

History of Auburn Public Theater

By Angela Daddabbo, Artistic Director

Auburn Public Theater came to life as the unlikely result of a feng shui consultation done by Sheila Murphy for Carey Eidel and me, then owners of Daddabbo's Pizza downtown Auburn.

One day, Sheila came in for lunch, sat down in a booth and noticed that the building across the street had two signs in the window, one announcing the building was for sale and the other announcing the retail space was for rent. Later that evening, she called and gave me a few quick fixes for Daddabbo's Pizza; hang a few plants, put small white lights around the inside of the large window at the front of the restaurant, group the old photos of family members together and cluster them over the tables next to the wall.

And, finally, she suggested I see if it would be possible to do something a little more lively in the window across the street. She explained that half of Daddabbo's customers had been sitting down and staring out the window directly at the For Sale and For Lease signs every day and, quite frankly, if only on a subconscious level, that was probably more than a little depressing.

I quickly made the easy fixes. I bought plants and strings of small white lights and worked with Carey to reorganize the many photos and posters hanging all over the restaurant.

Now, for the window across the street, that was a little more complicated. Who owned the building? Would he or she be amenable to making changes for the sake of helping to improve the vibe at Daddabbo's Pizza? Should I really lend this suggestion time and energy or should I just let it slide? I decided to let it slide.

Then one day, a great idea came to me. How about hanging a poster of Einstein sticking his tongue out in the window of the vacant building across the street from the pizza shop? It would

only cost about twenty dollars, it wouldn't interfere with the current signage in the window, and it would make everyone who walked by it, drove by it or sat across from it smile. Perfect. Then another idea came along. How about hanging a dark red, heavy, velvet theater curtain in that window? That would be more expensive but it would also be more interesting; it would help to create a little mystery.

As I continued to drive, a third idea quickly came. Don't hang a theater curtain in the window; build a theater in the building across the street. I immediately knew this was the one true thing, the perfect fix on all levels, and that I needed to act on this idea as soon as I possibly could. I also knew how much time, effort and money would be needed to execute such an idea so, at first, I tried as hard as I could to ignore the idea altogether.

In fact, I immediately told the idea to go away and leave me alone forever.

Back in Los Angeles, where Carey and I met years ago, we always talked of a shared dream to own a theater building where we could program plays, musical performances, comedians, family productions and acting classes. With our first spare million dollars, we fantasized, we would buy a little building on Theater Row in Hollywood and see to making our dream come true. But when we made the decision to leave LA in 2001 and move to Auburn, we also made the decision to leave that dream behind. Until that fateful feng shui consultation at Daddabbo's Pizza, our dream of having a theater space of our own was all but dead and buried.

So, after trying my hardest to ignore the idea of building a theater in the old Grant's building in downtown Auburn (the idea came to me daily, hourly even), I finally decided to share it with Carey. Upon hearing the first version of the plan, he promptly fell sound asleep. In all fairness, it was pretty late at night.

Several days later, Brian Anderson, our neighbor, was outside raking leaves. For some reason, I started telling Brian about my idea to build a theater in downtown Auburn. Like me, Brian grew

up in Auburn and fondly remembered downtown in its heyday. He was curious to know more. And so he gave me the greatest gift one human being can give another human being. He listened. And then the dream hooked him, too.

Brian and I promptly started on a path to meet and speak with anyone and everyone who could help us turn our daydream into a reality. Soon after our first few meetings, we asked Janie MicGlire, a friend and neighbor, to get involved. And soon after that, we asked another friend, Tiffany Brasell, to join our fledgling group.

And something magical happened after we found that fourth member: everything just went "click."

The four of us met on a weekly basis for nearly a year, named ourselves Auburn Public Theater, produced two plays (one at Cayuga Community College and one at Westminster Church), formed a not-for-profit entity (with the help of CPA Brenda Kayn), designed a logo (with the help of Terry Cuddy), had stationery printed and tried on several occasions to sign a lease for the space in the former Grant's building across the street from Daddabbo's Pizza. But, for various reasons, it kept not working out. We looked at vacant buildings all over Auburn. Several had real potential. But our hearts were downtown. That, we decided, was where Auburn Public Theater needed to be built.

So we waited. And, finally, the planets lined up.

In October 2005, Carey and I were able to purchase the building at 108 Genesee Street and lease 10,000 square feet to Auburn Public Theater. The building also opened on the Exchange Street pedestrian courtyard, a fine place for patrons to meet and mingle on the way to a show. When we opened, 8 Exchange Street would become our formal address.

On December 7, 2005, Auburn Public Theater opened its doors to the public for an Open House. More than five hundred people came and took a tour and, since then, more than one hundred and fifty thousand patrons have come through the doors of APT.

It is our wish, the wish of all of us involved with Auburn Public Theater, that one hundred years from now programming will be going strong, the number of people through the doors will be in the millions, downtown Auburn will be the thriving city center it once was and has always deserved to be, and the people running the place will have as much fun working together as all of us have had dreaming it into existence.