



# The New York Times

October 20, 1993

THE NEW VICTORY®  
THEATER

209 W 42<sup>nd</sup> St  
Just west of Broadway

A New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street project

## 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Theater To Offer Youth Programs

### **By GLENN COLLINS**

The Victory Theater, an empty 93-year-old Times Square house with an illustrious past but no future until now, will become the city's first major midtown theater offering year-round programming for young audiences. After a \$7.9 million renovation, the Victory will become the first of nine historic theaters on West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to be restored and reopened, the project's organizer, The New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Inc., announced yesterday.

If renovation, which is to begin in February and end one year later, is finished on schedule, the theater — on the north side of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street west of Seventh Avenue — will be the first tangible evidence of years of planning to overhaul the nation's most famous theatrical street. In addition, project planners announced, two other 42<sup>nd</sup> Street theaters are to be renovated and will become the New York Information Center, a commercial venture that will offer sightseeing advice, hotel and restaurant referrals and a multi-media show for tourists.

The announcement follows by several weeks a report that the Walt Disney Company is considering presenting productions in the New Amsterdam Theater, a graceful 10-story Art Nouveau building in disrepair that was once the home of the Ziegfeld Follies. Disney is still negotiating with the New York City Economic Development Corporation, but no agreement has been reached.

### **The Oldest Established...**

After its renovation, the Victory will be renamed The New Victory. It will be the "oldest functioning legitimate theater in New York," said Hugh Hardy, the renovation's principal architect, from the firm of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates.

Programming at the theater will be primarily for teen-agers, pre-teens and children with their parents. An audience of 150,000 a year has been estimated by the planners.

"This is the greatest concentration of theaters on any block in the world," said Cora Cahan, President of The New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, a not-for-profit group founded by the city and state of New York in 1990 to determine new uses for six theaters situated within the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Development Project. "The replacement of X-rated films with family fare within a single theater will communicate a message of hope up and down the block."

Among the programs planned by The New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street for the inaugural season at The New Victory are productions by the Night Kitchen, a national children's theater company founded by Maurice Sendak and Arthur Yorinks; a free summer program by Theaterworks/USA; presentations by the Crossroads Theater Company, a black company in New Brunswick, NJ; classical and contemporary plays for young people and adults by Theater for a New Audience, a New York-based company run by Jeffrey Horowitz; and work by Urban Bush Women, an ensemble of black theater artists.

Also planned is a film series assembled by Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese; a puppetry series from the Jim Henson Foundation; and a series of third-world films under the direction of Warrington Hudlin and the Black Film Maker Foundation.

Ms. Cahan said that turning the Victory into a legitimate Broadway theater was rejected because “it would probably have left the theater dark more than it was lit, and our mission was to get people on the street all year round.”

She added that her organization had decided on a theater devoted to family-oriented productions because “it will be the first centrally located large-scale family theater in New York devoted solely to offering low-cost presentations.” She said that large, centrally located children’s theaters in Minneapolis, Seattle and Honolulu had become financial and popular successes. When asked whether parents would feel comfortable taking their children to the hard-core precincts of Times Square, Ms. Cahan replied: “We have to prove to families that it’s safe, and we believe it is. The area is cleaner and safer than it’s ever been, and it’s going to get better.”

Many in the Times Square neighborhood have tired of “studies and plans and studies of the plans” for the future development of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Ms. Cahan said, “and it was time to jump-start development on the street by operating a visible symbol of its revitalization. We hope The New Victory will be a catalyst for other activities.”

### **Historic Guidelines**

The reconstruction of the Victory is governed by historic-design guidelines imposed by the city and the state. Mr. Hardy said the theater’s original brownstone stoop would be reconstructed, the cornice replaced, and the interior plaster and wood-work restored.

The Victory was opened as the Republic Theater on Sept. 27 1900, by Oscar Hammerstein (its greatest hit was “Abie’s Irish Rose,” one of Broadway’s longest-running plays) and was named the Victory after World War II. In the early 1970’s it became a pornographic movie theater, and by 1990 was empty except for occasional theatrical productions.

The planned annual operating budget of The New Victory will be \$3 million, half of it supplied by earned income and half to be raised by donations. The chairman of The New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is Marian S. Heiskell, and its members include Linda LeRoy Janklow, Bill Irwin and Terrence McNally. The renovation will be paid for by Times Square Center Associates, a private real-estate partnership comprising Park Tower Realty and the Prudential Insurance Company of America. In 1988, the Center Associates signed leases with the city and state to construct four office towers at the corner of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue, plans that were shelved in 1992 because of the recession’s effect on office construction in Manhattan.

The agreements required that the Associates provide \$18.2 million to The New 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, with most of the money earmarked for nonprofit venues. Renovations for the New York Information Center will be paid for by the commercial leaseholder. Ms. Cahan said that the concept for the New York Information Center had come from the design firm of Edwin Schlossberg, which proposed a gathering place for tourists in Times Square featuring current information on Broadway and Off Broadway theater offerings, museum exhibitions, gallery shows and sports events. Approximately half the space of the information center will stand within the Times Square Theater, built in 1920 by the impresarios Edgar and Arch Selwyn. The other half will occupy one of two adjacent theaters: either the Academy (formerly known as the Apollo), a theatrical house built in 1920 and now used for pop-music concerts, or the Lyric, built in 1902, which was most recently a movie theater and is now unused.

