

Idaho Repertory Theatre calls it quits



Geoff Crimmins/Daily News

Performances by the Idaho Repertory Theatre, like 2011's "Moss Gown" seen here, have become too costly to continue.

Shanon Quinn/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

After more than 60 years of live summer performances on the University of Idaho campus, the Idaho Repertory Theatre is closing its curtains for good.

The decision to make a final curtain call for the IRT was not a surprise to those involved, said Andrew Kersten, dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences.

“This is actually a multi-year discussion,” Kersten said. “This goes back to before I was dean.”

Kersten, who has held his position at the UI since fall 2014, said the IRT has been struggling for several years to keep up with changing expense and time constraints.

“At one time they had six shows a summer, then they had four,” he said.

“Last year we were able to put one together. It’s a question of budget ... but it’s also a question of time.”

Kersten said people have been donating their time for the show to go on because there isn’t \$125,000 to \$150,000 to hire necessary personnel.

“People have to spend 70-hour weeks working on the IRT rather than 40-hour weeks,” he said.

The IRT never had a budget to address, Kersten said.

“There was no dedicated budget for the IRT,” Kersten said. “You scrap and save and scrimp and try to put things together. That’s no way to do professional summer theater.”

While collecting funds from small IRT endowment funds, the Dean’s office and other end-of-the-year revenue worked for a while, it was not sustainable.

“The cost structure for professional theater changed,” he said. “The way we funded it did not.”

Kersten said when he arrived at the UI his goal was to save the declining IRT, but addressing money problems and putting on a series of professional shows was not possible.

The faculty members’ goal was, he said, “to do nothing less than professional theater in the summer.”

A second part of the IRT’s decline was the result of growing competition, Kersten said.

“When it was first launched, Moscow was kind of it for summer theater, but now we have theater troupes on the Palouse, we have them in Boise, we have them in Oregon and other places,” he said. “It’s a competitive market for people to come to theater.”

While the IRT has made its final curtain call, Kersten said other programs will be coming to light for students and youth.

The IRT’s youth theater program will continue as Theater Arts Youth Program.

“I’m a very passionate supporter of that,” he said. “Here no one’s competing with us at all. We are the region’s leaders.”

Kersten said Theater Arts has a departmental budget for the youth program.

He said the college will continue the Moscow-to-Moscow program, in which students spend time with a company in Russia. Students may have the opportunity to travel with faculty over the summer to work in productions in other areas, as well.

“They’re going to have professional experience, just not with the IRT,” he said. “As much as we don’t want to let go and we need to grieve this moment, the future is very bright.”

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