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Emerald Theatre re-opens as a 'destination location'

Historic venue opens its doors for first time in two years

By Mitch Hotts, *The Macomb Daily*

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Kim Walton of Sterling Heights and Danielle Lambert of Waterford were at the front of the line Thursday night, waiting for the doors to the Emerald Theatre in Mount Clemens to open for the first time in two years.

They were there to enjoy the music of Blue October and others in a benefit concert hosted by radio station WDVD-FM (96.3), but they were also anxious to see the new changes in the historic venue.

“I just wanted to see how it looks after being remodeled,” Walton said, moments before the opening. “It’s been closed for a while.”

Lambert agreed.

“I’m here for Blue October, but I’ve never been in the Emerald,” she said.

While a line of concert-goers stretched outside the lobby and onto the sidewalk in front of the 95-year-old theater, a private VIP party was being held in the second-floor Rock Room bar for the city’s movers and shakers.

VIP attendees marveled over the new, dark paneling of the Rock Room, which features its own bar and series of couches. Several electric guitars and a large painting of Jimi Hendrix decorate the walls.

They also praised the theater’s new floor and rebuilt bar, the finished product of new owner, John Hanna of Royal Oak-based Hanna Development. The company worked for the past 10 months, transforming a closed, cold facility into a warm theater with a huge sign out front, glowing in the night.

“I’m expecting the re-opening of the Emerald will have a nice ripple effect for the surrounding businesses and real estate,” said Joe Sowerby, a partner in the development firm of Anton, Sowerby & Associates. “Anytime you have a venue that holds 1,000 people at a pop, that’s going to have a positive impact on the local small businesses that are the lifeblood of any community.”

Thursday’s crowd was the first to see the latest version of the building on North Walnut in downtown Mount Clemens.

The theater was designed by C. Howard Crane, the acclaimed theater architect who designed the Fox Theatre and Orchestra Hall. It opened in 1921 as a grand movie palace and vaudeville performance venue.

Over the decades, it morphed into other uses. In 2000, longtime area promoter Joe Nieporte purchased the theater along with local nightclub operator Ronny Masters, who named it the Emerald Theatre.

However, the latest team of operators ran into financial difficulties and had to close it down in 2014.

With the Emerald being back open for business, Hanna plans to hold concerts, comedy shows, and magic shows. It also will be available for wedding receptions and business meetings.

The re-opening is expected to lure people into town, providing a customer base for the city's collection of bars and restaurants.

"It's a destination location," said John Paul Rea, director of the Macomb County Planning & Economic Development Department. "We are now getting calls about the theater and that's a good sign."

Proceeds from Thursday's show will benefit Children's Miracle Network and Beaumont Children's. The next show is a New Year's Eve party featuring the music of Howling Diablos and the Reefermen.

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