

Amid economic drama, theater opens in Johns Creek

By [Patrick Fox](#)
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

2:37 p.m. Monday, April 25, 2011

The folks at Dancing Goat Theater are smiling amid tough times.

And it's no act.

At a time when many community theater groups are struggling to stay afloat, this intimate new theater space in Johns Creek will be home to three resident troupes. Dancing Goat, which is not quite completed, had about two-thirds of its 75 seats filled last weekend for a special preview of coming attractions.

"We couldn't be happier," said Margarita Moldovan, executive director for Performing Arts North, the nonprofit organization that runs the State Bridge Road theater and its three troupes.

The vision for Dancing Goat began in 2008, when Moldovan, Amelia Bahr and Daniel Glenn founded the Performing Arts North. The company has grown into an umbrella organization that includes Curtain Climbers, a children's theater group; the Shakespeare Studio, which offers high school and college students the opportunity to learn and perform Shakespeare; and the Maligned Actors Network, which presents contemporary performances with adults in mind. All of it is done on a shoestring budget with unpaid labor.

"We started this whole company, and we do it all as volunteers," Moldovan said. "Hopefully, eventually, we'll be able to pay a general manager, but everything we do has been for love."

Many metro area community theaters have not felt a lot of love in the past year.

Roswell's Kudzu Playhouse closed its doors in December after 20 years of operation. A month later, Rosewater Theater, which operated for three years out of a site on Holcomb Bridge Road in Roswell, closed up shop due to the bad economy. And, in February, the curtain fell on Marietta's Blackwell Playhouse after a 20-year run.

The operators of each company blamed the economy and lack of public support for their decisions.

Johns Creek, though, has shown it can and will sustain artistic enterprises. It has the metro area's only professional symphony orchestra outside of Atlanta, and the Johns Creek Foundation, a citizen's organization dedicated to improving the quality of life in the area, has proven a generous contributor to the arts.

"I think we're uniquely positioned in this city to be successful," said co-founder Glenn, a Milton High graduate who studied theater in New York and, with Bahr, created the Shakespeare Studio seven years ago, arranging camps for students at local high schools.

He added: "I think that in some ways it could be the right time to start, because there's more of a need for it now. I believe we have a board and we have volunteers who are uniquely giving of their time and their resources."

Bahr, Glenn and Moldovan had a lot of help getting their soon-to-be 100-seat black box theater up and running.

The organization received a \$10,000 grant from the Johns Creek Foundation. Donations poured in from the community. Members of the local International Union of Painters & Allied Trades put up walls, while plumbers, electricians and designers donated their expertise for free or at reduced rates.

Performing Arts North board members chipped in time and labor on evenings and weekends. The space for the theater itself, Moldovan said, is being made available at a reduced rate until the company gets established.

And all signs point to Dancing Goat establishing itself, at least for now.

The children's theater and Shakespeare Studio have a steady flow of patrons, Moldovan said. The Maligned Actors Network production of the "Vagina Monologues," held in a rented space in February, sold out both nights. The production raised more than \$2,000, with portions benefiting Stronghold Atlanta, a non-profit serving domestic violence victims.

Dancing Goat's first full production will be the Shakespeare Studio's "The Taming of the Shrew," which is scheduled for June. Patrons who got a glimpse of the company's wares at the April 23 open house were enthusiastic.

"We've been going to the Georgia Ensemble Theater for years," said Ann Levy of Johns Creek. "We love theater."

Theater fan and resident Gail Murphy said appreciates the work Glenn has done with her son.

"He used to teach at Johns Creek High School," she said. "He taught my son. He got into acting, and he'd never done it before. Now he loves it, and he can't wait to do it in college."

Backstage, Nicole Hepp and Sydney Schafer, both students at Lambert High School, were preparing for their brief stints as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum in a scene from "Alice in Wonderland."

"This is what I'm going to do for my career," Hepp said.

Standing nearby, Bahr kept an eye on the parade of actors preparing for their Dancing Goat debut.

"I love children's theater," she said. "I love children. I love how creative they are."

She and her theater partners have to hope the community will feel the same about every Dancing Goat production.

If you go

Dancing Goat Theater

10700 State Bridge Road, Johns Creek. Ticket prices vary by production. Admission for the children's theater is \$8 for children and \$12 for adults. The Shakespeare Studio and Maligned Actors shows are \$12 for students and seniors, \$18 for adults. Performance schedule and other information: performingartsnorth.orgCHKING or PHONE?

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