Hot Ticket

The Alberta Bair Theater began its *Hot Ticket Initiative* to upgrade its hardware and software systems to meet customer requests for easy access to show information and ticket purchasing. The initiative, expected to last 24 months, includes a complete remake of the theater’s website, enhanced electronic communications with our patrons, a new logo and brand image, and updates to the theater facility. Funding for this initiative comes in part, from a Murdock Foundation grant to upgrade the theater’s ticketing system to tie into a new website.

The *Hot Ticket Initiative* includes four major objectives to fulfill its goal of an enhanced customer experience.

1. A new website developed to express the excitement of programming at Alberta Bair Theater, create a space for customer engagement, and allow online ticket purchasing in real-time.
2. Increased use of social media, and electronic communication to engage patrons and customers, and keep them abreast of new developments and shows and events quickly and effectively.
3. Expanded focus on presenting the most exciting programming including, music, dance, Broadway shows, classical performances and school shows.
4. A facility update to express the excitement and vibrancy of the new brand and image within the building.

While many performing arts centers across the country are struggling in the economic slowdown, the Alberta Bair Theater has experienced increased support and attendance from the community. In the beginning of 2009 the board and staff at the theater made proactive changes in programming and events in an effort to avoid prospective challenges of the growing recession. These actions paid off and at the end of the 2009-10 season the Alberta Bair Theater is in an excellent financial position.

William Wood, Executive Director of the Alberta Bair Theater says, “About 14 months ago, we took some decisive actions and changed some of our programming mix. It paid off with great attendance and strong community support which means we are in a great position to update and upgrade our image, and systems.” Woods continues, “This Theater is such an important part of Billings. We offer exciting shows, concerts and
performances, we have an acclaimed educational program, and we serve as cultural hub for local arts organizations. The Alberta Bair Theater is part of the fabric of this community."

Woods is not exaggerating when he says the Alberta Bair Theater is part of the fabric of the community. The site of the theater was the original Charles M. Bair family homestead. This house, on the corner of what is now Broadway and 3rd Avenue North, is where Charles' daughter Alberta M. Bair was born.

On November 13, 1931 the Fox Theater opened its doors to great fanfare on the site. This elegant theater, with its chandeliers, art deco design, dressing rooms and stage, was financed in part by the 20th Century Fox Corporation, which purchased the land from Charles M. Bair. The Fox Theater had the distinction of being the last Art Deco style theater in the United States built by the 20th Century Fox Corporation and designed by Robert C. Reamer.

The Fox served as home for the Billings Community Concerts Organization for more than 50 years. It was also the home venue for the Billings Symphony and Chorale. The Fox Theater offered live plays and musicals that benefited the Fox Committee for the Performing Arts. This Committee was responsible for bringing such stellar performers as Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Charles, George Winston and Judy Collins to our community. The Fox Committee's name still lives on in the popular "Fox Series" offered each season by the Alberta Bair Theater.

In 1978 discussions were held regarding what to do with the aging theater. This discussion included the idea of demolishing the building to build a parking structure. The Fox Committee stepped in and involved other community leaders in a drive to raise enough funds to renovate the building. The community support of the fundraising campaign was overwhelmingly positive.

Alberta Bair was the largest single donor to this campaign and the beautifully remodeled building was renamed the Alberta Bair Theater. It opened its doors to the public on Saturday, January 24, 1987, with a Gala performance by Burt Bacharach.

Thanks to the dedication, vision and hard work of the founding board members, the Fox Committee and numerous community-minded people, the Alberta Bair Theater still stands as a world class performing arts center for all the people of Billings and the Northern Rockies.