



Oklahoma
Shakespeare
in the Park

OKLAHOMA SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK SPEECH

NOTE: This speech was originally delivered by Oklahoma Shakespeare in the Park President of the Board of Directors, David Holt, on Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2006 at 1 p.m. on the Water Stage at the Myriad Botanical Garden.

Thank you all so much for coming out today. There are a lot of familiar faces here. This is such a beautiful day. We didn't anticipate doing this announcement outside, but maybe we should consider mounting a winter season if this keeps up.

I am David Holt, President of the Board of Directors of Oklahoma Shakespeare in the Park. I have served in that position since October of 2005.

Oklahoma Shakespeare in the Park was founded in 1985 in Edmond by the late Jack O'Meara and our current Artistic Director, Kathryn McGill. Since that time, OSP has staged 22 summer seasons, historically complemented by a winter season, touring productions and educational outreach. However, there's no questioning that it's the summer season that has made OSP the state's premiere classical theater and the state's premiere outdoor theater.

In the early 1990s, OSP constructed its own stage at its own expense in Edmond's Hafer Park. Five years ago today, that stage was burnt to the ground. OSP rebuilt on the same land, and in the Spring of 2005, that stage was burnt to the ground. Proving that we can take a hint, OSP immediately moved to the campus of the University of Central Oklahoma. UCO had already been a longtime partner of OSP's, and I cannot thank UCO enough for what they did for OSP in its time of need.

But we all knew that was a temporary situation, and OSP soon began looking at all its options for a more permanent location. In light of our recent history, we had two criteria - that the stage be made of concrete and surrounded by water.

No, but seriously, what really mattered was that we find the best possible location, and for the first time since OSP's founding, we put every location in central Oklahoma on the table.

And when we weighed the options, there was just no denying the excitement of what's going on in downtown Oklahoma City. First of all, for 22 years, a majority of our audience has been coming from all over greater Oklahoma City, not just Edmond, and we sensed a real opportunity to bring our product to a more central location, one that all Oklahomans are growing more and more familiar with.

We also observed the renaissance happening in downtown. Moving here would not have made sense when OSP was founded in 1985. But today, within blocks of where we stand, there is a busy convention center, a renovated Civic Center, a world class library, a beautiful Art Museum, a Stage Center under new management, a burgeoning Arts District, a growing Midtown district and Medical Business District, an NBA arena, Fortune 500 companies, dozens of wonderful restaurants, a thriving entertainment district, a growing river district, a soon-to-be revitalized I-40 relocation area, including a brand new boulevard, hundreds of residences under construction, and within a year, seven fine hotels within blocks.

And right in the middle of all of it, a beautiful world-class garden - a little underappreciated, perhaps. And in the middle of that, an underutilized performance venue with maybe the best view in Oklahoma City.

All it lacked was a summertime outdoor theater with 20 years experience building an audience and honing its craft. All OSP lacked was a home. And so a golden opportunity for Shakespeare in the Park, the Myriad Gardens and downtown Oklahoma City had presented itself.

With all of that to consider, the only real question for us was not should we relocate our summer season to the Myriad Gardens, but what needs to happen and how fast could we do it? With the crucial assistance of Councilman Larry McAtee, representatives of OSP sat down with Jim Tolbert and Wendel Whisenhunt, and soon brought Allan Storjohann, Dixie Jensen and Michael Laird into the conversation. The ultimate result was a formal partnership between OSP and the Myriad Gardens Foundation to make the improvements necessary for OSP to perform on this stage.

I'm going to let Jim Tolbert talk more about that, but suffice it to say, we moved forward together, and as a result, OSP began negotiating a lease with the Myriad Gardens Authority and the City of Oklahoma City. John Michael Williams - and I challenge you to name a significant event in the

history of downtown Oklahoma City that has not involved John Michael Williams - represented OSP, and a lease was hammered out. It was approved by the Board of OSP on October 11th, and by the Myriad Gardens Authority in November. This morning, it was unanimously approved by the Oklahoma City Council.

And with that last step now complete, I can finally say, officially, that Oklahoma Shakespeare in the Park, Oklahoma's premiere classical outdoor theater, is moving to the heart of downtown Oklahoma City.

OSP will be moving its offices to Stage Center, in Oklahoma City's Arts District, and will stage its 2007 summer season in the Myriad Botanical Gardens, on this Water Stage. This historic season will kick off June 14th and continue through September 1st. OSP will perform Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m., every weekend. In this inaugural season, Kathryn McGill insisted on blockbusters, and therefore we will open with, what else, but "A Midsummer Night's Dream," continuing with a non-Shakespeare play, but always a big hit for us, "Cyrano de Bergerac," and close with "Macbeth." To capitalize on what we think will be fantastic tourism opportunities, OSP will also incorporate repertory theater into its season for the first time in 15 years. That means that selected weekends will feature more than one play, and our final weekend of the summer, Labor Day weekend, will feature all three.

Now, before I turn the program over to Mr. Tolbert, I want to thank some of the people who made this day possible. We still have a ways to go, but we've come a long way, too, and that deserves some gratitude. And that appreciation starts with Jim Tolbert, who is a champion of these Gardens and of the arts, and without whose continuing support, this simply would not happen. And of course, my Mayor, Mick Cornett, has been supportive every step of the way. Also Councilman Larry McAtee, whose involvement early was crucial to opening doors for Shakespeare. Plus, all the members of the City Council who voted for the lease this morning, and especially OSP's new Councilwoman, Ann Simank, for her kind comments this morning. I want to thank Dixie Jensen, Michael Laird and all of the members of the Myriad Gardens Foundation. Also, Jim Couch, Jim Thompson, Rita Douglass-Talley, Wendel Whisenhunt, Allan Storjohann and Janna Beth Tipton. Also, John Michael Williams and the Myriad Gardens Authority. I want to thank UCO, who kept us alive these last two years, especially Bob McGill, Steve Kreidler and Roger Webb. I want to thank OSP's incredibly

hard-working Board for all that you have done, and will do. I want to thank OSP's staff, including our co-founder Kathryn, and especially Sue Ellen Reiman, who has been loyal to this organization for two decades. And also our Development Director, Norman Hammon. And I want to thank Jack O'Meara, who started this journey with OSP in 1985, and Doug Getzoff, who started this journey downtown with us. They remain in our hearts.

I want to conclude by saying how much OSP looks forward to joining the downtown arts, business and tourism communities. The Arts Council of Oklahoma City and Allied Arts are important partners for us, and we look forward to being neighbors. We also look forward to building new relationships with Downtown OKC, Inc., the OKC Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Greater OKC Chamber of Commerce, and all of the restaurants, neighborhoods, hotels and corporations that call downtown home. In fact, we've already gained one new underwriter, OG&E, in anticipation of this announcement. But we're also going to keep our old friends close. UCO will continue to be our partner, providing a lasting link to Edmond, our ancestral home. And we'll continue to enjoy our working relationships with our underwriters, the Oklahoma Arts Council, Allied Arts, Chesapeake Energy, Inasmuch Foundation, Kirkpatrick Foundation and Kirkpatrick Family Fund, OG&E and Target stores.

And I want to say a special thank you to the City of Edmond and the people of Edmond. OSP's existence today is a testament to your support, and we look forward to hosting our old Edmond friends in our new OKC home.

I hope to see you all at our January production at Stage Center, "The Tempest," and at our annual fundraiser, "A SIP of Oklahoma," a tasting of Oklahoma wines at the Skirvin Hilton on March 2nd, just days after its historic reopening. And of course, on June 14th and beyond, right here where we stand. And now I'd like to turn it over to the Chairman of the Myriad Gardens Authority and the Chairman-Emeritus of the Myriad Gardens Foundation, Mr. Jim Tolbert.