

**Memorial Auditorium
Interview Summaries**

Date: 1/10/18

Interviewee: Jim Lockridge, Executive Director- Big Heavy World Foundation

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Advocate for 242 Main, which was founded in the mid-1980's as a project of the City's youth office. It was an adult-supervised venue that offered programming and live music conceived by Burlington's teens, in an environment that they helped design and build.

Key Points I Heard:

- 242 Main was a statement about valuing youth and providing a supportive environment in which teens could explore their interests with their peers.
- Jim believes that the City didn't invest sufficient time and effort to maintain adequate resources, collaborative multi-stakeholder programming, or community outreach for 242 Main, and thus teen interest began to diminish.
- Though now closed, 242 has potential to once again engage teens and evidence the City's commitment to its youth.
- The community has demonstrated its support for 242 via a petition drive and NPA resolutions.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- The future of 242 can be one in which programmatic partnerships and sharing of resources with complementary youth services entities that operate within a redeveloped Memorial Auditorium and the wider community are fundamental.
- The history of 242 was made where it was. The space itself is important and the strong and clear preference is that 242 be preserved where is. That said, in order to create those programmatic partnerships and share resources, 242 should be able to function as part of a "multi-function community commons"; there "shouldn't be resistance to re-arranging the furniture" if required as part of 242's future though teen leadership and direction of the 242 Main space should be valued and respected.

Date: 1/15/18

Interviewee: Alan Abair

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Selected by City in 1984+/- as a result of an RFP for management services. Under a contract with the City, Alan managed Memorial Auditorium until mid-1993 +/- . During that time, Alan was responsible for all day-to-day operations and all facility rentals, and the City provided utilities and basic maintenance. However, problems with the building envelope (roof leaks and masonry deterioration) were evident then.

Key Points I Heard:

- As a concert promoter in the '70's, Alan rented Memorial Auditorium on a regular basis. It was managed out of City Hall. There was significant use for sporting events, including area high schools and Champlain College. As a concert promoter, he paid all of the costs associated with rigging the lighting, sound and other production functions.
- The City's purpose in issuing the RFP was to invigorate Memorial Auditorium so that it would generate more revenue and more use by City departments and the public.
 - A childcare provider, Burlington Children's Space, and the Mayor's Arts Council began using the lower level of the building to deliver programs, activating a space that had not been much used.
- As manager, Alan produced concerts and events directly, but also coordinated rentals to third party producers and scheduled City department uses: "one stop" service.
- Memorial Auditorium became a union shop in order to provide a consistent level of technical expertise for rigging the lighting, sound and other production functions.
- In its prime during that period, two or three large scale events might be held during the course of a week. These ranged from concerts to boat, car or r.v. shows, to sporting events.
- Patrons did not complain about parking. Alan recalled only one instance (back-to-back shows and the first one ran late) during his tenure when parking presented a real problem.
- The relationship with other arts organizations was sound. The Lane Series produced 6+/- shows each season. Ticket sales were handled through the Flynn Box office.
- Shows at Memorial drove employment there, and also generated customers for downtown businesses.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- It's a unique 2500 seat venue that fills a gap in terms of size and location.
- Preserve the building and make it a draw into the City. Plywood and deterioration on Main Street send a bad message.
- If the City invests in the needed repairs, then attract a first rate management firm to run it.
- Seek corporate sponsorships for events and promotions, along with longer term usage commitments from institutions for regular events.

Date: 1/17/18

Contact: Doreen Kraft

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Executive Director of Burlington City Arts (BCA) since 1995, and involved with the creation of its predecessor in 1981, the Mayor's Arts Council. BCA began managing Memorial Auditorium in 1993 and continued to do through 2002. In 1996, BCA began operating some of its education programs, including clay, craft, jewelry and printmaking studios, in the lower level of Memorial Auditorium, after Burlington Children's Space relocated to the McClure Multi-generational Center. At the end of 2016, BCA ceased operating its arts education programs in the lower level when Memorial was closed to the public.

Key Points I Heard:

- In '93-'94, BCA worked with a range of producers and actively promoted events at Memorial Auditorium. BCA's Pepsi Family Series included pop concerts, circuses and dance. In 1996, sensing the shifts in the entertainment market, the increased costs of presenting and the City's liability risks, Doreen moved Memorial Auditorium to become a rental venue only, presenting a dozen annual community-based events in the facility.
- BCA focused on engaging a range of arts users (e.g. dancers and drummers in the third-floor loft space) in Memorial.
- BCA managed the rentals of the Auditorium, but no longer actively produced events.
- In light of the failure of the 1994 Bond Vote to gain a 2/3rd majority, there was no plan for or source of funds for capital maintenance other than revenues created by BCA.
- Over the years, through grants and other fundraising, BCA contributed to the City's on-going efforts to address ADA and other code compliance issues.
- BCA created a Task Force to study the future of Memorial Auditorium. There was not strong public or private support to fund a feasibility study. There were efforts to engage Champlain College in a long-term commitment to MA that failed.
- In 2002, management of Memorial Auditorium was transferred from BCA to the Department of Parks, Recreation & Waterfront (DPRW). DPRW had interest in programming activities within Memorial, and importantly, had the staff and equipment to better manage the facilities needs of the aging building.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- There is a tremendous need for a gathering/hall assembly space in Downtown Burlington- if we do not have Moran- Memorial Auditorium becomes an even more critical asset.
- Include art-making that the public can see and participate in as part of a re-use strategy (as an example, see: <http://torpedofactory.org/>).
- BCA has studied the rehabilitation of Memorial Auditorium with two different Community Task Forces over a decade. A major commitment of public and private funds will be required to save this facility. It has so much potential to serve Burlington; maybe the answer is just doing better what we have done in the past with a contemporary understanding of new community needs.

Date: 1/18/18

Contact: Richard Bailey

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Coordinated programs, especially teen programs (including Club 242, music education programs and music camps) for PRW, and served as Manager of Memorial Auditorium from 2013 until its closure at the end of 2016.

Key Points I Heard:

- Recreation programming was well attended, use of the loft space increased significantly, and the space became important to individual users, but not to a broad audience. Those individual users have found suitable space in other municipal and school buildings since Memorial closed.
- Interest in live performance at Club 242 diminished over time.
- The challenges that inhibit robust use of Memorial Auditorium for performing arts use include:
 - The city no longer produced events and there was not budget capacity to market the facility during his management tenure.
 - Expensive. Although the rental fee for the facility was only \$2500, other elements increased the cost of production significantly.
 - High labor costs to stage a production
 - \$3k minimum for a half day. Larger events typically exceed \$25k.
 - All equipment has to be brought in.
 - Tired facility. No air conditioning, limiting the venue to October-May only.
- The closure of the building was a necessary shock to the system.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- Focus on a few uses and be well-suited for them.
- Continue to activate the ground level with recreation and arts programs, and look for collaborations with performing arts event production on the Auditorium level.
- Make Memorial Auditorium competitive in the marketplace of event sites. Through re-design to provide for an efficient loading area, drive down the labor costs associated with producing a performing arts event.
- Look at ways to create sustainable sources of funding for long term maintenance as well as programming.

Date: 1/19/18

Contact: John Killacky, Executive Director of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts

Key Points I Heard and Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- Saving the building isn't enough. There have to be compelling uses of the building to engage the public.
- Go big, go bold and do something audacious for the future of Burlington that supports the arts and the creative economy.
 - Look for collaborations that would involve housing and studio space for practicing artists and musicians.
 - Revisit the conceptual plan developed by BCA in 2014.
 - Seek interest from Arts Space on potential financing options.
- Scrutinize the venue niche carefully.
 - 2500 seats is not likely the right size.
 - An acoustically perfect venue in the 500 +/- seat range may be one missing piece in the local market.
 - A renovated Champlain Valley Expo might serve as the host for larger shows than could be accommodated in Memorial Auditorium.
- Coordinate with BCA to identify rehearsal space needs in the creative community and see how those might be addressed in the building.
- Go out to the arts and new American communities to engage them in planning for Memorial.
- The Flynn could collaborate in a number of ways, from renting studio space to meet the needs of its growing education programs, to providing ticketing service.

Date: 1/30/18

Contact: Alan Campbell

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Alan has a degree in mechanical engineering and a background in theater. In 1995, he was hired by BCA to manage programming and rentals of Memorial Auditorium. Alan continued in that role under PRW (where he also managed events in parks) from 2004, until he retired in 2013.

Key Points I Heard:

- Memorial’s key assets are its scale (“its bigness”) and its location.
- Parking is manageable.
- Demand for concert use at Memorial began to decline after 1996 (“six rock concerts in October that year”) due to several reasons:
 - Alternative venues, such as the Flynn Theatre and Higher Ground, though different in scale, absorbed some of the demand.
- Memorial in its current configuration and condition has a number of factors that limit its appeal for live performances:
 - It’s expensive to produce a show there. Load-in and load-out are labor intensive (from the front of the building on South Union Street) as is rigging and set-up.
 - The big stage can be hard to scale down for certain performances.
 - There’s a reputation for poor acoustics (“somewhat true, but mostly myth”).
 - If a seated show, the large flat floor area can result in poor sightlines. The flat floor sightlines issue is not absolute. While the flat floor can make for some bad sightlines for some types of shows, it is not always an issue. People manage during seated music shows. The worst are dance performances when folks in the back of the house can’t see the performer’s feet (Lord of the Dance.) Little kid’s shows (Sesame Street Live) aren’t great either, but parents make it work by putting the child on their lap; however, that can be the case with children’s shows even at venues with raked seating.
- The benefit of the union shop is the skill level of the I.A.T.S.E. (for International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees).
- Burlington is on the bubble – too small to host the 5,000 seat venue most promoters say makes the cut to present certain top tier artists.
- There has always been a notion of a public/private partnership to make Memorial work. Perhaps. But the City needs to decide if the test is whether Memorial is profitable or at least revenue neutral, or, if the redevelopment of Memorial Auditorium improves the quality of life for City residents. The building won’t make money, but parks don’t make money either.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- Make it work as a performing arts venue.
 - Build a multi-story addition on the north of Memorial [[see link to 2002 study](#)] to provide for an efficient loading dock, elevator tower, storage area and other back of house functions.
 - Invest in the acoustics and infrastructure.

- A 400-600 seat black box theater as part of the overall development, perhaps on the ground floor, could fill an important niche.
- Consider contracting with professional management with the capacity to produce events to operate the building.
- The public will want to compare the cost to rehabilitate Memorial Auditorium with the cost to build new. Be ready with a sound plan for the long term operation of Memorial as part of a response.

Date: 2/8/18

Contact: Alex Crothers and Alan Newman

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Alex is the founder of Higher Ground and presented shows at Memorial Auditorium over the course of many years. Alan presented events and festivals at Memorial and lead interest in making the lower level available for arts use. Alex and Alan are now working together on Higher Ground and related ventures.

Key Points I Heard:

- Memorial Auditorium, as configured and previously operated, presents a range of challenges for production of live music and other performing arts events. Most are solvable or at least manageable:
 - High labor costs.
 - A more efficient load-in configuration would reduce the time associated with set-up.
 - Some basic rigging infrastructure could remain in place and not require time for set-up for each event.
 - Current configuration of seating and stage is awkward and inefficient; 2500 seats is probably too big for the market.
 - The big flat floor offers opportunities to re-configure the space, and add amenities (such as food and bar).
 - Use of the mezzanine provides flexibility and the ability to add seating capacity as needed.
 - The acoustics are a challenge (“it’s a gymnasium”), but solvable with the right crew and equipment.
 - Parking: their comments indicated an interesting generational split. Alan felt it represented a challenge today. Alex indicated it was a non-issue for a certain demographic (“millennials don’t care”), who are likely to walk or arrive by a car share service. Combined with primarily night time use for performing arts, Alex was not overly concerned.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- Make the main level auditorium and mezzanine into a first rate performing arts venue.
- Seek proposals from qualified operators to manage the building and produce performing arts and other events.
 - The City needs to be clear about the requirements for public use of spaces within the building and calendar control.
 - The metrics for determining the City’s required return on investment need to account for the value of public uses, along with the growth in ancillary revenue streams (sales tax on tickets, meals and alcohol tax) in addition to any direct revenue from operations.
- Look for a range of compatible uses within the building:
 - On the ground floor

- Recognize 242 and look for ways to provide mentorship and training opportunities associated with main floor productions.
 - Consider a black box theater of 600+/- seats that could share some back of house functions with the main floor.
 - Consider food and retail potential along Main Street façade.
 - Consider other entertainment and recreation activities that could function well in that space.
- On the main auditorium level, recognize that Saturday night performances are critical to the success of the venue. As a result, other potential public uses of the space (e.g. Farmer's Market) can't be accommodated during the day on Saturday.
- On the mezzanine and third floor levels, seek out studio and rehearsal uses where time-of-day compatibility would work (e.g. no drumming practice during the evening if a show is underway).
- They anticipated some limited demand for day-time conference/convention type uses but did not foresee that activity driving significant programming or revenue.

Date: 2/19/18

Contact: Didi Harris, Strategic Initiatives Manager for Vermont Birth to Five, and administrator of the City of Burlington's Early Learning Initiative (ELI).

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Didi ran childcare programs for the Y during the mid-to-late 1990's, during the time when Burlington Children's Space (BCS) operated in Memorial providing infant care. Didi collaborated over the years with BCS, and as a parent her children participated in PRW programs held at Memorial.

Key Points I Heard:

- There is solid demand for childcare within Chittenden County. Within Burlington, there is indication of strong demand for infant-to-3 care.
- Several plans are in motion that may increase the number of childcare slots within the City.
 - New Y facility to be developed on College Street.
 - Burlington City Place.
 - Burlington Early Learning Initiative grant making program to increase high quality infant and toddler child care capacity.
- At the same time, two established childcare centers within the city (located in the campus and south end districts, respectively) comprising some 135 slots may be seeking alternative locations providing them permanent homes and allowing for possible future expansion.
- While Memorial worked in the past as a childcare location, its challenges to do so again include:
 - Lack of natural light.
 - Lack of outdoor space.
 - Adequate parking for pick-up and drop-off times.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- While it would be “fantastic” to have a childcare program element as part of Memorial Auditorium's future, the first priority with regard to childcare programming should be to collaborate and support other planned initiatives. For example, make sure the Y's plans are understood and secured, and don't replicate their work.
- With sprinklers and elevators, spaces on the upper floors (office, storage, loft spaces) could potentially work for childcare use, if there were demand. Recreation space is available at the Edmunds playground.

Date: 2/23/18

Contact: Chris Wagner, Market Manager and Spencer Welton, Steering Committee President, of the Burlington Farmer's Market (BFM).

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: BFM ran its Winter Farmer's Market on the main floor of Memorial Auditorium from late 2007 through early 2015. The Winter Farmer's Market has been run at the Davis Center at UVM for the past two winters.

Key Points I Heard:

- The Farmer's Market needs a long-term home for winter and perhaps for a more year-round footprint as well.
 - Davis is challenging because of schedule (can't hold markets often enough), loading and lack of a long term commitment.
 - The summer market will need a temporary location for two seasons when City Hall Park undergoes renovation.
 - During its years at Memorial, demand for space from vendors, and gross sales by vendors, grew steadily. The move to Davis has reversed this trend.
- The mission of the Market is to act as an incubator for small producers. They are expert at convening and managing groups and individuals and having them perform in accordance with agreed upon rules and standards.
- There is strong demand from an array of food-related professionals and purveyors to participate in BFM managed markets.
 - Chefs
 - Food activists
 - Small producers
 - Children's and other community organizations whose activities include growing, cooking and distributing food.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- Consider the lower level as a long term location of BFM and an array of food-related ventures and activities
 - Year round retail presence.
 - Cooking classes.
 - Small scale production.
 - Restaurant.
 - Community dinners.
 - Pop-ups
- Tie in to performing arts venue(s) and potentially share back-of-house/food production capacity.

Date: 2/28/18

Contact: Senior administration at Champlain College: Sandy Yusen, Director of Communications and External Relations, Lisa Mazzariello, Director of Student Engagement, Katie Hawley, Vice President for People, Strategic Communication and External Affairs, and Katherine Birrow, Chief of Staff, Office of the President.

Connection to Memorial Auditorium: Champlain College had a long history of using Memorial Auditorium to host its recreation programs, as well as specific events such as orientations and graduations.

Key Points I Heard:

- While Champlain used to use Memorial for its graduation ceremony, the facility does not have the capacity needed to accommodate the size of this audience.
- Since construction of its own gymnasium and other spaces on campus, the College no longer needs Memorial for recreation purposes.
- However, if Memorial were refurbished, its function as a gathering space could be of interest to Champlain for a number of events.
- Additionally, Champlain could collaborate with UVM on events and social opportunities for students at Memorial.
- Proximity matters. Memorial is close enough to feel like an extension of campus.
- As examples of its connections into the community the College uses the Flynn Theater for accepted students' day gatherings, and Higher Ground as a venue for certain student events.
- Champlain is a member of the Green Mountain Higher Education Consortium (St. Mike's and Middlebury are the other Consortium partners). There could be additional opportunities through the Consortium for events and other space needs at Memorial.

Suggestions for the Future of Memorial Auditorium:

- Based on its current campus plan, capacity and mission, Champlain College would be unlikely to respond to a request for proposals to manage or lease Memorial Auditorium.
- The College would consider making commitments to specific day/evening uses, perhaps over a period of years, as part of an operating plan for Memorial going forward.
- Involving the College in continued planning for Memorial is prudent so that opportunities and ideas are explored and any potential conflicts are identified and mitigated if possible.