

# Theater troupe adopts new name but stakes its claim at same west Houston site

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A west Houston

Photo By Courtesy Queensbury Theatre

1 of 2

Queensbury Theatre - formerly called the Country Playhouse - will open next spring.



landmark is taking on a new image as the Queensbury Theatre - formerly called the Country Playhouse - is being rebuilt from the ground up.

The 21,000-square-foot project with its \$6.5 million price tag was made possible when the theater sold 1.78 acres to Moody Rambin and will reopen with a new season next spring. The theater will remain at its 12802 Queensbury Lane address.

"Once we're in the new space, we're going to be able to become an even more integral part of our neighborhood than ever before," said theater president John Paul Stevenson, who has served in this role since November 2010.

"We're looking forward to entering in to partnerships with other arts organizations as well as local businesses to really bring a new vibrant cultural and artistic hub to the area."

The theater anticipated a reopening this fall, but some significant spring showers stalled the pouring of concrete for the exterior walls, Stevenson said, and the construction site had to dry out. The reopening is now on track for spring 2015.

Board member Marinell Cerwinske has been a part of the theater since it began in 1956 when she was a teenager and she and her mother got involved. She has seen the theater and its volunteers evolve over the last half century.

"In the beginning, everybody knew everybody," Cerwinske said. "You were either acting or helping with concessions. And you didn't do just one thing; you did the whole shebang."

"Everything was done by volunteers and you paid a membership fee to be a member - that was up until about 10 to 12 years ago."

While so much has changed in Houston, the theater still has gracious volunteers and amazing performances. But, with the construction plans set, the board decided to officially change the theater's name in February to something more local and modern to reflect the area's evolution.

"The main reason that the name change came up is that we had a company advising us, and they told us that we didn't have 'theater' in our name, and we were no longer in the country, just because of how Houston is growing," Cerwinske said.

The board started brainstorming, but didn't want to do the historic theater a disservice.

"We didn't want to lose the vibrant history that our organization had built, but at the same time, 'Country Playhouse' wasn't really reflective of who or where we were as an organization anymore," Stevenson said.

"'Queensbury Theatre' was a way to not only tie in to our neighborhood, but to also allow us to embrace our new location in the heart of one of the hottest entertainment districts in town."

Cerwinske said the idea to rename the theater after the street it's been on for 50 years went over really well with the board, and will help to prevent some confusion with patrons.

"It'll always be difficult for me to not say 'Country Playhouse,' but I like the name because people will think, 'Oh, that's on the same street as the Country Playhouse. Maybe that's what it's called now.' And people will remember it," Cerwinske said.

At the end of all of these improvements, Cerwinske hopes that the theater will still provide the same enjoyable evenings to patrons, but be able to serve a larger group of people.

"We're hoping that we can get more people involved and attract bigger, more diverse audiences and casts," she said.

After the new theater is completed, the Queensbury Theatre's opening season will have a diverse set of shows, and

Stevenson said there will be something for everyone to enjoy.

"The anticipation is building at an astronomical pace, both within our organization and from the surrounding community," Stevenson said. "We cannot wait to get into the new space and welcome Houston to our new home with this incredible new chapter of our longstanding history."