



Remarks of Gregory W. Powell, Chairman
Harold Alfond Foundation

Waterville Opera House Press Conference
Wednesday, April 28, 2010

Thank you Diane (Bryan) and good afternoon to Mayor Paul LaPage, City Manager Mike Roy, Waterville City Councilors, Opera House patrons, board and staff members, and members of the press.

Thank you for joining us today. I am delighted to be back here in my hometown along with fellow trustees Bob Marden and Peter Alfond to make a special announcement on behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation.

On this beautiful spring day, we are pleased to announce a \$2 million grant for the Waterville Opera House to support its renovation and expansion project. And in true Harold Alfond style, it's a matching challenge grant. Dollar for dollar, the Foundation will match all donations to the project, up to \$2 million dollars. We hope our commitment to match every donation will inspire all members of this community who have enjoyed the Opera house over the years to support the renovation of this historic theatre.

Harold Alfond had a soft spot in his heart for his hometown of Waterville, and perhaps no other institution embodies the cultural history of Waterville like the Opera House. Although Harold was known for supporting athletic programs, he also loved music and was a terrific dancer. And so at the urging of his close friend Bob Marden, Harold became a season sponsor of the Opera House over ten years ago and his foundation has renewed the commitment every year since.

Why do we still think the Opera House is so special? The reasons are many, but let me name just a few.

For starters, after looking at the preliminary plans and the latest drawings and budget, it's clear to us that the Opera House team has done its homework and the renovation and expansion project is necessary to address safety issues and take the Opera House to the next great level.

Second, we think this historical gem must be preserved. Its architecture bespeaks class and grace – which is one of the reasons it's listed on the National Register of Historic Places. But 108 years after its grand opening, the Opera House is showing its age. So it deserves to have its antiquated stage issues upgraded, and its beauty and history preserved.

Third, the Opera House is a cultural rendezvous point for Central Maine. Each season brings a new and exciting lineup of plays, dance performances, concerts and films. The quality of theater productions with local actors is so good that after seeing “Chicago”, a visitor once asked which professional touring company had just performed the show.

Fourth, the Opera House has a positive economic impact on Waterville. Area restaurants have to add extra wait staff on show days, and a recent survey found that nearly one third of Opera House patrons visit other area businesses as well. And the annual Maine International Film Festival, headquartered at the Opera House, has put Waterville and Central Maine on the cultural map, drawing thousands of visitors from across Maine, the U.S. and the world.

Fifth, and in keeping with Harold Alfond’s belief in teamwork, community partnerships are integral to the Opera House. Since the Opera House opened its doors, Colby College has used the theater for concerts and performances. Today, Colby students continue to learn about the theater arts by working on local productions. Over the years, through its Arts in Education program, the Opera House has partnered with local schools to bring the performing arts to thousands of school children. The Opera House also offers Creative Movement and Music classes to nurture toddler development, as well as its popular summer theater camps for children and teens. Most notably, partnership with the City of Waterville gives the Opera House its home.

Finally, in these difficult economic times, we should not forget the important role of the Opera House and the arts in lifting our spirits and outlook on the challenges we face in daily life.

As fellow trustee Bob Marden always reminds me, the Opera House is a major source of pride and enjoyment for the citizens of Waterville and Central Maine. Whether Bob is recalling the times he and his children performed on stage [or trying to forget the clarinet solo I personally performed here in 1969], or telling us how terrific the latest production of Camelot was, his enthusiasm conveys the delight felt by generations of Opera House patrons in good times and bad.

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We have a few people we want to recognize today. Since it was formed in 1973, the Waterville Opera House Improvement Association has raised over \$1 million for temporary fixes and upgrades. You’ve done a tremendous job, and we are pleased to partner with the Board of Directors and Diane Bryan on the first major renovation and expansion of the Opera House.

We also thank Mayor Paul LaPage, the City Councilors and City Manager Mike Roy for your great efforts to move the renovation and expansion project forward.

And, of course, our thanks to all the season sponsors and other supporters of the Opera House over the years.

That said, there is still much work to be done. So, we now invite all of you to join the team and help preserve and perpetuate another 100 years of Opera House history.