

Today I am taking a page from my all-time favorite columnist, Dick Yarbrough, and sharing my thoughts on this year we are bringing to a close. It's been quite a ride. We officially opened The Plaza Arts Center on March 13, 2008, however, my position was confirmed by the City Council in mid-January and I went on the payroll at the end of that month, so, for me, the year has been a full one.

All the positive things that have happened are obvious: the center has opened to a grateful community and we have managed to pull off some terrific events. The E-PAF board has been focused for 11 years on bricks and mortar, so it no small thing for them to have grown through the paradigm shift this year to focus more on our outreach and performances than being concerned over the color of the bathroom paint. They've been an amazing support team and I will miss those who are rotating off but look forward to the fresh energy our five new incoming members will bring.

Over the year we've had some comical (but not when they happened) moments, like the dance recital in May for 170 little ballerinas. A wedding with 12 bridesmaids was scheduled for that same day, to be wedged between the morning dress rehearsal and the evening performance. I'm not sure who got confused, but a couple of the bridesmaids decided to take a shortcut from their dressing room to the bride's and walked right across the middle of the stage during the dance of the little red robins! It wasn't so funny then, but you have to look back and laugh at our folly not to think that the first time we had 500 people in the building, who all took a bathroom break at the same intermission, that the plumbing wouldn't be a bit strained (it was untested; who knew??). And, no one thought to inform me that the elementary school has over 1400 students so when I agreed to have awards night for the school, I was unprepared for over 1000 guests in the same evening (note to self: avoid programs being done in shifts). I also learned the hard way that when the temps on Dairy Festival Day exceed 100 degrees, nobody wants to go anywhere or do anything at the end of the day, except find a cool place to crash. But nothing tops the thrill of live theater, especially when a performance is brought to an abrupt end after the lead actor steps off the stage into the orchestra pit.

While we have served 'approximately' 18,314 people (take note Jim Marshall) in the first nine months the doors have been open, the community has growing to do too. It has been disheartening to see people with their feet propped up on railings or children running through the aisles undeterred. Some guests think the rules do not apply to them and they have brought food or drink into the theater anyway; the resulting trash (including once a dirty diaper!) should be an embarrassment to everyone. Next time you see somebody having a snack while in the theater, remember this is your place too and ask them to take it outside. We are trying to teach our children that the theater is a place of good graces and manners, but maybe we need to teach some adults too (would you behave like that at The Fox?). And, no one is more frustrated than I, that we have been so slow in getting our website online. It's still a work in progress, but we're getting there.

After serving all year on the bi-centennial committee, I took great pleasure in the fireworks display that ended our celebration on Sunday night. It punctuated what has been a year like none

other in my adult life. I actually moved in with mom and dad at a time in my life where I am eagerly awaiting grandchildren. What's better than free lodging, great meals and no laundry, not to mention finding yourself with two of the greatest friends you can imagine? After 31 years of living in Atlanta, always within close proximity of Lenox Square, I still pinch myself to think I have ended up here. But, when I drive down the street and people stop to smile and wave (especially Tim) it's not hard to understand. It's taken 8 months to remodel and get fully moved into my cute little bungalow (the former residence of Grace Walton), but now I can't picture myself anyplace else. I am certain this is where I was meant to be.

Merry Christmas everyone. I look forward to serving you in the New Year.