stage.<sup>8</sup> Cosmetic changes update Starlight's appearance and provide new ways of engaging patrons. Throughout all of the construction, Starlight's management strove to maintain the original physical appearance of the Kansas City destination.

#### JEANNETTE AND JEROME COHEN COMMUNITY STAGE

The stage space at Starlight is significantly different from what it was on its opening night in 1951. This section will examine the stage alterations from 1951-1987, as well as the major 2000 renovation. The initial Starlight stage was open air, with a

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8. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," 11.

permanent wooden floor, and two side pylons for theatrical lighting. Starlight's stage floor was replaced yearly, because it was ruined by the extreme weather. In 1954, the venue altered its approach to the stage floor. Starlight installed a maple floor in 1954, which was moved into storage during the off season.<sup>9</sup> The next change came nearly 30 years later, during Rohlf's tenure, with the installation of a light canopy in 1983. The light canopy allowed theatrical lighting to be hung over the stage, but that was not the main reason for its addition. The main purpose for the canopy was related to the sound. Starlight used wireless microphones on principal characters, but general chorus microphones were hidden in scene wagons (mobile platforms used to support and transport movable scenery) and the footlights. The canopy made it possible to hang microphones over the playing space for a better overall soundscape.<sup>10</sup> In 1987 the organization phased out the maple floor and replaced it with ¾ inch plywood layers. Installers treated the bottom layer with a preservative, but the top layer, like the maple flooring, went into storage during the off season. Renovations expanded the playing space, with the new floor bringing the action nine feet closer to the audience.<sup>11</sup> Through the years, these changes saved Starlight money and increased the quality of productions.

In 1993, Starlight launched a five-million dollar campaign to make improvements over a five-year period. Starlight planned to implement the stage improvements in 1997. Prior to doing so, the leadership paused to examine several factors influencing the future of the stage space. They looked at other regional theatres, their stage spaces, and the

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9. Kathleen Hegarty Thorne, *The Story of Starlight Theatre* (Eugene, OR: Generation Organization, 1993), 12.

10. *Ibid.*, 85.

11. *Ibid.*, 12.

technology used. They took into consideration that Starlight audiences continually requested large touring productions in the yearly survey, which Starlight's space could not house. Finally, leadership examined the variety of productions being produced on Broadway and what would be needed to house those productions on tour. Rohlf explained the reasoning behind expanding Starlight's planned stage renovations:

When we started to look at those three things together, it became apparent that the \$600,000 planned improvement to our stage was a band-aid and wouldn't have any positive long-term benefits to the theatre. Instead of throwing that money away, we decided to change the stage technically to produce shows that our audience wanted to see, including the mega-hit Broadway spectacular.<sup>12</sup>

After examining all of the variables, instead of the \$600 thousand band-aid, Starlight made plans to expand and enclose the stage house.

While Starlight, the Parks Department, and other stakeholders were excited about the new stage, not all of Kansas City shared their sentiments. In a letter found in Starlight's private archives, the leader of a Kansas City arts organization encouraged city officials to publicly oppose the Starlight stage renovations. While Starlight hoped to expand its season programming, at least one other organization saw this as a threat to the existing cultural landscape. Rohlf also recalled calming board members as the project budget climbed. The initial cost came from several individuals outside of the architecture field estimating the renovation. When the anticipated budget of several million dollars rose to ten million, Rohlf defended the plan's elements, fighting off accusations of

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12. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," 29.

wasted funds.<sup>13</sup> Fortunately for Starlight, the civic support for the project and organization outweighed any opposition.

*Miss Saigon* christened the completed Jeannette and Jerome Cohen Community Stage in 2000. The new stage house, which cost \$10 million, is ten stories tall with 12,000 square feet of floor space. Additionally, the proscenium has a large door, similar to those used in aircraft hangers, which is opened or closed, creating a climate-controlled space. The roof protects the stage floor year round, eliminating the need for yearly removal. The quality of materials used for the floor improved to include a sprung layer, similar to those used for dance floors, to decrease wear and tear on performers. The renovations moved the orchestra pit to a more weather-protected location below the stage. After moving the pit further upstage Starlight added additional, premium seating to the front of the venue.<sup>14</sup> The most recent addition to the stage came during the 2015 season. Two 20- by 16-foot high-resolution LED screens were mounted on movable tracks above the stage. These can be moved to different locations or taken down completely. Prior to their installation, Baker was not completely sure of the many ways the organization planned to utilize the screens. “If Broadway producers allow, we may be able to simulcast some of the action on stage, and we definitely will use the screens to share customer information, highlight upcoming events and maybe even pose a Starlight trivia question or two.”<sup>15</sup> As promised, the new space allowed Starlight to court larger national tours and concerts that require more space and/or protection from the elements.

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13. Robert Rohlf, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, August 24, 2012.

14. “Making Memories for 50 Years!,” 11.

15. Baker on Broadway blog post, Starlight Theatre’s website, April 8, 2015, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/blog-detail/blog-03-04-2015>.

As discussed in the previous chapter, an economic strength of Starlight is its diversified revenue streams. Starlight reinforced this aspect of their economic sustainability by expanding programming options, creating a year-round useable space for Epic Innovative Events and implementing the second attempt at an indoor series.

The renovation of the Starlight stage required the organization to deftly balance all three dimensions of sustainability. The construction altered the fifty-year-old appearance of the stage, but kept the spirit of the venue by mimicking Delk's original designs. The new stage protected production elements from bad weather, created a year-round useable space, and allowed Starlight to schedule larger tours and concerts (Environmental and Economic Dimensions). The Social Dimension benefited from the new programming and improved venue. The new construction and larger productions meant new job growth for the area and additional traffic to businesses in Starlight's general vicinity. In turn, the private donors and businesses provided financial support (Social and Economic Dimensions). By carefully planning the renovation, considering all risks and gains, the result was a highly sustainable new space.

### ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING

Starlight's business and ticket offices have operated in several locations throughout the decades.<sup>16</sup> For the longest amount of time, offices were kept in a downtown Kansas City space, miles from the actual venue. This continued through the 1980s, until the Parks and Recreation Department rented to Starlight the Swope Interpretive Center (SIC) for a yearly fee of one dollar, the same amount it paid to

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16. Office spaces existed on the west side of Starlight. Over the years these spaces housed the production staff. In 2002 the space became Epic Innovative Event's new home.

operate the venue.<sup>17</sup> This space was used for business offices and ticket office for roughly two decades. SIC is a two-story building owned by the Parks and Recreation Department within Swope Park, located half a mile west of Starlight. The Parks Department justified the one-dollar rental fee, because the facility had no book value, being fully depreciated in value since its construction in 1904-1905. Starlight's management team was better positioned to run the venue in this new location. When recalling this move, Rohlf frequently points out the inherent difficulty in overseeing a theatre from an office twenty minutes away in a different part of town.<sup>18</sup> While the location was an improvement, the building was originally designed to be a shelter house and makeshift golf course clubhouse. Eighty years later, using the same space for business and ticket offices created space issues, frequently cramming workspaces into illogical spaces and layouts. Additionally, SIC leaked, creaked, and was home to a slew of outdoor creatures (bats, raccoons, and squirrels found shelter in its attic spaces that doubled as closets for some offices). Despite the drawbacks of a less-than-ideal space, SIC did bring employees closer to the venue, save money for the organization, and made use of a deserted, historic building.

In 2003, after renovations enclosing and expanding the stage, Starlight launched the Future Generations Campaign (FGC). Phase II of FGC raised \$6.3 million to construct a 43,874-square foot building adjacent to the stage house. This new space included the indoor/outdoor Applause Club restaurant, rehearsal spaces, the Ovation gift shop, and a second floor dedicated to housing the administrative and ticket offices. The

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17. "Performance Audit; Starlight Theatre Concession Agreement," 14.

18. Remarks made during a Starlight Intern Luncheon with Bob Rohlf and Rich Baker, held in Starlight's Board Room, Kansas City, MO, July 29, 2015.



space was finished and opened just in time for the 2006 Starlight season.<sup>19</sup> The proximity of the offices to the venue, being only a flight of stairs away from the seating, cut down on administrative car use, increased awareness of what occurs on site, and allowed staff to easily problem solve issues by walking to the venue and directly judging logistics of an issue. The new building added value to the city's property and has been cited as an example of STA's dedication to improving the city-owned site.<sup>20</sup> One downside of the building is the climate-controlling of the spaces. The indoor/outdoor Applause Club has glass garage doors that can be opened and closed during events, which do not fully insulate the space from the outdoor climate. For summer event nights, the Applause Club requires constant cooling to provide the indoor, air-conditioned atmosphere it markets to patrons. The heating and air units used by the Applause Club tie into the administrative offices directly above the space, making it difficult to keep both at ideal temperatures. When the Applause Club needs to be cooled for an event, the office workers upstairs are frequently seen in jackets and extra layers. Justin White, Starlight's Vice President of Operations and Theatre Plant, explained that the spaces could be split into different heating and cooling units, but such an update is cost prohibitive and wasn't workable in the original construction budget. As of 2015, there were no plans to rectify the problem with heating and air-conditioning.<sup>21</sup>

The Administrative Building incorporated all of the elements Starlight desired; office space, rehearsal rooms, indoor dining, a gift store. What it did not do was plan for

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19. "Starlight Theatre Dedicates New Facility," Starlight Theatre Press Release, June 8, 2006, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://www.kcstarlight.org/common/cms/documents/about%20starlight/NEWS/New%20facilities%20release.pdf>.

20. "Performance Audit; Starlight Theatre Concession Agreement," 40.

21. Justin White, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

future needs and growth. It is plausible that initial cost savings and decisions on construction, specifically relating to heating and air-conditioning units, attributed to the sizeable heating and cooling expenses over the years (Environmental Dimension). The new building included the Applause Club, a promising event and dining space. The area serves as a rehearsal space for self-produced musicals, a room for Education Department programming, and rental space for Epic Innovative Events. However, the primary use for this space, event night dining, has not been profitable (Social and Economic Dimensions). Considering these factors, the building is moderately unsustainable. In order to improve the sustainability of the space, Starlight must address the heating and cooling issues, reimagine the use of office space, and develop a financially successful business plan for event dining.

### RESTROOMS

Starlight's Broadway shows have a 20-minute intermission and concerts typically have a 20- or 30-minute set change. During that limited window of time up to 8,000 patrons make a trip to the concessions and restrooms. It is no surprise patrons want additional restrooms, given the high demand on event nights. Starlight's 2014 Broadway Season Survey asked participants to rank the importance of several potential additions to the venue. The survey options were: more paved parking, retractable roof over seating area, restaurant-style dining option, large video screens, and more restrooms. Survey takers marked the item as very important, important, somewhat important, or not important. Of the 8,344 responses, "more restrooms" was ranked in all three categories, very important (19.10%), important (28.30%), and somewhat important (34.09%), at a

higher percentage than the other options. It was ranked “not important” by the lowest percentage of the options at 18.52%.<sup>22</sup> The survey highlights the importance patrons place on restroom facilities, which is not lost on Starlight’s management. Restrooms are frequently upgraded, expanded, and modernized.

The most significant changes to the restrooms came as part of the 2003, \$15.25 million Future Generations Campaign. In 2005 Starlight completed Phase 1 of the capital campaign, which focused on the east side concessions and restrooms. The old facilities, which housed 14 women’s and 14 men’s restrooms, were demolished and replaced with a structure housing 45 new women’s and 28 new men’s restrooms.<sup>23</sup> The update “resulted in the largest growth of customer satisfaction in recent years,” according to materials for Starlight’s Future Generations Campaign.<sup>24</sup> Three years later, Phase IV focused on the west and north restroom facilities. The proposed \$839,299 project accepted construction bids in 2008, but took nearly three years to complete.<sup>25</sup> One of the reasons for the lengthy construction period was the nature of the project, which renovated existing buildings. “Rather than demolish these buildings, we’ve taken the space and we’re going to completely gut them and redo them with new light and new fixtures and a new layout so that the traffic patterns in the buildings will be a little bit better,” White explained in

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22. Data obtained using the Starlight Theatre 2014 Audience Survey, Question 25, stored electronically on SurveyMonkey.

23. “Missouri Development Finance Board Term In Review, January 2005-December 2008,” State of Missouri, Section 29, accessed March 31, 2016, [https://archive.org/stream/200508MDFBTermInReview/2005-08MDFBTermInReview\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/200508MDFBTermInReview/2005-08MDFBTermInReview_djvu.txt).

24. “Act 2: Future Generations Campaign,” Starlight Theatre Development Document, Section 2, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

25. “Starlight Theatre Funding Request, PIAC Resolution #100446,” Public Improvements Advisory Committee, January 2008, accessed December 18, 2015, [http://ww4.kcmo.org/publicimprovements.nsf/b45c2bac92abaa0086257015006d47c7/8cd2679fb651e8228625774b00727585/\\$FILE/Restroom%20Documentation%20for%20PIAC%20Request.pdf](http://ww4.kcmo.org/publicimprovements.nsf/b45c2bac92abaa0086257015006d47c7/8cd2679fb651e8228625774b00727585/$FILE/Restroom%20Documentation%20for%20PIAC%20Request.pdf).

2011.<sup>26</sup> Starlight has restrooms located throughout the venue. The only section without a restroom is the northeast area of the venue, but there are other nearby restroom facilities. Starlight's facilities currently offer a total of 120 toilets and 41 urinals, with one family/unisex option.<sup>27</sup> Starlight's continued inclusion of the category "restroom expansions and/or remodeling" on its yearly surveys indicates the venue may see future facility updates. In addition to considering additions in the northeast section, Starlight would benefit from exploring environmentally friendly fixtures. The current toilets are not low flow and do not allow patrons to select a low flow when flushing only liquid waste. Introducing waterless urinals and motion-activated sinks throughout the venue would reduce water consumption.<sup>28</sup> Hand-drying blowers could replace some of the venue's paper towel units; factoring in patron preferences, cost, maintenance, recycling, conservation issues, and what Starlight management deems viable. Incorporating these changes in future expansions and remodels would result in a more sustainable balance between the dimensions.

Audience members always appreciate the addition and renovation of restrooms (Social Dimension). Renovations have not included environmentally friendly fixtures, but this could be remedied with future improvements. The enhanced facilities have amended the traffic flow and line issues during intermissions (Environmental Dimension). Investments in restroom renovations benefit both the Environmental and Social Dimension (Economic Dimension). Improving the fixtures in the restrooms would help

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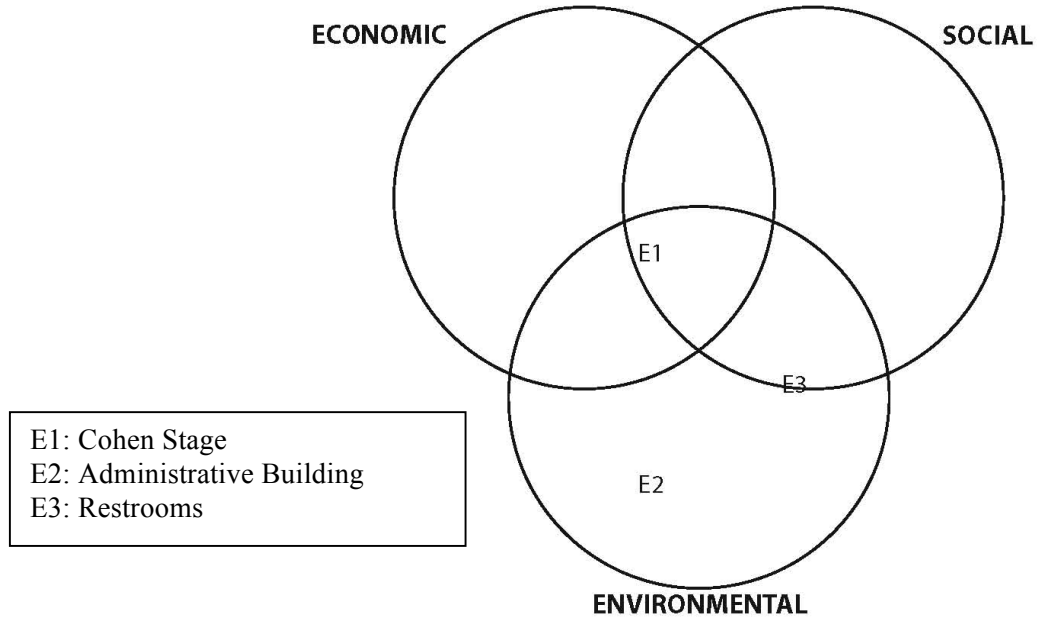
26. "Starlight Theatre renovated bathrooms," KSHB-Kansas City, October 24, 2011, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://www.kshb.com/money/business-news/starlight-theatre-renovates-bathrooms>.

27. Justin White, e-mail message to author, October 18, 2015.

28. Michael Crowley, "Reducing Water Use In Venues," Broadwaygreen.com, March 1, 2010, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://www.broadwaygreen.com/reducing-water-use-in-venues/>.

move this practice from its current moderately sustainable position towards a more sustainable placement.

**Figure 16: Sustainability Snapshot of Environmental Dimension Focus Area #1 – Facility Improvements**



**Environmental Dimension Focus Area #2: Environmental Awareness**

Typically when people consider environmental impact they think about “reduce, reuse, recycle.” This focus area will address elements that fit traditional aspects of the environment; water usage, recycling programs, and plant life. For example, Starlight’s water usage encompasses both reducing and reusing the resource. The recycling programs initiated by the organization obviously hit on the recycle component. Starlight’s approach to plant life helps the venue reduce waste and reuse plants. Utilizing fans and misters are current approaches to reducing heat in the venue. While those components work to alleviate the effects of the sun, solar panels on top of the Administrative Building reuse the sun’s energy. Starlight’s conscious effort to reduce its environmental footprint

is evident in its evolving venue products; from traditional recyclable plastics to less expected elements, like biodegradable confetti. Together these business practice components (water usage, recycling program, plant life, fans and misters, solar panels, and biodegradable confetti) exemplify Starlight's approach to the venue's environmental elements.

### WATER USAGE

The extent of Starlight's water usage is not readily apparent to guests. Some of the venue's practices are visible, like rain gardens and motion-activated restroom fixtures, but these are only drops in the bucket of Starlight's overall expenditure. Starlight was constructed with a drainage system at the base of the stage. Each morning after a performance the cleaning crew mentioned in the previous section arrives and begins the laborious task of eliminating the recent audience's debris. While larger items can be picked up and sorted by hand, the spilled drinks and food crumbs are not easily collected. To rid the venue of this sticky, smelly waste, the crew uses multiple fire hoses to spray down the ground and seats. White estimates the venue uses "10,000 gallons (of water) per cleanup, give or take."<sup>29</sup> The 2015 season consisted of 61 performance nights, which translates into roughly 610,000 gallons of water used for cleaning. White acknowledges this practice works for Starlight but is unsustainable in more arid climates. Another reason this method is successful for Starlight is because it's a south-facing venue. This positioning allows the water to dry quickly, preventing mildew or algae problems.

The use of hoses to wash down the cement ground of the venue highlights the sustainability model's difficult balancing act. To the management of Starlight, the hoses

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29. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

are a necessary byproduct of a lucrative concession business. Patrons treat Starlight as they would a ballpark, covering the ground with peanut shells, drinks, popcorn, and trash. “The stench of spilled beer and margaritas would be thick if we didn’t rinse,” White pointed out. “We could eliminate peanuts and nacho cheese and popcorn and sugary drinks and eliminate most of why we need to hose down, but that would be an odd concession menu, wouldn’t it?”<sup>30</sup> Starlight attempted using backpack blowers to assist in the cleanup, but found drawbacks with the method. The blowers took longer, were unable to tackle dried liquid spills, gave off air pollutants, and caused noise pollution within the venue. To accommodate a revenue stream of the Economic Dimension, the Environmental Dimension is saddled with a resource-draining practice.

Water usage is Starlight’s least sustainable practice within the Environmental Dimension. The venue reliance on thousands of gallons of water to clean the venue is highly unsustainable. The cost of the water is offset by the profits from concessions, which is also the main reason Starlight uses so much water, creating a vicious circle. While this relationship results in profits for Starlight, the environment suffers (Economic and Environmental Dimension). The patrons enjoy the variety of concessions, but never witness the cleanup process nor realize the resource drain their spills produce. Starlight could do more to encourage patrons to clean up after themselves. The venue launched a similar campaign for recycling, examined in the next section, but hasn’t done anything for general waste (Social Dimension). While this type of campaign might only result in a minor savings in water, it would still be an improvement over the current situation.

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30. Ibid.

## RECYCLING PROGRAM

In 2009 Starlight Theatre started a recycling program in partnership with its sponsor Deffenbaugh Industries.<sup>31</sup> Initially Starlight recycled paper, plastic, metals, and green waste from plants, adding glass in 2011. Throughout the venue Starlight places recycling bins alongside the trashcans, encouraging patrons to sort their waste. At the gates volunteers and employees highlight spots to recycle their programs. Other recycling methods are less visible to the public. After each performance, the morning cleaning crew sorts through the debris left in the seats, collecting the recyclables. The Starlight offices also recycle year round. The addition of the recycling program led to some staggering numbers. In 2011, with glass recycling for only part of the season, Starlight generated 155.2 tons of waste, but was able to recycle 51.2 tons of materials, or 33%. Broken down, that figure contained 33.2 tons of plastics, cardboard, and paper, twelve tons of metals, four tons of green plant waste, and two tons of glass. At the time White felt the venue covered all the available recyclable categories. “Now, increasing the recycling awareness of our guests and bettering our practices to increase diversion is our best bet to drive Starlight’s recycling rates even higher.”<sup>32</sup> Over the years, the recycling option took hold in the venue, becoming the norm for patrons. White estimates the 2015 recycling figure above sixty tons, plus roughly fifteen tons of glass, the result of a busier, fuller season and positive adopted recycling practices.<sup>33</sup>

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31. While the official details are private, the Deffenbaugh-Starlight partnership offset pickup and recycling costs with in-venue advertising. While recycling might carry a financial burden, Starlight found a way to circumvent this hurdle.

32. “Starlight turns shades of green,” *Spotlight*, Starlight Theatre Publication, December 2010, 9.

33. Justin White, e-mail message to author, December 17, 2015.



Starlight successfully implemented their recycling program, benefiting all three dimensions of sustainability. By forming a partnership with Deffenbaugh Industries, Starlight offset costs associated with launching such a program; new waste bins, signage, program promotion (Economic Dimension). Given the large quantities of recyclables collected by the venue, Starlight was successful in raising audience and employee awareness and engagement (Social and Environmental Dimensions). All of these elements combine to create a highly sustainable program.

### PLANT LIFE

Whereas other theatres may landscape their entrances for curb appeal, Starlight requires a fulltime team to handle the vast horticultural needs of an outdoor venue. In 2015 the team was responsible for 29 annual beds, 46 hanging baskets, two rain gardens, and plants, shrubs, and trees estimated to be in the thousands.<sup>34</sup> The Operations Department, which includes the horticulture staff, constantly drafts and formulates building and facility improvements. These plans extend to updating the landscaping and flowerbeds. The staff makes many decisions internally, but for larger projects Starlight hires outside consultants to propose and design the landscape. Starlight maintains its grounds by utilizing a Swope Park greenhouse, thus allowing them to reuse larger potted plants and grow the majority of smaller annuals from seeds. As in other management areas, some of the larger horticulture decisions require a future-focused approach to planning. By strategically planning future plant growth Starlight's management combats the summer sun, conceals unattractive building elements, and protects the pre-existing

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34. "Horticulture Team Gets Things Growing," Starlight Theatre Blog Post, May 5, 2015, accessed December 18, 2015, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/blog-detail/blog-05-05-2015>.

plant life of Swope Park. All of these elements combine to create a sustainable approach to the venue's plant life.

Swope Park's greenhouses, built in the 1910s, provide over 22 thousand square feet of space for maintaining the area's plants. Around 2004 or 2005 Starlight took over some space in the greenhouse to keep larger perennials.<sup>35</sup> Then, in 2007, a 3,000-square-foot hoop house connected to the greenhouse became available. That is the space Starlight still uses. Starlight does not pay rent or utilities for this space, which White points out makes it an easy decision to grow plants from seeds. "If we cost out the full amortization and depreciation and utilities for a Starlight-built greenhouse, it may very well be a tough call. I'd ballpark the value of our tropicals and self-grown materials at over \$30,000 a year, though."<sup>36</sup> Currently, Starlight only uses outside nurseries for fall plants (mums and kale), because the horticulture team is too busy during the timeframe needed to plant and grow these items.<sup>37</sup> The 2014 Starlight Annual Report states the venue used 7,000 flower seeds for 55 flowerbeds.<sup>38</sup> The ability to grow plants to meet venue needs results in several benefits. Starlight employs its own horticulture team, producing optimum results for its salary expenditures. Optimal results include: reduced waste (no plant packaging); saves mileage and fleet depreciation (no driving to constantly purchase new plants); reduce monetary leakage (investments are made to Starlight's own horticulture staff and facilities). On the surface, these are small savings, but accumulated

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35. The impact of a greenhouse came to light in 2006 with the addition of a spring bulb program. That year more than 2,200 tulip, hyacinth, and daffodil bulbs went into the greenhouse for spring use. Starlight also highlighted this as a sign of the venue's shift to being a year-round facility.

36. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

37. "Horticulture Team Gets Things Growing," May 5, 2015.

38. "FY 2014 Annual Report," Starlight Theatre publication, Kansas City, MO, 10.

over time they add up and support a sustainable approach to beautification and environmental awareness.

While some of Starlight's planting is purely for aesthetics, some trees and plants are placed with strategic purpose. For instance, in the late 2000s, Starlight installed two rain gardens. Although the management would prefer differently, the venue is not immune to rain and the two gardens help reuse the storm water runoff. Additional rain gardens would help compensate for Starlight's sizeable use of water each summer. In addition to the plants, the horticulture team handles the venue's 75 trees, some of which date back to the pre-Starlight years.<sup>39</sup> In 2013 an outside consultant helped Starlight create a comprehensive study to combat the venue's exposure (and loss of ticket sales) to heat. The study touched on the need for trees and plant life in certain areas. The Applause Club's perimeter is an area that received new trees. While the impact will not be seen for several years, over time these trees will offer shade and relief from the sun. The trees also evoke a positive psychological impact. They "contribute to a 'garden' atmosphere which 'feels' better than the flat concrete."<sup>40</sup> The long-term success of such plantings rely on Starlight's management to develop plans focused on future results and sharing the reasoning behind the implemented plans to future leadership, allowing the plans to come to fruition. Sustaining the horticulture team and keeping decisions internal will aid in implementing these objectives.

In many ways, the plant life at Starlight serves a superficial purpose, beautifying the space (Social and Environmental Dimensions). Starlight found ways to control costs

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39. Ibid.

40. "Strategic Plan – Theatre Cooling," internal document e-mailed to author by Denton Yockey, draft dated June 16, 2013, 2.

and raise their own plants (Economic Dimension). In recent years, the organization engaged professionals to find plant-based ways to provide ideal shade throughout the venue. These plans depend upon the maturing of trees. While already in place, it will be a few years before Starlight will reap the benefits of their investments (Environmental Dimension). Even without the mature trees providing strategic shade, Starlight's approach to plant life throughout the venue is highly sustainable.

### FANS AND MISTERS

The content of a 2013 strategic planning document shows the management of Starlight knows that heat is a large deterrent for current and potential audience members, causing the organization to lose money:

The discomfort felt by patrons leads to purchasing decisions guided by weather. Often, the heat even causes season ticket holders to forgo attending when they have tickets on hand. This has helped lead to an erosion of season ticket sales because patrons will not continue to purchase something they are not using due to the weather. Potential single ticket patrons may watch the weather (heat or rain) to determine if they will enjoy the outdoor conditions prior to purchasing their tickets.<sup>41</sup>

To identify solutions to the problem, the organization engaged outside consultants and developed multiple plans. Many of these ideas remain untested and will be considered in the final section of this chapter. Dimensional Innovations, one of Starlight's consultants, created a Venn Diagram to weigh cooling elements. In their model, effective elements needed to balance cost, aesthetic value, and the cooling effect. Over the 2012 and 2013 seasons Starlight installed two types of fans to address stagnant airflow and added a

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41. Ibid, 1.

mister in the venue's southeast fountain. The installations focused on giving patrons the impression of cooler temperatures; they served as an appeasing and accommodating starting point.

The airflow problem developed between 2000-2006, following the additions of the stage house and administrative building. Both structures block any breeze coming from the south, leaving hot, potentially muggy, air deadlocked in the seating area.<sup>42</sup> The MUNY dealt with a similar airflow problem and installed four large fans in 1955. These fans, designed for citrus orchards, ran before the show, at intermission, and as audiences exited. They updated their system to larger, quieter fans in 2013. The MUNY's president, Dennis Reagan, acknowledged the fans don't deal with heat as much as they do perceived comfort. "You know how everybody loves it when a breeze comes through the theater? That's how we want them to feel."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Starlight found two ways to incorporate breeze-making fans into the venue. One approach was to test several large, 8' fans at different locations in the venue during the 2012 season. Starlight deemed the fans too costly for the limited airflow they provided. Instead, in 2013 the venue opted for a plan similar to the MUNY's, which provided cooling before the show, at intermission, and after the show. Twenty-three fans were installed around the seating area's perimeter, near the Southwest Restrooms, and outside the Applause Club. Similar to ceiling fans, the side pergola, restroom, and club fans are 5' in diameter and fans behind the seating area are 8'

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42. Ibid.

43. Judith Newmark, "Cool breezes will blow through the Munny this summer," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 7, 2013, accessed December 18, 2015, [http://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/theatre/cool-breezes-will-blow-through-the-munny-this-summer/article\\_2f6c06e7-5598-5ae6-b45e-9428af23f8c2.html](http://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/theatre/cool-breezes-will-blow-through-the-munny-this-summer/article_2f6c06e7-5598-5ae6-b45e-9428af23f8c2.html).

wide.<sup>44</sup> The 2013 strategic plan indicated the MUNY's large-scale fans might be adopted for Starlight, but that addition is not currently scheduled in the venue's immediate future. For now, the lower cost fan option serves as a stopgap for the long-term airflow problem.

While the fans move the air, they don't actually lower the temperature. In 2013 the venue added a cooling element to the Helzberg Fountain's circular pool. Starlight equipped the pool with a mister, which creates a cooling fog in the surrounding area. The fog lowers that area's temperature by only a few degrees but, like the fans, is a visible element that might influence an audience member's perceived comfort. The mister, while located far from the seating area, does better than the fans on Dimensional Innovations' Venn Diagram. The mister was an \$11 thousand investment, but does not negatively alter the venue's aesthetic value and actually lowers the temperature, if only slightly.<sup>45</sup> The element demonstrates how Starlight's unique venue might require unconventional solutions.

It is plausible the fans and misters benefit patrons psychologically, more than physically; they don't drastically improve venue airflow or temperatures. While fans and misters represent Starlight's attempts to counter heat and impact the conditions, they aren't overly effective (Social and Environmental Dimensions). This is an example of minor attempts being better than nothing, which is why the practices are moderately sustainable. The fans and misters were expensive to purchase and install, which pushes the practices more towards the Environmental and Social Dimensions (Economic Dimension). Future additions to the venue might garner better results, justifying the financial investment.

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44. "Strategic Plan – Theatre Cooling," 2.

45. Justin White e-mail, December 17, 2015.

## SOLAR PANELS

In April of 2014, partnering with the City of Kansas City, MO and Kansas City Power and Light Company (KCP&L), Starlight installed 200 solar panels on its rooftops.<sup>46</sup> Those panels generate up to 50 kilowatts of renewable energy per day, or 250-kilowatt hours.<sup>47</sup> While the panels generate energy and utilize dead space in the venue, due to clouds, winter sun angles, and other weather elements, they underperform. “They’re a feel good more than anything at this point,” explained White. “They’re just not efficient enough. They produce about half of their rated output over the year.”<sup>48</sup> The partnership kept costs down and the panels do create solar energy. However, their overall impact is less than indicated by their position on the sustainability graph.

The solar panels are moderately sustainable, edging closer to highly sustainable than the previous fans and misters. Solar panels benefit from their subsidized installation. While they aren’t overly effective, the operating cost is less of an investment (Economic Dimension). The solar panels optimize space usage (rooftops) reaping benefits from previously ignored areas (Environmental Dimension). As White stated, solar panels are a “feel good” item. Starlight promotes the solar panels online and whenever the organization highlights its environmentally friendly programs (Social Dimension). In the future, Starlight can add more panels to increase the amount of energy produced, making the practice more sustainable.

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46. “What’s New? Solar Energy at Starlight,” Starlight Blog Post, June 30, 2014, accessed December 18, 2015, <https://www.kcstarlight.com/blog-detail/blog3-06-30-2014>.

47. Ibid. and “FY 2014 Annual Report,” 10.

48. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

## BIODEGRADABLE CONFETTI

Frequently, concerts at Starlight utilize some form of confetti. While certain performers travel with specific colors and shapes of confetti, others just ask for a generic confetti blast. After White complained about the difficulty of confetti cleanup, because the pieces flew everywhere in the venue, Waugh found CleanFree confetti. CleanFree “is a material created from plant starch that dissolves when exposed to water,” allowing the product to dissolve when the morning crew cleans the venue with water hoses.<sup>49</sup> White acknowledges the product is not ideal in a light rain or high humidity, but is pleased by how easily it disappears from the space after use.<sup>50</sup> Like the solar panels, this practice is small, but enough of these environmentally conscious practices add up over time for a greater impact. Biodegradable confetti is a perfect example of Starlight thinking outside of the box to adjust its unique, outdoor-specific practices.

Starlight’s use of biodegradable confetti is a creative solution to a crowd-pleasing production element. While it’s minor compared to water usage or other business practices previously analyzed, it is important not to ignore the smaller practices’ benefits, because they accumulate, improving an organization’s sustainability. The cost is higher than typical confetti, with a 2005 USA Today article pricing the item at \$25 a pound.<sup>51</sup> A survey of bulk confetti sites list a range of prices, from \$9-15 a pound (Economic Dimension). Since the venue doesn’t use much confetti in a given summer, the slight

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49. Description found on the Artistry In Motion, Inc. website, referred to the author by Justin White, accessed on December 18, 2015, <http://www.artistryinmotion.com/confettistreamers/confetti/>.

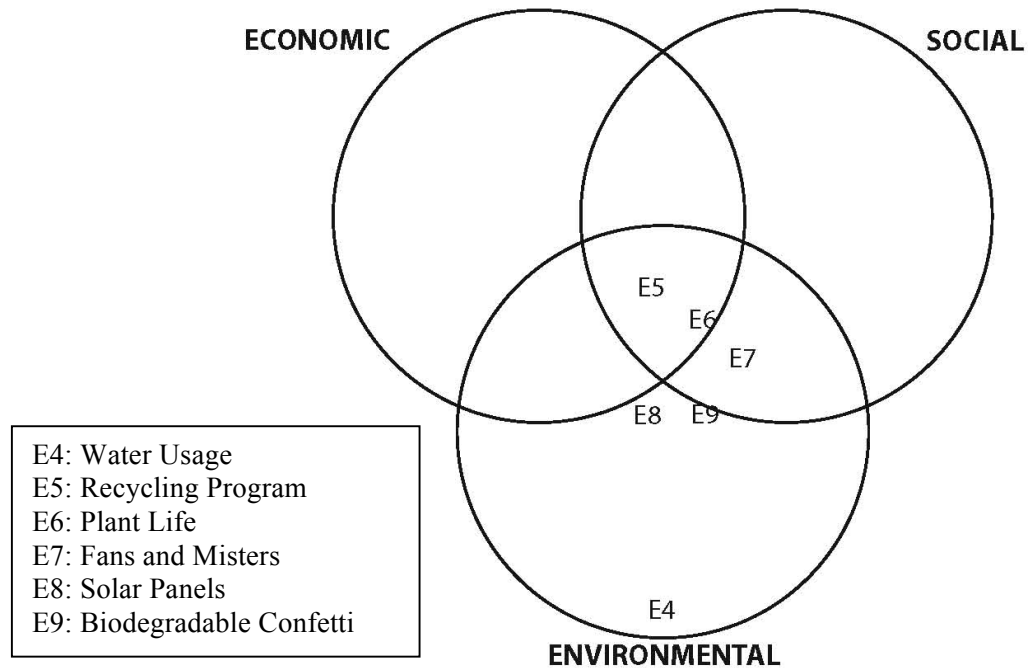
50. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

51. Bruce Horowitz, “Designer confetti flutters into party mix,” USA Today, updated December 30, 2005, accessed April 1, 2016, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/2005-12-29-confetti-usat\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/2005-12-29-confetti-usat_x.htm).



increase in cost is justifiable, aiding in clean up and still allowing this amusing element in an outdoor setting (Environmental and Social Dimensions).

**Figure 17: Sustainability Snapshot of Environmental Dimension Focus Area #2 – Environmental Awareness**



### **Environmental Dimension Focus Area #3: Guest Experience**

This Environmental Dimension focus area will explore less-than-tangible environmental factors influencing the Starlight atmosphere for guests. Starlight places an emphasis on guest experience, often referred to as the “Starlight Experience.” The nightly online event surveys, discussed in Chapter Two, gather data and allow management to pinpoint what is or isn’t satisfying customers. Some venue changes are generated from the survey comments, while others fill a customer need identified by management. In 2003 several customer-focused initiatives rolled out. Guest Interaction Guidelines, internally referred to as G.I.G., and a system that rewarded employees for exemplary

customer service by handing out tokens (attibloons); both strived to improve patron experiences. The organization still uses G.I.G., but retired attibloons in 2012. Since the two programs were originally rolled out as counterparts to one another this section will explore both. Starlight’s approach to the ambient sound within the venue is also examined in this section. Whether it is the Broadway-themed Starlight Radio played from venue-wide speakers or guest bands performing in the V.I.P. Club prior to concerts, Starlight hopes the venue’s audio background will put their patrons in the right mindset for a wonderful event experience. Over the years Starlight added free water coolers and cups throughout the venue on excessively hot nights, made booster seats available for younger patrons, and provided complimentary seat cushions on select nights. All of these additions are free to the guests, as management strives to improve the patrons’ experiences in the venue. For the 2015 season, the venue added guest service kiosks to streamline the distribution and availability of these items.<sup>52</sup> All of these practices demonstrate Starlight’s continued focus on improving the Starlight experience.

#### Guest Interaction Guidelines (G.I.G.)

The original goal of G.I.G. in 2003 was to foster a mentality that produced exceptional customer service:

We have challenged each and every Associate of Starlight Theatre to create an environment that will not satisfy our guests. That’s right, we don’t want satisfied customers. We want “Raving Fans”! We want each and every guest that visits Starlight Theatre to feel compelled to rave to everyone they know about their great Starlight Theatre

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52. Since the kiosks are prefabricated and their addition was less for structure and more for customer service, they are included in this section instead of the earlier one on facility improvements.

experience. Great show, great food, great service, great environment, and most of all friendly hosts.<sup>53</sup>

Despite some tweaks to verbiage, G.I.G.'s purpose remains the same today. The initiative encourages associates to “exude” three principles: Friendly First, Image, Helpfulness. Friendly First reminds associates to “smile, listen, introduce yourself, and remember why the guest is here.” Image emphasizes the positive impact of personal and venue appearance. Helpfulness asks associates to be proactive in situations and “perform random acts of kindness.”<sup>54</sup>

G.I.G. is actively taught at associate training before the start of each season. After training the program is only passively reinforced. Starlight prints the three principles of G.I.G. on the back of every associate badge. Many of the doors associates use to enter the public areas of the venue have a posted printout of G.I.G., a mirror to check appearance, and a reminder to smile. Originally the attibloons actively reinforced the importance of G.I.G. Attibloons were silently retired in 2013 and nothing replaced them. The attibloons will be discussed further in the next section. Although the principles remain, G.I.G., a passive set of ideals, is not inherently effective. G.I.G. lays the groundwork, fostering the desired venue environment, but needs proactive, frequent reinforcement by management to become the default mentality of associates. White envisions a future approach to G.I.G. where he is able to meet with each department and identify area-specific points of information, resulting in a more customized G.I.G.<sup>55</sup> If this individualized approach to the

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53. Official letter to members of the Starlight Theatre Board from Bill Hartnett, June 12, 2003, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

54. Ibid.

55. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

program included a proactive reinforcement element, it could potentially make G.I.G. a front-of-mind behavior as it was when it was launched.

G.I.G. is a highly sustainable program, while being more passive in recent years. The program doesn't cost a lot to put in place. Mainly it is the cost of ink for the back of badges, mirrors for the doors, and laminated signs for posting (Economic Dimension). The program provides a clear set of staff expectations, making it easy for employees to understand how to approach a typical guest interaction (Social Dimension). The friendly tone helps create the Starlight Experience for patrons (Environmental Dimension). As previously indicated, management would benefit by modifying G.I.G. into a more proactive program.

#### ATTIBLOONS

Rolled out in 2003 with G.I.G., attibloons were golden metal doubloons given to board members, who served as secret shoppers or, as Starlight referred to them, "talent scouts."<sup>56</sup> Starlight's management team also handed out attibloons. These leaders would hand an associate an attibloon when they saw him/her perform exemplary guest service, carrying out the G.I.G. principles. Associates turned in the attibloons to their managers, who subsequently would take a moment during a team/department meeting to highlight the associates and how they received their attibloons. After some time the process evolved. By 2006, when associates turned in an attibloon they received a lottery ticket from the Theatre Plant Director. If it wasn't a winner, the associate's name went into an end-of-the-season drawing. Instead of serving as a positive reinforcement and chance to highlight great work, many associates only saw the value in the lottery ticket, missing the

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<sup>56</sup> Bill Hartnett letter, June 12, 2003.

program's initial intent. White saw the same associates constantly receiving attibloons because they were in positions with frequent guest interaction. He also realized not all managers embraced the attibloons as a chance to point out exemplary work and to strengthen their team. In a nutshell, White felt the attibloons were "hard to implement, hard to reward, hard to redeem. Fun to collect, sure. We've found much more success writing personal thank you notes to those staff who have earned it."<sup>57</sup> The slow decline of the attibloons' effectiveness started at the management level. Managers did not take the time to highlight success publicly or reinforce the value of receiving an attibloon. When management becomes complacent to a program, employees emulate them, placing less importance on the item as well.<sup>58</sup> Without attibloons or a replacement, G.I.G. transitioned to a more passive program.

During the 2010s, when attibloons slowly phased out, Starlight had an opportunity to tweak the G.I.G. incentive or replace it with something more effective. Instead, it quietly retired the attibloons, which were no longer effective in encouraging the Starlight Experience (Environmental Dimension). Without attibloons, G.I.G. no longer had a "secret shopper" type of incentive. White thought writing thank you cards or other forms of acknowledgment might reinforce good service more effectively, but nothing formal was ever introduced.<sup>59</sup> Whereas G.I.G. helps employees understand expectations, attibloons were almost like mini employee reviews, albeit positive ones.

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57. Justin White, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, December 13, 2012.

58. From 2003 to the retirement of attibloons Starlight's management underwent numerous shifts. The change in leadership and how the different leaders approached customer service and human resources did not help attibloons continue. Instead, the program was an easy item to let go as other initiatives called for attention and time. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, nothing took the place of attibloons, leaving a gap in the organization.

59. Justin White interview, December 13, 2012.

While an employee might believe they understand expectations, reinforcing those standards by showing them examples of strong customer service is beneficial (Social Dimension). If Starlight developed a new form of attibloons or similar concept, the organization needs to have clear procedures in place for management. This will prevent money being spent on rewards, like lottery tickets, that benefit the employee but not the overall organization's wellbeing (Economic Dimension).

### AMBIENT SOUND

The “Starlight Experience” relies on tangible and intangible elements to create a memorable, positive experience for patrons. Sound, whether provided by nature, created by Starlight’s many fountains, or played over venue speakers, is a significant intangible component of what patrons refer to as the “Starlight Experience.” Traditional, indoor theatres use sound to set the mood of a show, but Starlight’s spacious venue requires a unique approach to the element. Whereas a theatre typically focuses on the lobby and house, Starlight has more spaces to cover. Starlight’s approach to sound is similar to an amusement park. Both venues use sound to give the space a sense of life and energy, customized to suit the specific area or ride/musical/concert. Played audio may tease future attractions, sponsors, concessions, or other elements. Take for instance Universal Studios in Orlando. That park has a specific audio track for its entrance, plays area-specific sound in the different park sections, and offers live entertainment to add to the atmosphere. Starlight approaches its venue in a similar fashion, creating a welcoming, energetic environment for its patrons.

In 2014 Starlight replaced its sound system. The upgrade included speakers positioned throughout the non-seating areas and near the gates, allowing the venue's sound to become more area-specific. One item played on these speakers is the Starlight-produced "Starlight Radio" audio loop. The track contains season teasers, sponsor ads, and general Broadway and concert-related music. Prior to 2014, this audio played in the Applause Club, restrooms, and gift shop. Now Starlight uses the speakers to set the mood for patrons the minute they step into the venue. Additionally, the new sound system allows Starlight to isolate and target different areas with sound. For the 2015 Blue Star Awards Ceremony guests entered the venue with Broadway music playing. They walked a red carpet where two Starlight representatives interviewed them. The audio and video feed from the interviews broadcasted live in the seating area. The expanded sound system worked to create different experiences for the attendees depending upon where they were in the venue.

In addition to Starlight Radio, the venue utilizes onsite locations for live entertainment. During the Broadway season the venue constructs a stage in the northwest part of the venue, near a busy entrance gate. The Group Sales Manager books this stage, which features local dance companies, performers, and a Starlight-trained performance troupe of students. The entertainment on this stage is not specific to the musicals, although sometimes it works out that perhaps a barbershop quartet will perform during *The Music Man* or a dance company will perform a song from that evening's show. For concerts Starlight constructs a similar stage space in the outdoor section of the Applause Club. Launched around 2010, this stage provides patrons atmospheric live music in the

vein of that evening's concert headliner.<sup>60</sup> On some evenings the gates will open one to two hours prior to the opening act taking the stage. The Applause Club stage fills this dead pre-concert time and adds an unexpected element to the patron's trip. Jeff Miller, Starlight's Concert Sponsorship and VIP Sales Manager, acknowledges the stage adds to the event. "It's nice to play music, Pandora, Spotify, or whatever, but to have a band and to have that strong presence to get the customer's night kicked off really sends out some good energy." Although the Applause Club is for VIP concertgoers who pay an extra fee or have a season ticket package, the stage space is still in the outdoor area. "Even if people aren't able to get into the (Applause) Club, a lot of them just hang out right outside of the Club by the fountains and listen to the band play. So it's a bonus for them as well."<sup>61</sup> Miller added that his VIP patrons ask about the stage if there isn't talent booked for an event, highlighting the value it adds for those guests.

The combination of Mother Nature's soundtrack, Starlight Radio, and live pre-show entertainment provides patrons with a spirited atmosphere. These elements create memories and ties with the venue, which White hopes will mature into a sense of nostalgia around Starlight. He sees the sound elements as a Starlight-specific unique experience. When patrons think of Starlight, those aural memories are present, even if not in the foreground of a memory. Future growth in this area might include audio components in the parking areas, allowing the Starlight experience to have an audio component outside of the gates.<sup>62</sup>

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60. Jeff Miller, interview by author, Kansas City, MO, October 23, 2015.

61. Ibid.

62. Justin White interview, December 13, 2012.



Starlight's ambient sound might often go unnoticed, for instance Starlight Radio playing in the background of a gift store, but it successfully wallpapers the spaces with acoustic energy (Environmental Dimension). In the case of the VIP Club musicians, the ambient sound is hard for guests to ignore, drawing them to the area, and creates interest and added value for the patrons. Miller pointed out the effectiveness of music playing prior to a concert, setting the tone for the evening. The positive patron experience justifies providing musicians with complimentary tickets to the concert and free publicity (Social and Economic Dimension). Despite the lack of a traditional lobby, Starlight found cost-effective, highly sustainable ways to welcome guests into a lively venue.

### KIOSKS

In 2015 Starlight added four kiosks throughout the venue. These green and crème colored buildings replaced two wrought iron tables the venue used for guest information. Starlight's Ambassadors staff the kiosks, answering questions, selling ponchos, fans, and earplugs, renting seat cushions, and handling lost and found items. The 10'x10' roofed structures allow for more points of contact with guests and high visibility in the venue. White explains these structures hope to result in "better guest service- a shorter walk for anyone with questions, an immediate need, or a hope to find someone knowledgeable."<sup>63</sup> In terms of the basic goals, the kiosks doubled guest service locations and the buildings are easier to spot or point out than the previous non-descript tables.

The kiosks struggled during their first season, even though they still achieved their intended purpose. The buildings were added right before the first venue event,

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63. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

resulting in late training of Ambassadors. In May Starlight hired a new Concessions and Merchandise Manager, Katie Lohe. Lohe is a key point of contact for the kiosks and her late hiring meant she couldn't troubleshoot potential kiosk issues prior to their launch. Instead, Lohe and several managers dealt with issues during the season, the main one being Ambassador morale and pullback. "They (Ambassadors) did not want to handle money as volunteers and thought it was too much pressure for them," explained Lohe. "It made the job more difficult and less customer friendly in their minds, when in reality they were providing more of a service."<sup>64</sup> Previously, Ambassadors sold \$1 ponchos at the guest information spots during inclement weather. The kiosks quadrupled the inventory sold and made retail a component of every show night. When the kiosks opened they took credit cards via the Square application, but later they only accepted cash. "This (removal of credit cards) was simply to keep volunteers staffed for the rest of the season and in actuality we did not do that many credit card (sales)," said Lohe.<sup>65</sup> With the credit card problem resolved, White believes future seasons can see an improvement at the kiosks in terms of guest interaction. "One of the two staff/volunteers needs to be outside of the kiosk, not both sitting inside waiting for the next fly to land in the spider's web," observed White. "There needs to be a welcoming component there and that's missing currently in a fair amount of the kiosk operation."<sup>66</sup>

The kiosks present Starlight with a great opportunity to increase the effectiveness of a practice in its second year. By increasing the amount of time allotted for training and

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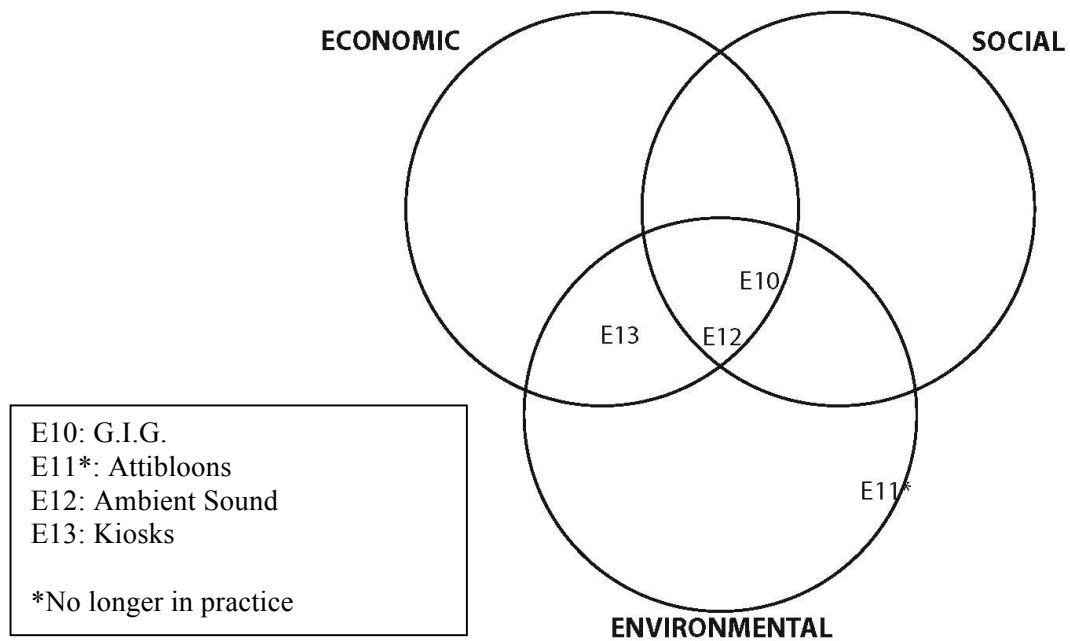
64. Katie Lohe, electronic message to the author, October 27, 2015.

65. Ibid.

66. Justin White e-mail, September 21, 2015.

streamlining the retail aspect of the kiosks, Starlight should find future success at the kiosks (Social and Economic Dimension). Simplifying the process for Ambassadors should mean friendly customer service for customers and allow volunteers to take advantage of the kiosks' great locations to seek out patrons to assist (Environmental Dimension). A better second year experience would benefit management and volunteer relationships. A constantly changing list of responsibilities can be the source of frustration, but the majority of those problems are solvable headed into future seasons with the kiosks (Social Dimension).

**Figure 18: Sustainability Snapshot of Environmental Dimension Focus Area #3 – Guest Experience**



## **Environmental Dimension Focus Area #4: Administrative Elements**

The workplace environment can make or break an organization. The topic of how to create a productive, positive, efficient workplace fuels a tremendous amount of research and consulting. A sizeable pool of research underlines the importance of the workplace environment, although much of it differs in how to achieve this goal. One thing the research has in common is the potential negative effect of the workplace. “Not only can a poor work environment slow down productivity, but it can cause employees to consider resigning and moving on to a new job.”<sup>67</sup> Many elements, from physical space, company size, workload, leaderships, and more, influence the workplace environment. Furthermore, business journals reinforce a belief put forth by the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department earlier in this chapter, that maintaining a consistent, skilled workforce ultimately benefits a business. This section explores Starlight’s approach to cultivating an optimal workplace environment, from the staff size, office space, and structure of the board of directors, who interact frequently with the staff.

### STAFF SIZE

To maintain sustainability, it is important to avoid overtaxing resources. It can be difficult to gauge the staff’s workload capacity. Currently, Starlight is nearing an unsustainable staff-to-task ratio. The season calendar, amount of shows, and education and outreach programs consistently expand, but the staff size does not significantly

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67. Laura Close, “The Importance of a Positive Working Environment,” Australia Business Review, October 8, 2013, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://www.businessreviewaustralia.com/leadership/143/The-Importance-of-a-Positive-Working-Environment>.

increase. For instance, the 2001 season included six musicals and twenty concerts.<sup>68</sup> The year-round staff size was roughly forty and did not include Development, Education, or Concert Departments.<sup>69</sup> Worth noting, the Marketing Department was utilizing an outside public relations company to create content for press releases and articles. The 2015 season included seven musicals, an indoor show in February, twenty-one concerts, and eleven education programs. The staff size was 38, which includes an education team of two, one person dedicated to concerts, and two development professionals.<sup>70</sup> As of 2015, the Marketing Department produces its own content. The workload of each department grew since 2001, but not the staff member count, which included new departments. The snapshot below, of Starlight’s Education Department, demonstrates the expanse of workloads but not staff. Prepared by Amy Reinert, Director of Education, the list shows Starlight’s programming when Education became a two-person department in 2008 and its current programming with the same department size.<sup>71</sup>

#### **Education Programming (2008)**

Act Like An Animal Camp – 1 session of 60 campers  
Starlight Theatre Academy Classes – 2 fall classes, 16 days  
Vincent Legacy Scholarships – 7 scholars  
Internship Program – 17 interns  
Starlight STARS of Tomorrow – 23 STARS, only summer  
Blue Star Awards – 51 productions submitted

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68. Bill Blankenship, “Stars to shine at Starlight,” *CJ Online*, April 22, 2001, accessed December 18, 2015, [http://cjonline.com/stories/042201/art\\_starlightsked.shtml#.VmW6Mcp4gxd](http://cjonline.com/stories/042201/art_starlightsked.shtml#.VmW6Mcp4gxd).

69. Starlight Theatre’s *Casper the Musical* Program, July 2001, 42-43.

70. This staff count was obtained using the staff page on Starlight’s website in May 2015.

71. In April of 2008, prior to Reinert’s hiring to expand the department to two people, Anne Johnston expressed that the education programming was reaching its limit because of workload and lack of institutional support. When Reinert was interviewed in 2013, the same concerns were expressed. It is worth noting, the Vincent Legacy Scholarship program is structured to grow each year, requiring more time to touch base with each scholar.

### **Education Programming (2015)**

Act Like An Animal Camp – 2 sessions of 60 campers each  
Camp Take-a-Bow – 1 session of up to 30 campers  
Frosty Fun Days – 2-3 sessions of 30 campers each  
Spring Break Camp – 1 session of 30 campers  
Master Classes – 2-3 sessions of 12 campers each  
Vincent Legacy Scholarships – 27 scholars  
Bob Rohlf Internship Program – 15 interns  
Starlight STARS of Tomorrow – 26 STARS, eight months  
Blue Star Awards – 57 productions submitted  
Starlight ‘Customized’ – 7 sessions, totaling 400 students  
Just Imagine – 93 children and 48 adults served  
Starlight on Site (currently on hiatus) – up to 20 students<sup>72</sup>

At a certain point the organization risks burning out its current staff, and new ventures will not succeed unless Starlight dedicates additional resources to staff expansion.

Staff expansion comes with organizational red tape and requires a fair amount of forward planning. The unspoken steps to adding a new position include showing the need for additional help; frequently this is tied to expanding current programming, attempting the pre-existing workload and expansions while maintaining current staffing levels, and timing the staff additions with the yearly budget process. This process inherently taxes the current staff before assisting them, which is why some positions don’t get expanded or adjusted until the current staff member quits or is let go. Frequently, once someone leaves the organization his/her position undergoes restructuring, gets a new chain of command, and/or expands to more than one employee. It’s less likely to see this retooling happen when the positions are occupied, which can hurt morale and lead to a loss of trained staff. In spring of 2015 the Education Department, laying the groundwork for potentially expanding its staff, brought on an intern for the semester. This venture allowed Reinert to see whether enough work existed for a third person, to explore whether an intern would work instead of a fulltime staff member, and to demonstrate to

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72. List created by Amy Reinert and provided to author, October 2015.

the board, when considering budgets, there is a tested need for additional staff. While this didn't solve the problem of added positions being tied to an elongated timeline, it did provide relief while Reinert sought a long-term solution. The current approach to staffing, which is to deal with issues as they present themselves, is reactive and unsustainable. Money is lost when employees burn out and quit, requiring recruitment and training of new staff members. In the future, the same amount of forethought put on season planning and venue upgrades should be given to examining the size, responsibilities, and morale of departmental staffs.

When first examining Starlight's approach to staffing, it appears the practice is cost efficient, because it keeps salary costs down. However, there are potential pitfalls to this approach. First, if morale suffers because of frustration or fatigue, that may become pervasive throughout the organization, which is counterproductive to G.I.G. and the goal of creating the Starlight Experience. The potential short-term cost savings in salaries may cause long-term damage in other areas. Too much of a workload might also result in staff turnover, which costs the company money to advertise positions, interview applicants, and train the new hire (Economic and Environmental Dimension). If the staff is spread too thin, it makes it difficult to assess a practice/event/camp after its completion, because when one event is over the next task is underway. In a similar fashion, a lack of breathing room makes it difficult to build in team building opportunities or other initiatives that might help morale and the overall energy of the workplace (Social and Environmental Dimensions). As programming grows and expands, Starlight will hopefully allocate more human resources to support such endeavors. This might also require time, because turnover in the president position is followed by an observation period. Both Yockey and

Baker expressed the need to understand the organization before making drastic changes, and determining which departments require additional staff support is likely part of this long-term process.

### BUILDING CAPACITY

The first section of this chapter looked at Starlight's 2006 addition of an Administrative Building. Recently, after nine years, the office space is experiencing growing pains. Prior to and during the 2015 season, one of the two meeting spaces was converted to a permanent office space, and a rarely utilized waiting space near the front door became two cubicles. While these are minor adjustments, both reduce the free space in the work area and can make the space feel more cluttered with cubicles, resulting in a negative mental perception of the work environment. Anything that might negatively affect an employee's productivity or positivity needs to be examined. Additionally, this is just the beginning of the current growing pains. In the previous chapter, Lindsey Rood with Epic Innovative Events indicated Starlight's expanded concert and Broadway programming limited her company's ability to rehearse and hold events on site. Similarly, in recent years the Education Department found itself without a rehearsal or camp space. They moved some activities to free spaces at the neighboring Kansas City Zoo, Starlight's green room, and on one occasion held a rehearsal in a sizeable women's restroom on the east side of Starlight. Obviously, none of these were ideal scenarios or solutions. With program and season expansion, it is reasonable to assume Starlight will need to occupy more office, rehearsal, and performance spaces than it currently possesses. Fortunately, the management recognizes this space concern. Plans were



announced in 2015 to repurpose a deserted outdoor rehearsal pavilion to create an education building. It is crucial these plans are executed, providing further relief to the staff and programming issues. The programming can only expand if there is room for new growth.

In 2016, the Administrative Building construction was one of several projects. Unlike the planning of the stage renovation, the Administrative Building design did not appear to fully consider future growth potential. While it is important for Starlight to not overbuild or be overly optimistic, the organization doesn't want to outgrow a new facility within five to six years (Environmental Dimension). The same logic follows the expansion of new winter programming on the stage. Starlight needs to find a balance between offering programming without completely blocking Epic's ability to utilize the stage for events. While programming is a core component of Starlight's mission statement, the organization needs to proceed with caution before they invest money into an unknown entity at the expense of a profitable business (Economic Dimension). The organization will hopefully alleviate any internal conflicts over space with the addition of a new education pavilion and a clear approach to utilizing spaces from October to April. Reducing these conflicts should reduce stress within the workplace, allowing all areas to focus more on the programming and supporting one another (Social Dimension).

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Boards function differently at every organization. Their sizes, organizational structures, and responsibilities differ significantly, as does their level of engagement. Over the decades Starlight's Board of Directors underwent many changes. For instance,

the 57-member Board of 2015 operates much differently than the 220-member Board of 1980. When Starlight created its Board, the members consisted of the organization's financial backers, the guarantors. The members held positions on a wide variety of sub-committees. The November 16, 1951 minutes from a meeting of the sub-committees lists a total of nine; Auditorium & Grounds, Concessions, Legal, Personnel, Production, Promotion, Nominating, Finance, and Insurance. Other sub-committees were created and eliminated as needed. Thirty members sat on the Executive Board. The Board retired the majority of old members and brought in new sub-committee members on a yearly basis. The size of the Board and general function remained the same for decades. As Rohlfs saw it, by 1980 "it was a social register. It wasn't a Board."<sup>73</sup> In 1981, following Rohlfs's creation of a five-year strategic plan, Starlight reduced the Board size to 30 members, making up seven committees. Instead of 30 members on the Executive Board (Committee), the new structure put important day-to-day decisions into the hands of seven members,<sup>74</sup> "Everybody was on a committee for a specific purpose. The committees were formed with specific purposes in mind. It was all part of the plan."<sup>75</sup> With a smaller, easier-to-engage Board, Starlight targeted the members with purpose. For instance, when Marty Nichols became Board President in 1988, Rohlfs gave her the task of bringing her circle of influential friends back to Starlight to see shows. "And she did that, she did that very, very well. That was a big part of the turnaround."<sup>76</sup> The approach to the Board in 2015 is similar, attempting to find the right alchemy of civic and business

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73. Robert Rohlfs interview, August 24, 2012.

74. "Making Memories for 50 Years!," Starlight Theatre Commemorative Program, 2000, 11.

75. Robert Rohlfs interview, August 24, 2012.

76. Ibid.

leaders who will connect Starlight to Kansas City.<sup>77</sup> As Starlight expands, the Board adapts its structure, recently adding an Education Committee. As long as the members are selected for specific purposes and utilized to their full extent, Starlight's Board of Directors can support and strengthen the organization.

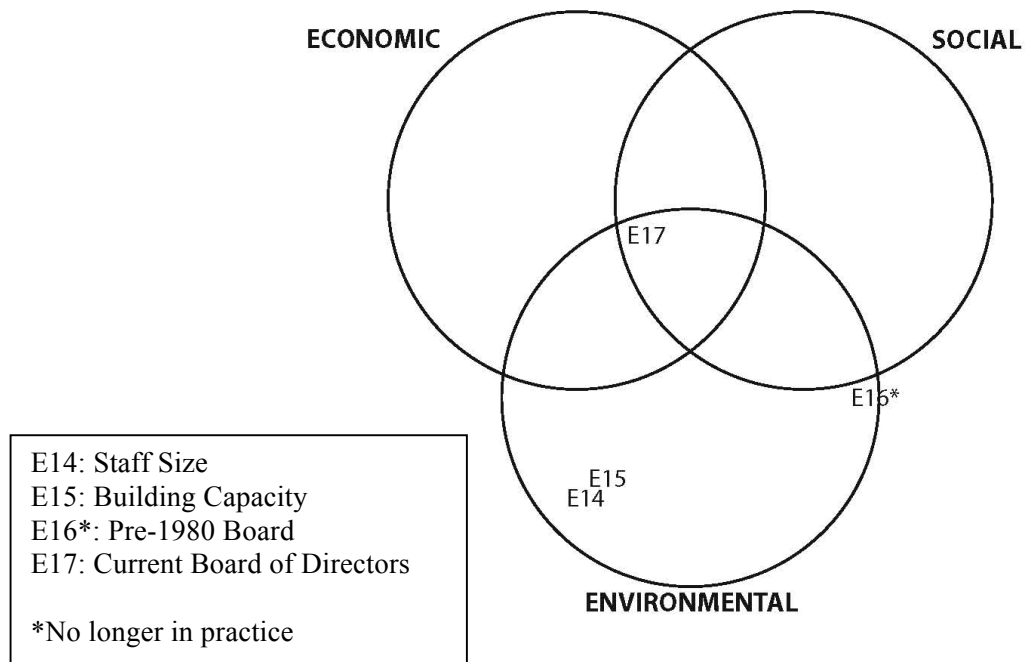
Rohlf addressed the numerous ways Starlight's pre-1980 Board structure was unsustainable. The inclusion on Starlight's Board was more of a status symbol for the individual and less about how the member could benefit the organization (Social Dimension). The number of members was also too great for Starlight to properly engage or manage (Environmental Dimension). This early iteration of the Board brought in guarantor funding, but didn't necessarily provide the organization assistance to secure large financial support (Economic Dimension). The current approach to Starlight's Board shows a clear effort to correct the issues of the early manifestations of the Board. While being on the Board is still a status symbol and a source of pride, it is now more elusive, since there are fewer members. The organization needs to be mindful when selecting new members to find the right balance of individuals from different types of businesses and with varying connections throughout the city (Social Dimension). Starlight uses the Board to seek out Gala donations and program sponsorships. The "ask" for donations carries more weight when a prominent business executive is calling on behalf of Starlight (Economic Dimension). The smaller size allows Starlight to know the members better and interact with them more often with greater response (Environmental Dimension).

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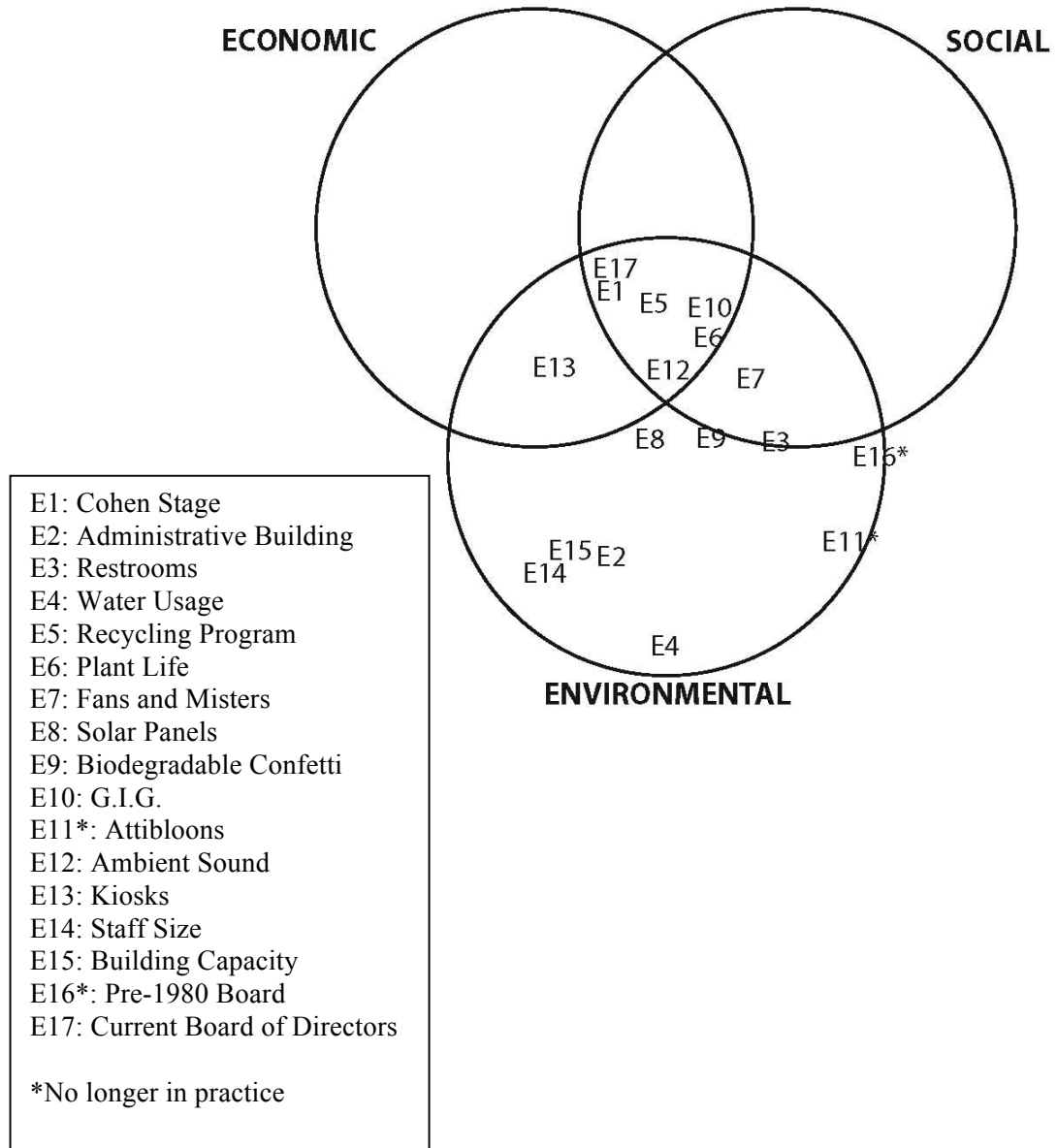
77. In recent years, there was some internal concern too many civic leaders were on the Board. Since part of the Board's current function is to identify sponsors and donors, business leaders seem a better fit. It is up to Starlight's Employee Officers to express this concern and help vet the yearly list of potential new members.

These are the reasons the pre-1980 Board was moderately unsustainable and the current approach is highly sustainable.

**Figure 19: Sustainability Snapshot of Environmental Dimension Focus Area #4 – Administrative Elements**



**Figure 20: Overview of All Environmental Dimension Focus Areas**



Of the seventeen practices examined in the Environmental Dimension, six land in the centralized area of the Venn Diagram, finding a balance between the three dimensions of sustainability. Three of the current practices benefit the Social Dimension, putting guest comfort (fans, misters, restrooms) and enjoyment (confetti) before economic

concerns. In these instances, the financial investments should pay off in later ticket sales. Only the solar panels benefit the Environmental Dimension alone while landing in the moderately sustainable area. If the use of the panels gained more attention or resulted in higher savings it could move closer to the center. The kiosks, fans and misters may also move more towards center. In both regards, that movement will depend on how Starlight management tackles future growth and use. For the kiosks, finding a balance between the workload and worker training is key. Fans and misters don't make a significant impact and are frequently more for appearances. Increasing their effectiveness, while balancing aesthetics and cost, will increase sustainability. Water usage, staff size, the Administrative Building, and building capacity are the least sustainable practices from this chapter. All four items are a calculated risk by Starlight to benefit the Economic Dimension. The money made in concessions offsets the water bill, but doesn't make up for the use of so much water. The staff size and building capacity are both waiting games to find how much Starlight can get out of each item before hiring more staff or constructing new workspaces. Both of these items need to be closely monitored by management so they do not lead to high turnover or missed growth opportunities.

The middle-to-unsustainable practices provide important guidelines for the future of Starlight. Many of the decisions made by Starlight management seem to occur in spite of the environmental ramifications, being driven by the Social or Economic Dimension. For instance, the water use is driven heavily by these two elements, despite a clear waste of water, or the previously discussed concern of staff size. These practices seem to be approached from an "as long as they're sustainable enough" approach, instead of proactively identifying needs for improvement and creating a plan. A prime example: as

cubicles fill in the Starlight office and space runs short, the leadership needs to see the first warning signs of crowding and develop a plan. Too often these outlying practices appear to rely on reactive responses to the problem. To increase the sustainability of Starlight, specifically the facilities and staff, the leadership should look towards adopting more proactive methods when managing the Environmental Dimension.

## Conclusion

### Review of the Kansas City's Starlight Theatre case study and sustainable business model for theatres

There's no silver bullet (for success). There's no "Here, you do this." It's a series of things we (Starlight Theatre) did.

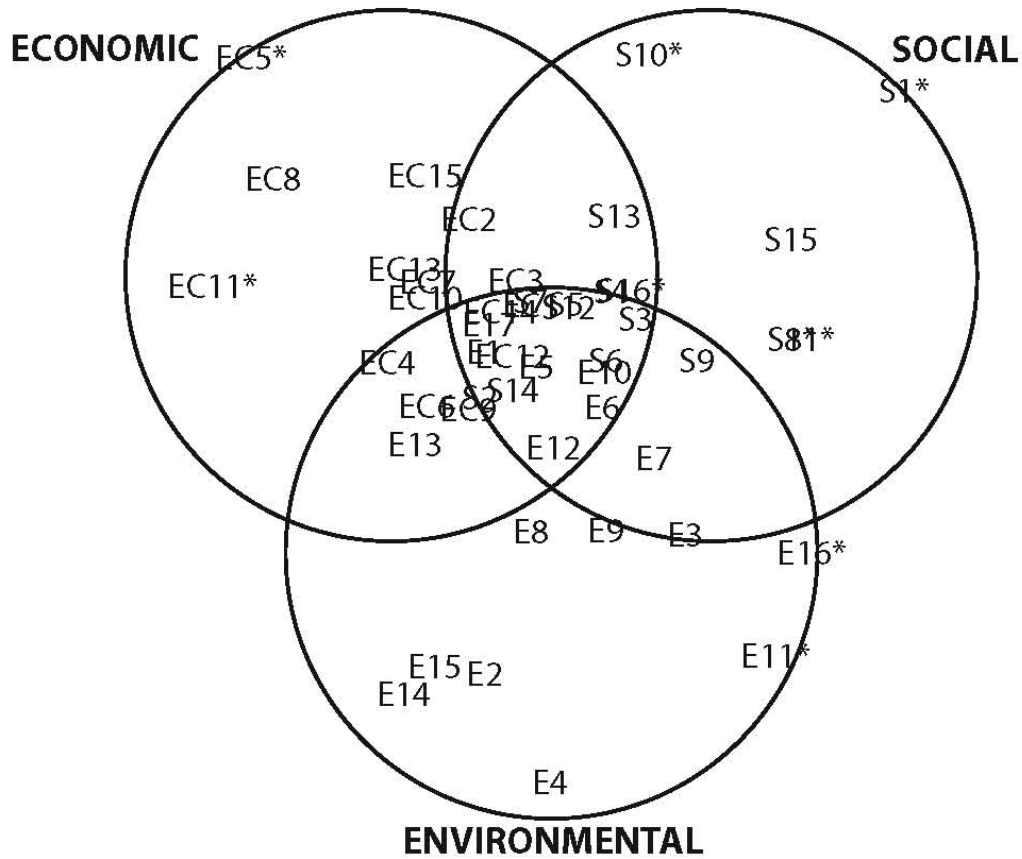
— Bob Rohlf, 2012 interview

#### CHARTING AND REVIEWING STARLIGHT'S PRACTICES

The main goal of this study, as previously stated, is to produce an overview of a specific theatre's sustainability, including areas of strength and weaknesses, providing a general model other theatres (including Starlight) can use to assess their own sustainability. The previous chapters discussed the backgrounds, development, strengths, and weaknesses of individual business practices. Additionally, the chapters included a visual charting of each practice, allowing individuals to gauge Starlight's sustainability of those practices at a glance. The diagram below includes all of the previously examined business practices and the list of individual plot points:



**Figure 21: All Previously Examined Business Practices**



- S1\*: Pre-2007 Season Survey
- S2: Current Online Season Survey
- S3: Nightly Online Survey
- S4: Facebook
- S5: Other Social Media Platforms
- S6: Blue Star Awards
- S7: Act Like An Animal Camp
- S8\*: All Business is Like Show Business
- S9: Community Ticket Program
- S10\*: Starlight On Site (up to 2014)
- S11\*: Starlight On Site (new concept)
- S12: Just Imagine
- S13: Vincent Legacy Scholarship
- S14: Pre-Show Tours
- S15: Family Show Activities
- S16\*: Children's Theatre Study Guides
- EC1: Touring Musicals
- EC2: Self-Produced Musicals
- EC3: Co-Produced Musicals
- EC4: Concerts
- EC5\*: Starlight Indoors (Pre-2015)
- EC6: Starlight Indoors (2015 and Beyond)
- EC7: Parking and Concessions
- EC8: Applause Club

- EC9: Dynamic Pricing
- EC10: Starlight Gala
- EC11\*: StageFright at Starlight
- EC12: Epic Innovative Events, Inc.
- EC13: Bob Rohlf Internship Program
- EC14: Ambassadors
- EC15: Moonlighters
- E1: Cohen Stage
- E2: Administrative Building
- E3: Restrooms
- E4: Water Usage
- E5: Recycling Program
- E6: Plant Life
- E7: Fans and Misters
- E8: Solar Panels
- E9: Biodegradable Confetti
- E10: Guest Interaction Guidelines (G.I.G.)
- E11\*: Attibloons
- E12: Ambient Sound
- E13: Kiosks
- E14: Staff Size
- E15: Building Capacity
- E16\*: Pre-1980 Board
- E17: Current Board of Directors
- \*No longer in practice

Of the 48 analyzed practices, 21 (roughly 43.75%) landed in or on the middle, highly sustainable section of the Venn Diagram.<sup>1</sup> The Social Dimension is represented in the middle by nine practices, while the Economic and Environmental Dimensions have six centralized practices. When you look more closer at the Environmental Dimension in comparison to the other two you can see that the current practices tend to gravitate toward the outside, less sustainable area of the circle. This pattern indicates that the organization is inclined to sacrifice its resources, be it people, space, or elemental, for the benefit of the Social and Economic Dimensions. This trait comes to light when you're able to compare all three areas. All three plot differently on the chart, but the Environmental Dimension shows the greatest inclination towards the unsustainable. The Social Dimension is somewhat sporadic, but the organization already discontinued three of its least sustainable programs, likely because of the high cost and low return. The Economic Dimension does a nice job of bordering that middle section. So, while there's still room for improvement, many of these practices demonstrate the potential for improved sustainability with relatively minor adjustments.

### **Starlight's Cluster of Sustainability**

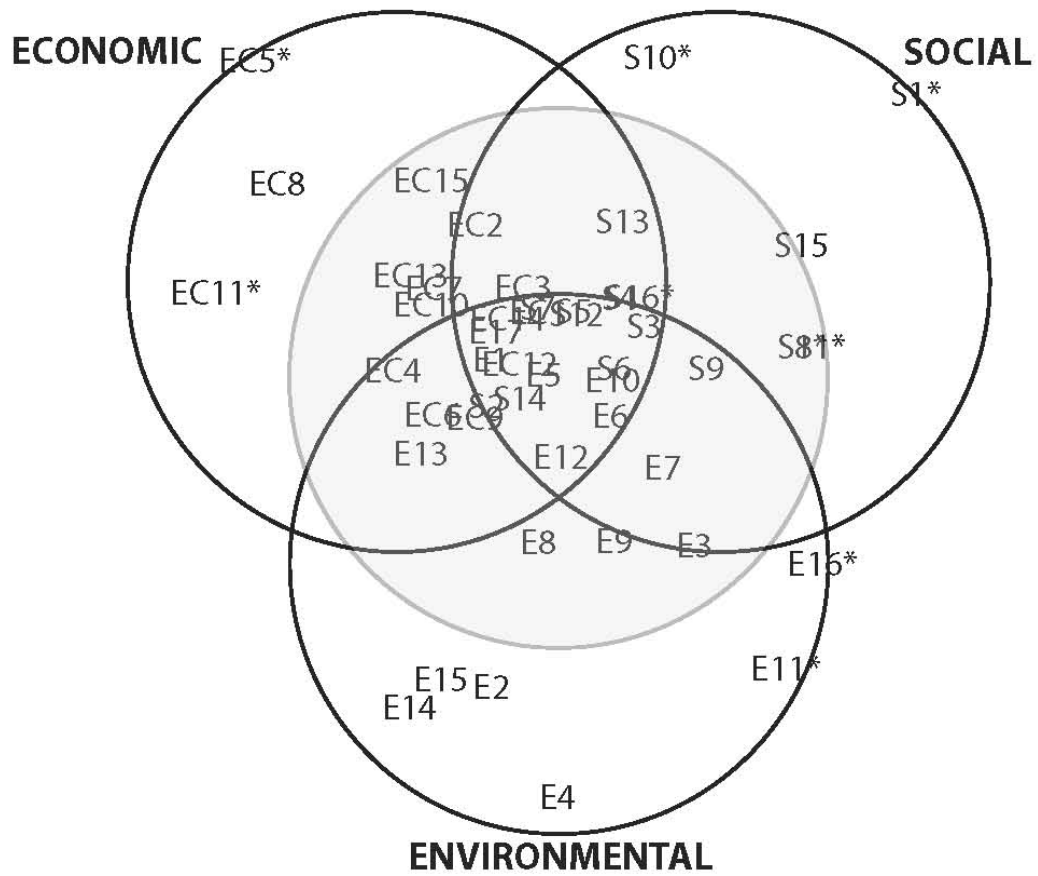
A concept presented in the introductory section dealt with the idea that a balance of practices might emerge just outside of the center zone, where practices benefit one or two areas in a moderately sustainable way, but support an overall balanced business plan.

The gray circle represents that area in the following Venn Diagram:

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1. If you remove the plotted points no longer in practice (eight points), twenty of the forty practices land in the highly sustainable section of the Venn Diagram (50%).

**Figure 22: Starlight’s Cluster of Sustainability**



This highlighted area encompasses fourteen practices; five Economic, five Environmental, four Social.<sup>2</sup> Three practices share the Environmental/Economic area, while four overlap Environmental/Social. It would be beneficial if Starlight modified its approach to EC13 (Bob Rohlf Internship Program), as the practice closest to the Economic/Social area, to better balance these overlapping zones. That space is the least populated of the new circle. Additionally, this area helps to highlight how many of the Economic practices fall just outside the highly sustainable area. This is not surprising, considering that financial security has been a key component in Starlight’s decision

<sup>2</sup> This results in 35 of the 48 practices (72.9%) landing in the moderately-highly sustainable areas, or 33 of 40 practices (82.5%) once you discount the plot points no longer in practice.

making since coming out of debt in the 1980s. For nearly three decades the organization has worked toward solidifying its financial security. Therefore it is not surprising to see more of the Economic Dimension practices clustering around the sustainable area. This provides a snapshot of the organization's most recent mindset. The layout of this Venn Diagram would be different if it contained only practices from the 1950s, when the organization focused more on social and environmental concerns.

Unsustainable practices, which land outside of the highlighted area, are easily identified in Figure 22. Earlier chapters examined each focus area, practice, and dimension, but this combined Venn Diagram helps identify areas for improvement. For example, in the Economic Dimension, financial and managerial adjustments to EC8: Applause Club might potentially strengthen the practice's sustainability.

At a glance, the Social Dimension looks sustainable. However, reinstating both S10 and S11, versions of Starlight On Site, might strengthen the organization's Outreach Programs. This analysis has also revealed that Starlight's sustainability in terms of the Social Dimension might be strengthened through greater engagement with its surrounding community. Currently, the surrounding community is only reached through the Community Ticket Program, potentially some of the educational programming, and part-time employment. The most significant engagement program for the surrounding community was Starlight On Site, which was put on hiatus in 2014.

The organization's decisions pertaining to the Environmental Dimension raise the most concerns.<sup>3</sup> E4: Water Usage is the most highly unsustainable practice, but management also needs to examine carefully the long-term effects of their growth and

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3. Five of the forty in-practice plot points (12.5%) land in an unsustainable area, four being from the Environmental Dimension.

workforce. Some of the most unsustainable practices in the Environmental Dimension pertain to these items: staff size, building capacity, and the administrative building. There are certainly reasons to be cautious with these items; for example the organization cannot afford to build office space for nonexistent staff. The concern lies in management's ability to identify future needs and plan accordingly.

### **How Starlight Can Utilize This Model**

In recent years, Starlight's Board of Directors encouraged the organization's departments to create scorecards. The scorecards allow departments to track successes, growth, and areas for improvement. Previously, each department presumably had its own way of tracking these elements. The Development Department's grant applications might benefit from being able to present an organization-wide scorecard, providing clear metrics over qualitative data. While many management-level meetings occurred around the scorecards, they seemed to stall as priorities shifted. In the end, Starlight never adopted an organization-wide scorecard, but the process did benefit some areas. The Education Department keeps a scorecard for most of their programs. After years of refining the scorecards with the Education Subcommittee, the Department uses the system to track enrollment numbers, satisfaction, and financials. These items could translate to the sustainability chart used in this study. For example, consider enrollment numbers, or capacity, in the Environmental Dimension, satisfaction in the Social Dimension, and the financials factor into the Economic Dimension. By adapting the individual department scorecards into the sustainability model, all areas can track their own practices but still feed into an organization-wide system of reporting.

Starlight can implement the graphing method when exploring the feasibility and sustainability of future projects. While this case study focused on past and current practices, this approach could work to assess future items as well. By tracking items on the graph Starlight's management can see if potential plans fill organizational needs or cover an area that is already heavily engaged.

Starlight has already used the research from this case study to uncover the histories of different practices. The majority of current employees did not receive full histories of their areas from predecessors. In some cases, the knowledge passed down includes only partial histories and explanations of current practices. The historic overviews found in this case study illuminated certain decisions to current employees. The Marketing Department and Center Stage Young Professionals Group both used Chapter 1 of this study as reference material for blog posts and a Happy Hour at the Towers event. A variety of staff members engaged the author to ask about different practices, their history, or some unknown piece of information. Throughout the process, the potential for organizational benefit became increasingly clear.

### COMPLICATIONS WITH THE PROCESS

While this approach was successful in revealing patterns in Starlight's practices, different elements created hindrances along the way. Some items were outside of the case study's control; for example, Starlight changing leadership or unexpectedly altering aspects of the venue. Other delays occurred as new research avenues revealed themselves through interviews and archival work. The first chapter identified the potential for the project to evolve during the research, but it is important to point out that this required

significant time. This section explores these complications and presents, when available, ways to avoid potential pitfalls in future applications of this model.

## **Timeline**

The first complication came from the fact Starlight is a growing, adapting organization. While this is one of the reasons the venue was selected to study, this characteristic also meant plotted practices shifted and moved throughout the research period. Changes in leadership, at the president level or individual department level, resulted in different approaches to certain topics. These changes, though minor, affect the sustainability of the item. While some of these changes were minor enough to simply clarify in the footnotes, others required more substantial revisions. Additionally, the longer the research and writing phase extended, the more new practices and items materialized. For example, Starlight's new indoor series began midway through the final research phase for the Economic Dimension Chapter, and the organization retired Starlight on Site after completion of the Social Dimension Chapter. It seemed any one new business decision would affect two previously plotted points and add another to the chart. As highlighted earlier, the adaptability of the organization and willingness to evolve practices made it an excellent case study subject, but also made it feel as if there was no way to properly wrap up the research. Ultimately, I decided to stop tracking any significant changes occurring after May 2015, or else the study would never solidify.<sup>4</sup> An internal study, which wouldn't need to lay out the same level of history or specific explanations of each practice, would be able to easier adapt to constant shifts in

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4. May 2015 marked a little over a year with Baker at the helm. This date allowed the case study to include Baker's newly implemented practices. While many of them were still in the trial period, their inclusion was important to show Starlight's continual growth.

sustainability for each plotted point. The academic aspects of this case study required the establishment of a timeline boundary. Future applications of this model need to set a clear, reasonable timeline for research. As was the case with this study, that timeline might not clearly reveal itself until the research is underway.

The challenging relationship between completing this study and time produced an interesting result for Chapter 2. The initial draft of the Social Dimension was completed in 2012. The chapter was revised following the decision to stop tracking significant changes after May 2015. During this time many of the plotted points shifted to different areas of the graph, some becoming more sustainable and others less so. Often these shifts resulted in significant changes. For example, in that space of time Just Imagine secured a donor, the Community Ticket Program was moved to a new department, Starlight On Site went from a program adjustment to hiatus, and the nightly surveys no longer required daily follow-up with patrons. These shifts support the concept that this is a fluid tracking method that can adapt with the practices. As the different focus area headings indicated, these are “snapshots” at practices. Any of the practices’ plotted points may shift on a daily, yearly, or even decade-long period of time.

## **Resources**

This case study benefited from a wealth of available resources, though at times it was an overwhelming amount of available raw data. I was fortunate enough to have access to materials in the Starlight archives, utilizing items that were not sensitive information, like the specific costs of bookings in the Economic Chapter. While it took significant time to sort through 20+ four-drawer cabinets of archival materials, it is



important to acknowledge that this pool of information ultimately aided this case study. It would hinder the timeline of a case study if a theatre did not have detailed records or a history of surveying patrons. Such studies require more initial planning and identifying what research areas needed additional time. The resources available to the researcher will significantly change depending upon whether the case study is for academic purposes or an organization-led effort. The social aspect of this study became a result of the available research and interviews. The prospect of engaging and surveying the immediate community surrounding Starlight presented a significant drain on physical and financial resources and couldn't be accommodated with this study. Instead, the study relied on Starlight's own research data, which often identified populations and areas Starlight failed to engage.<sup>5</sup> If an organization adapted this model they could, depending upon their financial situation, have more agency to engage patrons and surrounding communities about their practices and impact.

### **Evaluated Practices**

As the case study developed, additional research areas materialized. Early in the development of this case study there were 13 identified research areas.<sup>6</sup> Over time, these 13 areas became the macro topics within the chapter, which were then dissected by examining several practices within each area. The number of possible research topics, ways to examine each topic, and available resources continued to expand. It is important

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5. If you recall from Chapter 2, Starlight frequently surveys its patrons. While this might be a burden on the organization, for this study that provided ample information pertaining to the human element of the various practices. Nearly every practice examined in this case study is touched upon in one, if not multiple, Starlight surveys.

6. A research document addressing this study's central questions, dated September 13, 2011, identified these thirteen areas.

to understand the need for a large sample pool of practices. The 13 points might have shown some organization issues, but the 47 points made trends and points of weakness easier to identify. The key moving forward with this model is identifying a large pool of possible practices from an organization. It will be easier to start with a broad number and then hone in on specific points during the research phase. By adding points during the research phase, it was necessary to interview several Starlight employees more than once to ask follow-up questions. Some amount of repeat interviews will be unavoidable, but having a clear list of items, albeit broad, going into the research phase, will streamline the process.

#### FUTURE APPLICATIONS OF THIS MODEL

Initially, this study planned to utilize a three-round Delphi survey to select the areas of research. This plan was abandoned when it was determined the researcher's knowledge of the venue was extensive enough to select the best practices for inclusion. Moving forward, the Delphi survey might benefit future studies, even if the researcher is capable of selecting the practices. While conducting this case study a future evolution of the Venn Diagram emerged, which relies on the Delphi survey. The Delphi survey method is frequently used in tourism to forecast the sustainability of potential projects or to identify sustainability criteria for quantitative research.<sup>7</sup> The Delphi method begins by having a large pool of respondents, typically experts in the given field, providing initial criterion. The researcher then consolidates the responses and a selected panel ranks and responds to the choices. The process continues, attempting to distill the strongest, most

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7. Graham Miller, "The Development of Indicators for Sustainable Tourism: results of a Delphi survey of tourism researchers," *Tourism Management* 22, no. 4, (July 2001): 351, accessed March 28, 2016, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00067-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00067-4).

valuable responses. The method allows a large group to participate without ever having to gather as a whole and removes the possibility of “group think” and the influence that has on an individual’s responses. Instead of experts in the sustainability field, removed from the core issues, this model will use a broad range of stakeholders as the initial pool of respondents. The goal will be for respondents to identify key factors of the theatre’s current and future sustainability within the three dimensions. The responses will be consolidated to identify the top sustainability factors.<sup>8</sup> This new survey goes to higher-level stakeholders. Their responses will refine the data again. The final survey will be given to an elite group of stakeholders. The following round-by-round guide gives an overview of the method for a hypothetical future analysis of Starlight.

#### STARLIGHT THEATRE DELPHI SURVEY

Round One: Given to a broad pool of probable stakeholders<sup>9</sup>

- Brief description of sustainability and the three dimensions
- Space provided to list 5-10 items per dimension
- Space provided for additional comments

Round Two: Given to management-level stakeholders<sup>10</sup>

- Brief description of sustainability and the three dimensions
- List of top, most common elements (20-30) produced from First Round and scale to rate their importance from 1-10, with 10 being the most vital to obtain sustainability
- Space provided for additional comments

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8. If the case study’s researcher is confident in identifying an extensive list of potential practices in each dimension of sustainability, a list that balanced the interest of all stakeholders, that list can be used in place of carrying out Round One. Again, this should be done only if there is extensive knowledge of the organization and hopefully prior research to consult. The researcher’s list is then used in Round Two.

9. This broad group of stakeholders includes theatre patrons, neighborhoods surrounding Swope Park, Starlight employees (seasonal and full-time), Parks and Recreation Board, Starlight’s Board, Swope Park leadership (Zoo, Southwest Community Center), Starlight volunteers, city and civic leaders, and Kansas City Arts Council.

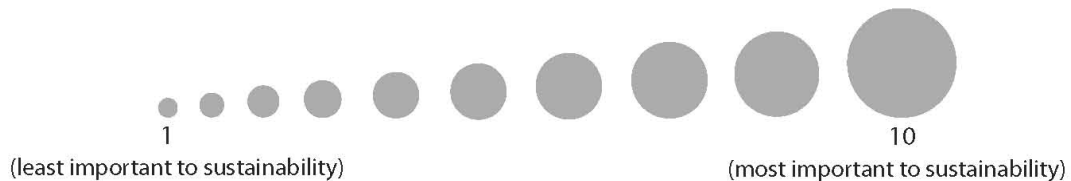
10. This more refined pool should be made up of those who manage the previous pools of stakeholders. So, instead of all Starlight employees, it would be given to the president, vice presidents, and directors. Instead of the entire group of Ambassador volunteers, the president of the group is in Round Two.

Round Three: Given to top-level stakeholders (Presidents, Mayor, Business Owners)

- Brief description of sustainability and the three dimensions
- List of top, highest-ranking factors (15-20) and scale to rate their importance from 1-10, with 10 being the most vital to obtain sustainability
- Space provided for additional comments

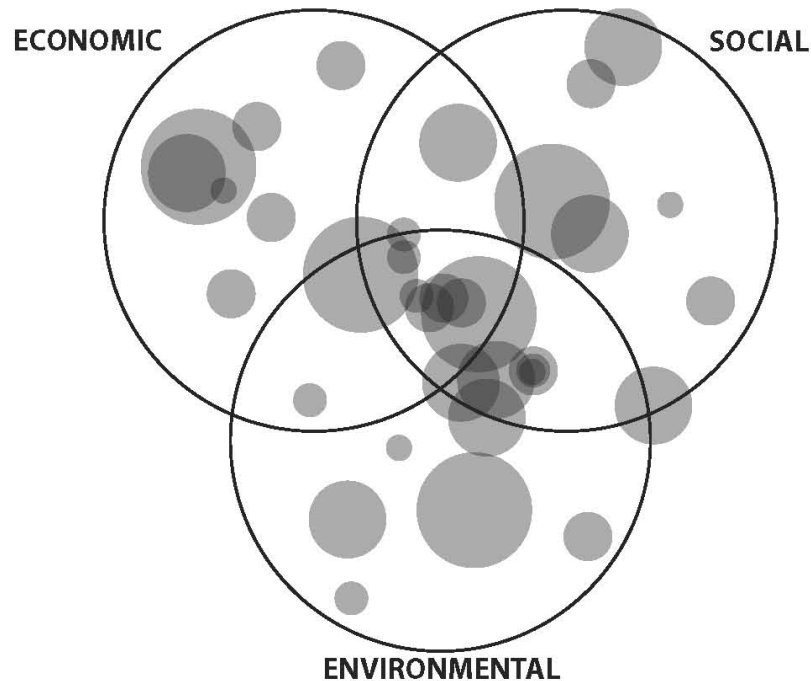
Round Three of the Delphi study takes the list from Round Two and assigns them a numeric value. This is vital for the future usage of this study's charting method. The Venn Diagram used in this case study successfully produced trends and highlighted successes and areas for improvement. A downside of the early graphs is that each element has the same weight/value to the eye. The Delphi survey's quantitative data solves this dilemma. Round Three's values are assigned a plot point size as follows:

**Figure 23: Delphi Survey Round Three Values**



These sized points, which are also slightly transparent, produce a more informative Venn Diagram, like the following example:

**Figure 24: Example of Delphi Survey Venn Diagram**



This new approach to graphing may accompany the model utilized in this study, providing theatres with an additional way to analyze the sustainability data. This is an exciting new implementation of the charting method that slowly revealed itself through the process of conducting this case study. As this chapter's opening quote from Rohlf highlights, there's no single decision for success. Rather, it is a series of decisions, of practices, that lead to an organization's sustainability. For this reason, it is important to create and utilize new models, which embrace the importance of every decision and each decision's influence on the overall sustainability of the theatre.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS ON THIS STUDY

Researching and writing this case study confirmed the desirability of balancing the Social, Economic, and Environmental Dimensions as key to a theatre's success as

well as offering a vivid and in-depth look at how these dimensions may overlap and integrate. The benefit of this balance was previously theorized, and studies explored a theatre's practices for one dimension, but this study extensively explored how a singular theatre engages all three dimensions. At Starlight, apparently, previous research and leadership frequently balanced these components without realizing these were the main areas in play. As the subjects I interviewed grasped the concept, they began responding to the discussed topics by pointing out what aspects of a practice benefitted the Social Dimension or how it failed to fulfill the needs of the environment. They embraced the sustainability model and easily adopted it in their responses. The clarity of the three areas makes dissecting broad or complex topics an easier task. There is tremendous value in distilling the main elements needed for sustainability, because this streamlined approach can be used for all current and future business decisions. It is more difficult to analyze living, evolving organizations without a clear model to follow, because everything is so interconnected. Instead of being put off by this complicated, overlapping world, this study's model embraces and encourages it. Then, by applying the study's findings to the Venn Diagram, this business model produces an X-ray of the organization's sustainability. That X-ray shows signs of operational health, potential pitfalls, and areas of current loss. While some theatres focus on a yearly annual report, final budget figures, or other markers of potential success, this new model encompasses all these elements and presents them as a singular assessment of the whole.

APPENDIX 1: 1952 Letter to Starlight Theatre Guarantors<sup>1</sup>

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

We have received hundreds of letters and personal statements demonstrating that this community is deeply grateful to the Guarantors of the Starlight Theatre Association for making possible the outstanding productions staged at the Theatre during the 1951 season. Our total attendance for the season certainly indicated that the people of Kansas City and our trade area enjoy good entertainment. Our appreciation extends also to the Park Board and to the City of Kansas City for the construction of the Theatre; however, without the Guarantors these marvelous productions could not have been possible. You are entitled to know, as a Guarantor, that we finished with an operating balance. We did have to invest better than \$74,000.00 in permanent equipment which now constitutes capital assets. While we did not take in more money than we spent, these capital assets have a much greater value than the financial difference.

We can, therefore, tell you, on the basis of an audit by Arthur Andersen Company, you will not be called on the remainder of your Guarantor's pledge and furthermore, if you so desire, we will refund you that which you paid in on your guarantee. However, working capital each season must be underwritten to fill the gap between the beginning of our fiscal year, which is October 1, and the time which we receive funds from ticket sales and we certainly want you back as a Guarantor for 1952. You do not need to send us any money merely check and sign the attached card indicating that you will support the 1952 season on the same basis you did in the 1951 season. Since we already have the funds you originally sent us, we can use that money for operating capital for 1952.

Your cooperation and assistance is deeply appreciated by the Board of Directors and Executive Committee and all the other Committees who worked so hard and long to make this first year a success. Next year should be an even better year and with your cooperation it will be.

Sincerely yours,

John A. Moore  
President

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1. Starlight Theatre Association Minutes (1951), October 16, 1951, 12, Starlight Theatre Onsite Archives, Kansas City, MO.

## APPENDIX 2: Season Survey History

### **1998: 1,476 respondents (included a corporate survey)**

Conducted by Rockhurst Small Business Institute, paper survey administered during productions and in mailings.

### **1999: 2,091 respondents (Survey #1; Show preference only)**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey administered during productions and in mailings.

### **Total respondents unknown (Survey #2; Show/Concert preference)**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey administered during concerts.

### **4,217 respondents (Survey #3; Season preview and demographic survey)**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey included as part of a mailer and distributed in the venue.

### **2000: Survey occurred, total respondents unknown**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey administered during productions and in mailings.

### **2001: Survey occurred, total respondents unknown**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre on behalf of The League of American Theatres and Producers, paper survey administered during productions and in mailings.

### **2002/2003: 750 season subscribers contacted by mail**

Conducted between seasons in association with Carnegie Mellon University, paper survey administered through a direct mailing to a controlled pool.



**2004: 3,019 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey administered during *Camelot* and *Chicago* and electronic version available online. Online link was emailed to subscribers.

**2005: 4,123 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey administered during select productions and electronic version available online. Online link was emailed to subscribers.

**2006: 3,552 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, paper survey administered during *Rent* and electronic version available online. Online link was emailed to subscribers.

**2007: 3,493 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers.

**2008: 4,016 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers.

**2009: 5,547 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers and posted on Starlight's Facebook page and Twitter.

**2010: 5,143 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers and posted on Starlight's Facebook page and Twitter.

**2011: 6,408 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers and posted on Starlight's Facebook page and Twitter.

**2012: 7,478 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers and posted on Starlight's Facebook page and Twitter.

**2013: 10,139 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers and posted on Starlight's Facebook page and Twitter.

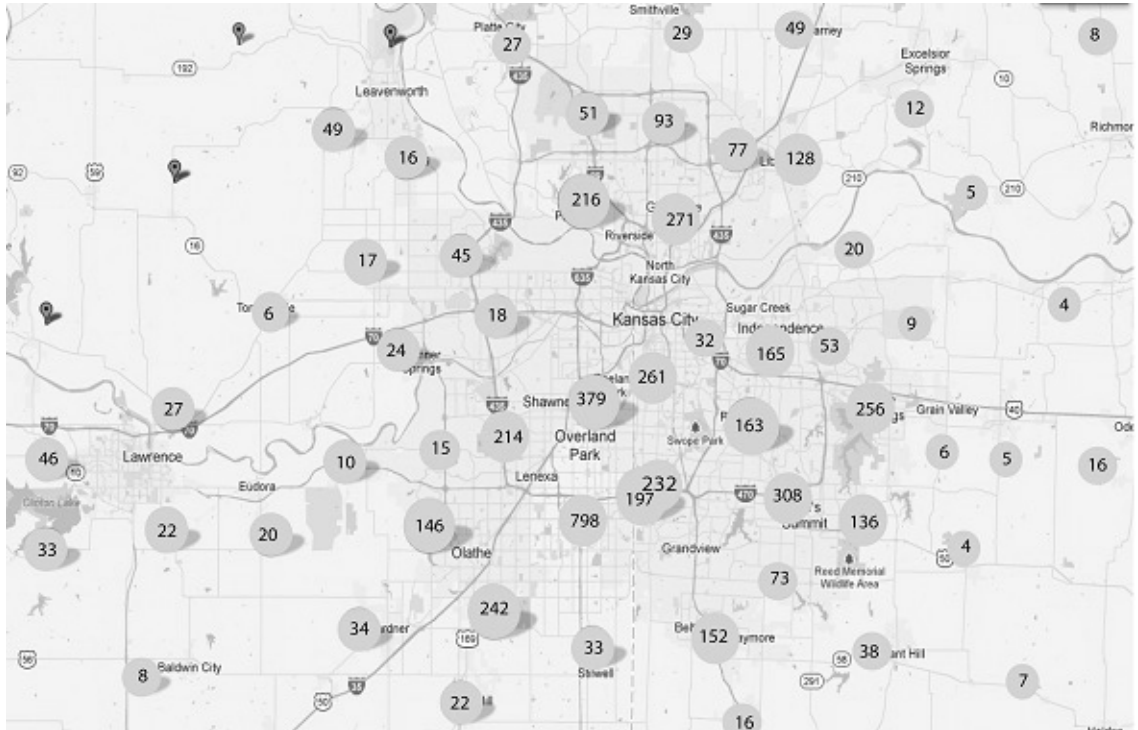
**2014: 10,098 respondents**

Conducted by Starlight Theatre, only available in electronic form. Online link was emailed to subscribers and posted on Starlight's Facebook page and Twitter.

APPENDIX 3: 2012 Survey Respondents By Zip Code



APPENDIX 4: 2012 Kansas City Area Survey Respondents By Zip Code



APPENDIX 5: 2012 Starlight Theatre's Facebook Response (August 20, 2012)

Dear Starlight Fans and Facebook members,

In the past 24 hours, our staff has discussed internally and with members of the Kansas City community the reactions to this post. Please know that Starlight Theatre did not intend in any way to offend anyone with our advisory for La Gage Aux Folles. Our guests are continually asking for detailed show descriptions and content advisories so that they can make their own decisions about attending shows, bring children or teens, etc. While we are now providing more descriptions and parental guidelines than in years past, how to better educate guests regarding show content is an ongoing process.

When choosing a way to describe the relationships and the nightclub performers presents in La Cage Aux Folles, we naively selected the phrase 'alternative lifestyles.' We say naïve because those involved with drafting this advisory were unaware of its hurtful context. In no way did Starlight Theatre mean to hurt members of the LGBT community, and while reading your comments we realize this is exactly what we have done. Thank you to everyone for passionately articulating your feelings and educating us about how this phrase can be hurtful. We are extremely sorry for any pain we may have caused and ask for your forgiveness.

As of this morning, we have changed our advisory for La Cage Aux Folles to the following, "This show contains adult themes, some sexual references and suggestive costumes. Parental guidance strongly recommended."

In the meantime, we are very proud and excited to present La Cage Aux Folles at Starlight Theatre and would like to invite all to attend. The family at the center of the musical shows a devotion to one another that makes a strong statement about family values. La Cage Aux Folles will perform at Starlight Theatre August 28-Sept. 2.

Yours sincerely,  
Starlight Theatre

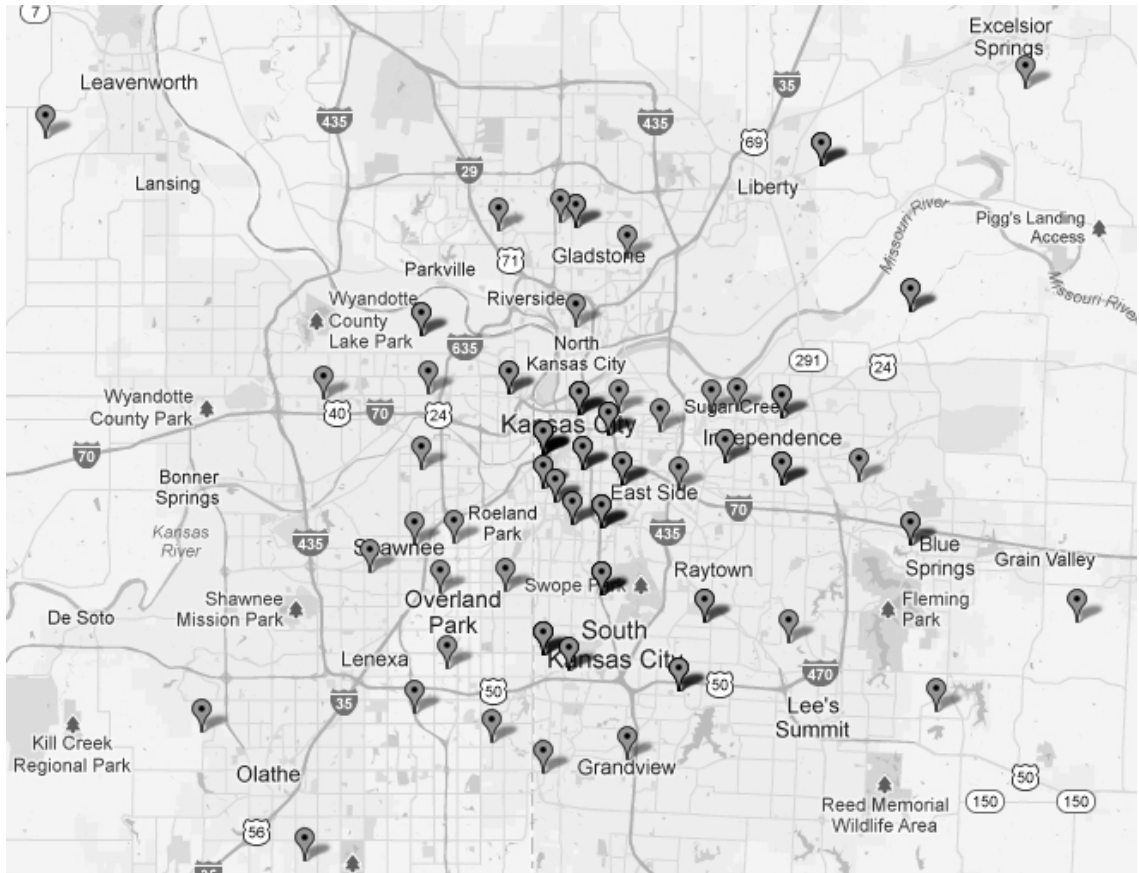
APPENDIX 6: 2003 Blue Star Awards Categories

- Outstanding Overall Production of a Musical
- Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role
- Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role
- Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role
- Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role
- Outstanding Performance in a Cameo Role
- Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble Member
- Outstanding Performance by a Chorus
- Outstanding Production Number
- Outstanding Performance by a Teacher or Alumni
- Outstanding Performance by an Orchestra (student orchestra only)
- Outstanding Instrumental Performance
- Outstanding Achievement by a Teacher or Outside Director
- Outstanding Achievement by a Student Director
- Outstanding Achievement in Musical Direction
- Outstanding Achievement in Choreography
- Outstanding Stage Crew
- Outstanding Achievement in Scenic Design
- Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design
- Outstanding Achievement in Costume Design
- Outstanding Achievement in Graphic Design
- Outstanding Achievement in Lobby Display
- Outstanding Achievement in Technical Production
  - Awarded by Teacher Recommendation
- Rising Star Scholarships—Male and Female Graduating Seniors
  - Student Application Required.

APPENDIX 7: 2014-2015 Blue Star Awards Categories

Outstanding Artistic Contribution by a Student - Teacher Recommendation Required  
Outstanding Technical Achievement  
Outstanding Orchestra  
Outstanding Costume Design, Tiers I & II  
Outstanding Scenic Design, Tiers I & II  
Outstanding Hair and Makeup Design  
Outstanding Lighting Design  
Outstanding Technical Crew  
Outstanding Male Ensemble Member  
Outstanding Female Ensemble Member  
Outstanding Ensemble  
Outstanding Actor in a Featured Role  
Outstanding Actress in a Featured Role  
Outstanding Actor in a Supporting Role  
Outstanding Actress in a Supporting Role  
Outstanding Actor in a Lead Role  
Outstanding Actress in a Lead Role  
Outstanding Overall Production  
Outstanding Technical Achievement -Student Application Required  
Rising Star Scholarships—Male and Female Graduating Seniors -Student Application  
Required

APPENDIX 8: 2012 Community Ticket Program Recipients By Zip Code Concentration





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## VITA

Originally from Topeka, KS, Andy Pierce received his BA from Pittsburg State University. Upon graduation, he entered into the MA Program at University of Missouri-Kansas City, where he studied under Dr. Felicia Hardison Londré. Andy's thesis, "The University of Missouri-Kansas City Charrette: A New Approach to Theatre Training," explored teaching techniques within the university's MFA program. During his time at UMKC, Andy began working at Starlight Theatre as the Ovation Gift Store manager, helping launch the new retail space. He continued working at Starlight during the summers throughout his doctoral work at University of Missouri-Columbia. Upon completion of his coursework, Andy accepted a fulltime position with Starlight as the organization's Education Coordinator, a position he still holds.

Andy's collegiate studies included extensive dramaturgical work. He was selected twice to attend the Kennedy Center American College Theater National Festival as part of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas' Dramaturgy Initiative. He served as a literary fellow (2009) and archival associate and docent (2010) at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, and is a script panelist for the organization's National Playwrights Conference. From 2010-2011 Andy was a dramaturgy apprentice with the Minneapolis Playwrights' Center. He has been fortunate to work with Ricardo Khan and Kathleen McGhee-Anderson (*Quindaro*), Barry Kyle (*Three Sisters*), Jeremy Cohen (*The Body of an American*), Julia Cho, John Baker, and Mark Brokaw (*The Language Archive*), and Wendy C. Goldberg, Martin Kettling, Anne Morgan, and the 2009 NMTC/NPC artists (The O'Neill). Andy has been published in *The Journal of Popular Culture* and *Theatre Design & Technology*.