

# PITTSBURGH OPERA

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## **Pittsburgh Opera Announces Green Initiative**

**Pittsburgh, PA**...As part of its ongoing mission to enrich Pittsburgh and the tri-state area, [Pittsburgh Opera](#) has begun a new green initiative committed to environmental stewardship and ongoing sustainability.

The primary focus of this new initiative is to obtain a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Operations and Maintenance Certification for the [Opera's new headquarters](#) in the historic George Westinghouse Air Brake Factory in the Strip District. In addition to the efforts to prepare the headquarters for certification, the initiative will also educate Pittsburgh Opera staff members on living "greener" lifestyles through decreased carbon footprints and personal health improvement and maintenance.

Pittsburgh Opera [General Director Christopher Hahn](#) is very enthusiastic about the success of this new initiative. "Pittsburgh Opera has long been a supporter of the region through cultural enrichment and education," he said. "We are delighted to now be leading a campaign of environmental stewardship here in our new headquarters as our part in the continued cultivation of this wonderful city."

Recycling has always been a fundamental principal in the opera industry. Sets are reused and costumes are refitted several times before they are stripped down and put out to pasture. "It's a good business plan that also happens to be great for the environment," said [Jerome Sherk, Director of Production](#) for Pittsburgh Opera. "Building a new set and making all the costumes can be very expensive. By sharing the cost with other companies and reusing the production over and over, we're helping our bottom line and the environment at the same time."

Pittsburgh Opera owns entire productions as well as percentages of other productions, parts of which are housed in its new headquarters in the historic George Westinghouse Air Brake Factory at 2425 Liberty Avenue, in the Strip District. When the Opera moved into its new home in April of 2008 the leadership committed to the use of sustainable design elements as part of the building's renovation and maintenance and this new green initiative takes that commitment a step further. As one of the first buildings in the Pittsburgh area

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certified under LEED-EB Operations and Maintenance guidelines, the Opera's headquarters will be a regional leader in ongoing sustainable practices.

The Opera's new facility has already been fitted with several green elements, including occupancy sensors to conserve electricity, window shades to help with decreased heating and cooling costs, recycled office materials, the use of green cleaning supplies and the reuse of materials, such as the wood from a renovated staircase used to create a conference room table.

Pittsburgh Opera has plans for several additional changes and upgrades in the coming months and has engaged [Evolve environment::architecture](#), a local environmental design and green practices consulting firm and will be hiring a LEED commissioner to assist in the pursuit of the certification. The company has also created a "Green Team" to give its staff an opportunity to be directly involved with the green initiative as well as learn green practices to apply in their personal lives. They will participate in a green practices workshop, participate in surveys to help identify areas for company improvement and continue efforts to recycle, conserve energy and decrease the company's impact on the environment.

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The building isn't the only focus of this new initiative, however; the health and wellness of the Pittsburgh Opera staff is also included.

The Opera began a wellness program from Highmark in collaboration with [The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust](#) Shared Services in March of this year. The program promotes healthy eating, exercise and lifestyle habits with the goal of increasing general wellness and reducing the risk of chronic disease. The many offerings of the program include a health risk assessment, biometric screenings, and the Color Your Palate program to help increase fruit and vegetable consumption to meet the latest nutrition guidelines. Participants in the program compete for points and the opportunity to win one of six \$500 prizes at the end of the year.

So far, the leadership and board have enthusiastically embraced the new initiative and the staff has fully supported the creation of the "Green Team" and the Wellness Programs. The last hurdle for the company is the issue of funds.

With a price tag of \$2.5 million for the building and costs for necessary improvements budgeted at \$3.5 million, the Opera launched a capital campaign to raise at least \$8 million by the end of 2009. When its goal is achieved, the capital campaign will also allow the company to establish a maintenance endowment for the long-term care of the building, which would keep the company from having to tap the Opera's annual operating funds for those costs.

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With the help of several generous organizations, a [Capital Budget Redevelopment Assistance grant](#) of \$1 million presented by Governor Edward Rendell this past April and a challenge grant for \$700,000 from the Kresge Foundation, the company has already raised 7.7 million dollars toward the goal. The Opera is now in the public phase of the campaign and is relying on the contributions of the community to raise the remainder of the funds.

[Michele Fabrizi, Co-Chair of the Opera Board of Directors](#) and Capital Campaign Chair has urged the community to support the Opera's efforts, saying, "Not only will the resources of the building allow us to better prepare the performances at the Benedum, this building also opens up a whole new way for the community to experience all the artistry that is part of opera - to learn firsthand about the music, sets, costumes, makeup, lighting. It truly makes all this accessible to everyone in the community. Beyond that, the building offers rehearsal and performance space for other local arts groups that don't have a home of their own."

The success of the capital campaign to this point has already allowed Pittsburgh Opera to provide assistance to one Cultural District neighbor. Attack Theatre, a local dance company, will be moving into the Opera's headquarters July 1. This [new facility-sharing arrangement](#) will help Attack Theatre reduce its occupancy expenses while providing new rental income to Pittsburgh Opera and allowing both organizations to decrease their environmental impacts through shared resources.

Pittsburgh Opera's new green initiative will provide the Company with a sustainable new home, a healthy and productive staff and a renewed positive impact in the community. The Opera has long been committed to enriching the lives of people in the region. By creating a culture of sustainability with a commitment to personal and environmental wellness the Opera will continue to prove a valuable asset to the city of Pittsburgh and the surrounding region for years to come.

*[Pittsburgh Opera](#) will celebrate its 71<sup>st</sup> season in 2009-10 with Eugene Onegin, Falstaff, The Rape of Lucretia, Carmen and The Marriage of Figaro. In addition to its mainstage productions, Pittsburgh Opera produces a range of programs to engage and enrich the community with more than 20,000 students, families and educators participating in its educational events annually. The internationally renowned Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artist Program is among the country's top five training centers for rising opera stars and the company's newly designed administrative and rehearsal space, housed in a 140-year-old air brake factory in the city's Strip District, provides space for events ranging from free community Brown Bag concerts to concert recitals by world-class opera singers.*

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