



Tony Award Winner Bernadette Peters Inaugurates Milwaukee Repertory Theater's New \$80M+ Associated Bank Theater Center

*Modernized and Expanded Home for Milwaukee Rep Features Three
State-of-the-Art Performance Spaces Including a Transformable Theater for
Broadway-Scale Productions, a Dedicated Education and Engagement Center, and
Increased Accessibility*

October 15, 2025 (Milwaukee, WI)—Milwaukee Repertory Theater opened its new Associated Bank Theater Center on Saturday, October 11, 2025 with a grand opening ribbon cutting and a sold-out gala performance by Tony Award Winner **Bernadette Peters**.

Milwaukee Rep Board President Adam Peck, Executive Director Chad Bauman and Artistic Director Mark Clements joined civic, corporate and philanthropic leaders from across Wisconsin including Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, Milwaukee Common Council President Jose Perez, and Commissioner of City Development Lafayette Crump to cut the ribbon officially opening the Associated Bank Theater Center.

The day of celebrations continued in the evening beginning with an elegant dinner in the Center's new Herzfeld Education & Engagement Center and was followed by Peters, who performed a Broadway repertoire that has made her one of the most heralded musical actresses of all time, including "Old Friends," "Fever," "Johanna," "Send in the Clowns," "Being Alive," and "Anyone Can Whistle." As one of the largest theatrical complexes to open post-pandemic, **the \$80 million Associated Bank Theater Center is notable for opening on time, on budget, and fully funded**, despite overwhelming odds, including a global pandemic, labor shortages, supply chain disruptions, the highest inflation in decades coupled with tariffs impacting the cost of building materials, and a [1,000-year flood that decimated the organization's production center](#).

The audience for the Grand Opening was comprised of many of the more than 600 individual donors who supported the capital campaign for the modernized and expanded 152,500-square-foot complex. Guests included notable Wisconsin leaders including Northwestern Mutual's CEO Tim Gerend, Greater Milwaukee Committee CEO Joel Brennan, Manpower Executive Chairman (ret) Jeffrey Joerres, Chairman & CEO Landmark Healthcare Joe Checota, EUA CEO Rich Tennessen, Zywave retired CEO William Haack, and philanthropists Joan Lubar and Donna Baumgartner.

The Associated Bank Theater Center provides state-of-the-art performance spaces for world-class, cutting-edge theater experiences, a dedicated facility to expand the theater's community-focused arts education programming, and new, accessible amenities that meet the needs of diverse audiences. The theater will kick off the season with *Come from Away*, opening November 4 and running through December 14.

Photos of the Grand Opening performance by Bernadette Peters are available [here](#).

“Seventy-one years ago, Mary John Widrig believed Milwaukee deserved a world-class theater. With the support of this community, Milwaukee Repertory Theater was born. From those early dreams, it has grown into one of the largest nonprofit theaters in the nation, serving 300,000 people annually. Her vision lives on in us today,” said **Chad Bauman, Ellen & Joe Checota Executive Director**. “When our former theater complex was failing, we faced a choice. Leaving our historic home behind and starting fresh elsewhere would have been easy. Instead, we chose the harder, braver path: to stay downtown, honor the legacy of the Oneida Street Power Station, and transform it into something extraordinary. This investment in our future strengthens the entire region as a vibrant creative hub and a thriving national destination for extraordinary theater.”

“The Associated Bank Theater Center redefines the standard for theater across the region, allowing Milwaukee Rep to expand the boundaries of storytelling and advance the art of theater,” said **Mark Clements, Artistic Director**. “The Associated Bank Theater Center opens up a new world of artistic possibilities to innovatively stage a surprising variety of works that explore our shared humanity, inspire meaningful dialogue, and offer audiences hope. With our inaugural season in the new space, we rededicate ourselves to producing and commissioning work from both emerging and established voices that reflects our region’s rich diversity and addresses issues that are both important to the local community and nationally resonant.”

The Associated Bank Theater Center

Designed by EUA and theater consultants Fisher Dachs Associates (FDA), the \$80.1 million complex connects Milwaukee Rep’s historic, completely renovated building with a newly built 30,000-square-foot glass structure that creates a welcoming main entrance to the Center. The transformed space allows Milwaukee Rep to push artistic boundaries with three flexible performance spaces; a 220-seat flexible black box, a 186-seat cabaret space, and a 671-seat theater with a transformable stage configuration and cutting-edge technology to create productions that can easily transfer to any stage in the country, including Broadway. The updated Center also includes the new Herzfeld Foundation Education & Engagement Center; 100-person donor lounge and event space, three revamped rehearsal halls, prop and costume shops, and administrative spaces; and the cascading Sandra & William Haack Galleria, unifying and creating streamlined circulation across the building’s theaters and public spaces.

Milwaukee Rep’s enlarged downtown footprint encompasses the completely gutted and reimaged 1898 Oneida Street Station, a national historic landmark former powerplant that has been home to the theater since 1987, and a newly constructed glass building situated between the former powerplant and the historic Pabst Theater, another historic building constructed in 1895. The elegant glass volume, which sits above a newly enhanced main entrance on Wells Street, connects—for the first time—all public spaces in the complex to the shared multi-level lobby. Engaging and activating the street, the transparent façade offers passersby a glimpse into the activity taking place inside the Center as patrons make their way to performances in the three theaters.

Milwaukee Rep’s capital project provides critical infrastructure updates to the theater’s more than a century old space, as well as updates to back-of-house and production technology to support increased performance capacity. The mainstage performance space, the Ellen & Joe Checota

Powerhouse Theater, is reconfigured for improved sightlines with a new flexible stage that converts from a thrust to a proscenium, seating 568-671 patrons depending on the production's configuration. The facility also accommodates increased accessibility within the space, including bariatric seating, quiet rooms, audio description, wheelchair accessibility in all seating zones, and hearing loop technology in order to welcome and inspire the many diverse populations of the region. Finally, the mainstage theater also includes updated, cutting-edge technology with an advanced digital sound system, a laser projection system, scenic automation systems for the newly created fly loft, programmable intelligent lighting, and livestreaming capabilities.

The Herro-Franke Studio Theater, Milwaukee Rep's black box space for intimate productions, is reimagined with new modular platforms and seating that allows for audiences of 182 to 224 patrons, staging plays with larger casts, and greater production flexibility. The Stackner Cabaret, which was renovated in 2018 by Uihlein-Wilson Architects in advance of the larger transformation project, also has state-of-the-art production capabilities, updated front- and back-of-house amenities including a full bar and kitchen for a pre-show dining experience, and increased seating capacity for audiences of up to 186 patrons.

The theaters can be accessed via the skylit three-floor Sandra & William Haack Galleria that occupies the space in the glass building. The open lobby includes inviting pre- and post-show gathering spaces, The Lubar Lounge, which can hold up to 100 people, restrooms, a gift shop, coat check, and bars with food and beverage offerings. It also offers access to the new 2,700-square-foot Herzfeld Foundation Education & Engagement Center, which includes classroom, rehearsal, and performance spaces, as well as an outdoor patio lounge. The dedicated education facility allows Milwaukee Rep to grow programming that deepens audience engagement; increases accessibility; and improves literacy, supports social-emotional growth, and creates school-to-career pipelines for more than 30,000 students each year. New programming enabled by the Center includes Connections, an audience engagement series with post-show TalkBacks and community nights, and the launch of a School of Theater that offers classes, workshops, seminars, and camps. Milwaukee Rep will also continue its successful student programs such as in-school workshops, the national Next Narrative Monologue Competition, and apprenticeships for the next generation of artists.

As part of the capital project, the theater's production shop was relocated off-site and expanded to a 35,000-square-foot facility that employs nearly 100 local artisans, advancing Milwaukee Rep's role in supporting the region's arts economy. Following the flooding earlier this year, the shop has to be completely rebuilt. The new Herzfeld Foundation Education & Engagement Center is housed in the space previously occupied by the shop.

The expansion of Milwaukee Rep reflects the theater's tremendous growth over the past five years, at a time when the industry at large has been impacted by financial challenges due to declining audience attendance and increased production costs. Since 2020, Milwaukee Rep's operating budget has increased more than 85% from roughly \$9 million to \$17 million, driven in part by a 40% increase in ticket sales and 41% Subscription revenue increase, with operating surpluses annually. In addition, over the last decade, Milwaukee Rep's net assets have increased from \$16 million to \$108 million including multi-million dollar funds for new play development, education, engagement and artistic enhancement, making Milwaukee Rep one of the best capitalized theaters in the United States presenting exciting work including recent world and American premieres by Lloyd Suh, Dael

Orlandersmith, Idris Goodwin, Andrew Bovell, Craig Lucas, Rick Cleveland, and Joanna Murray-Smith.

The fundraising campaign to expand and renovate Milwaukee Rep's Associated Bank Theater Center has raised \$80.1 million to date. Lead campaign funders include the Associated Bank, an anonymous donor, Ellen and Joe Checota, David & Julia Uihlein, The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation, and David Herro and Jay Franke.

For more information, please visit <https://www.milwaukeeerep.com/welcome-home/>.

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About Milwaukee Repertory Theater

Milwaukee Rep is the largest performing arts organization in Wisconsin with its new artistic home in the Associated Bank Theater Center opening Fall 2025 with three unique performance venues—the Ellen & Joe Checota Powerhouse Theater, Herro-Franke Studio Theater, and Stackner Cabaret. For over seven decades, Milwaukee Rep has been a centerpiece of Milwaukee's vibrant arts and cultural scene with productions ranging from Broadway musicals to Shakespeare to American Classics and New Works that are entertaining, inclusive and impactful. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Mark Clements and Executive Director Chad Bauman, Milwaukee Repertory Theater ignites positive change in the cultural, social and economic vitality of its community by creating world-class theater experiences that entertain, provoke and inspire meaningful dialogue among an audience representative of Milwaukee's rich diversity. More information visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com