

Pillsbury House Theatre: An Audience of One—Building Community from the Inside Out

by Noel Raymond, Pillsbury House Theatre and Denise Kulawik, ONEIROS, LLC.

Pillsbury House Theatre is a professional Equity theater launched in 1992. As part of both Pillsbury House, a neighborhood center serving core-city neighborhoods of South Minneapolis, and Pillsbury United Communities, a large and respected human service agency, the Theatre upholds the tradition of the arts as part and parcel of the life of all communities and emphasizes developing diverse new voices and theatre artists. At this point in its history, Pillsbury House + Theatre: A Center for Creativity and Community, is emerging as a model for arts-based community development, especially in terms of integrating the arts and human services programming.

As a professional theatre operating within the context of (and subordinate to) a large human services agency with a mission of both social service and social change, Pillsbury House Theatre is a rare, hybrid organization. We do not simply approach "community building" as a way of building audiences. Rather, it is more accurate to say that we build audiences as a strategy toward our ultimate purpose of community building. It is our hope that this case study chronicling the Theatre's founding, history, success, and current opportunities and challenges; its relationship with the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center; its mission of community building as well as the major lessons its leadership has learned along the way will serve as a useful resource to arts organizations, human services organizations that develop and implement arts programming, and community and economic development organizations that use the arts to enhance their effectiveness.

Mise-en-Scène: Minneapolis and the Central and Powderhorn Neighborhoods

Art is what makes our communities special, exciting, and unique - from community celebrations like the MayDay Parade to private displays of art like garage murals and front and back yard art gardens. Community arts organizations, like Pillsbury House Theatre, provide a gathering place, help introduce young artists to their budding talent, and foster an environment that values art as integral to our beloved community.

Elizabeth Glidden, Council Member, Minneapolis 8th Ward

By any measure, Minneapolis and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area have cultivated an enviable arts and cultural environment tailor-made for building arts organizations and audiences. One of the cultural centers of the Midwest, Minneapolis is relatively affluent compared to many other major metropolitan areas, boasts high educational attainment and literacy rates, and is home to numerous corporate headquarters and financial institutions, major institutions of higher learning, and nationally recognized flagship arts institutions such as the Guthrie Theater, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Walker Art Center, among others. Particularly relevant for this study, with the exception of New York City, Minneapolis supports more professional theatre companies per capita than any other metropolitan area in the U.S. It also benefits from the active engagement and support of major foundations such as The McKnight, Bush, and Jerome Foundations; a dynamic and effective state-wide arts lobbying organization, Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, as well as significant public funding for the arts. As of 2011, Minnesota ranks first in the nation in terms of per capita state appropriations for the arts. Minnesota is the only state in the nation, and the

only governmental entity in the world, that, to our knowledge, has passed a constitutional amendment to create a "perpetual" funding mechanism for the arts through the levy of a small sales tax. The Minnesota State Arts Board is one of the most robust and effective state arts agencies in the nation and ranks second in the nation, behind only New York, in total dollar value of grants awarded.

In this seemingly idyllic context for arts organization and audience building, the neighborhoods of the 8th City Council Ward, in particular the Powderhorn and Central neighborhoods of South Minneapolis, stand in marked contrast, conforming neither to the statistical profile of the community as a whole, nor to the racial and cultural stereotypes that characterize Minnesota and the Twin Cities for those who do not live here. The Central-Powderhorn community is both economically disadvantaged and racially diverse—a far remove from the austere Lutheranism and Scandinavian culture for which the city and region are commonly known. Many Powderhorn-Central community members face a host of barriers to their own advancement including low educational attainment, unemployment, insufficient job skills, discrimination and racism, language barriers, the experience

of personal and political trauma and violence, family instability, isolation, social dislocation, mental health issues and drug abuse.

In the Central-Powderhorn area, poverty rates among its approximately 30,000 households hover in the range of 25-30 percent. According to the most recent available census data, median household income is roughly \$33,000—more than \$10,000 less than the national median. In terms of diversity, just over half the population is of European descent. African, African-American, Latino, Asian, Native-American and multi-ethnic peoples comprise approximately 49 percent of the population. And, due to a legacy of work on the part of numerous international organizations based in the Twin Cities, there is a significant Somali community and other New Americans who now call the neighborhood home.

Latino and North African bodegas and soul food restaurants abound. Empty storefronts and dilapidated houses dot sections of Chicago Avenue, the main street running the neighborhood's North-South axis. Its major retail development, Midtown Global Market, provides space to take-out restaurants offering Middle Eastern, Vietnamese, Caribbean and Latin American food and small vendors selling Native American goods and imports from Africa and Asia.

Lastly, many artists make their homes here, as they often do in low-income communities. In 2006, the office of Elizabeth Glidden, the Minneapolis City Council representative for the 8th Ward, conducted an artist-mapping project, identifying over 1,300 artists and arts organizations living in the district. The artists who live in the Powderhorn-Central neighborhood share some distinguishing characteristics. By and large, they are deeply engaged in community affairs. Individual artists serve on the boards of neighborhood associations, participate in voter registration drives and organize around issues of importance to the local community. By and large, Powderhorn-Central artists are invested in the idea that art is a powerful community building tool and actively seek to engage their neighbors in collaborative art making and community building.

For example, since 1975, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre has spearheaded the MayDay parade and festival that culminates in what has become a large-scale community gathering in Powderhorn Park, drawing residents from throughout the Twin Cities. On a smaller scale, Artist Julian McFaul created the 'Art Sled Rally' to bring the community out in the winter months to celebrate the vitality and creativity of the neighborhood. A small grass roots effort initially, the rally now brings over 3,000 people to the park. More recently, in December of 2010, crime victims, activists, artists and neighborhood organizations came together to organize a candlelight vigil at Powderhorn Park featuring art, song and ritual in a creative effort to "reclaim the park," and promote principles of restorative justice in response to a spate of violent crime committed in and around Powderhorn. The event was attended by hundreds of community members.

It is in this context that Pillsbury House Theatre was founded in 1992, and has evolved from a programmatic extension of Pillsbury House, a neighborhood community center, to a nationally recognized and respected professional Equity theatre with an annual audience of nearly 6,000 and community programs that reach an additional 5,000. The Theatre's audience includes a significant portion of people of color (50%), people under 35 years of age (38%), and people from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods (21%). Throughout its history, the Theatre has grown steadily from an annual budget of under \$200,000 to an organization with annual expenses of just under \$1 million.

Pillsbury House has managed this growth while focusing its energies on the development of new and risky work by diverse artists. The Theatre serves as the training ground for numerous local artists who go on to make significant contributions to the field. Many artists, especially artists of color, have opportunities to hone their craft, develop new work, connect directly to audiences, and take artistic risks at Pillsbury House that they would not have elsewhere. For example, the Theatre's performance-art programs, Non-English Spoken Here: The Late Nite Series, and Naked Stages develop emerging, experimental, and interdisciplinary artists from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Late Nite provides an opportunity for local artists to connect and network with colleagues in New York City, a crucial opportunity for live performance artists. The Theatre's new play

commissioning program is dedicated to outstanding writers of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and challenging aesthetics such as Tracey Scott Wilson and Aditi Brennan Kapil. National artists such as Marion McClinton, Stephen DiMenna, James A. Williams, Laurie Carlos, and Daniel Alexander Jones regularly propose projects for the mainstage season that they feel are ‘Pillsbury House Theatre plays.’ Due to its success and growth during a time when many live performing arts organizations struggle with declining ticket sales, Pillsbury House is regularly consulted by theatres around the country on reaching out to and developing non-traditional audiences.

At this point in its history, Pillsbury House Theatre and Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center have integrated

Pillsbury House & The Settlement House Movement

From its beginnings in the last third of the 19th century, leaders of the settlement house movement have understood the important role that artistic expression and engagement play in the development of the human being. As much as food and water sustains our bodies and academic study enlarges our capacity to understand, art nourishes our very souls.

We continue to believe that art and learning are as essential to the human experience as food and shelter and that the relegation of art to a “nice-but-not-necessary” category, especially for the urban poor, limits individual growth, the development of community, and societal health and well-being.

The arts are foundational to our work because we know this: the well-off in our city, state, and country consistently and systematically participate in and support the “arts.” We know that they expose and engage their children in artistic expression and intellectual experiences, and where these opportunities do not exist, they go to extraordinary measures and cost to see that they do. They understand that art is essential to the human experience. To imagine that the urban poor can succeed without it is illogical and confounding.~ Tony Wagner, former President and CEO, Pillsbury United Communities

connection one person at a time.”

Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) and Pillsbury House trace their roots to the settlement house movement, a progressive reformist movement beginning in the late 19th century that stressed social justice and social reform while providing services to impoverished communities. In fact, arts programming was always a part of the settlement house experience and was a part of Pillsbury House programming from its very beginning. Historically, all settlement houses used arts programming as a way to engage neighbors and preserve cultural traditions. The “Little Theatre” and community theatre movements in this country are thought to have come out of the Settlement House tradition and ultimately served as progenitors to the regional/resident theatre movement.

their management and operations into one organizational body. The blended organization, the Pillsbury House + Theatre (A Center for Creativity and Community), is now implementing a bold plan to serve as a “cultural community hub,” with a vision to serve as a nexus and catalyst for community building, creative placemaking and neighborhood vitality in South Minneapolis. Ultimately, Pillsbury House + Theatre will act as a vibrant, buzzing hive of activity—a multi-service, multi-arts community hub, providing an environment that offers nurturance and support both for the personal growth of individuals as well as promoting community and economic development. The idea is to create a center that will sustain community members, enabling them to grow, learn, collaborate, pollinate, and cross-pollinate ideas and projects, creating art, business and commercial opportunities, and creative solutions to pressing community challenges.

Prologue: Pillsbury House Theatre and The New Settlement Way

In 1992, Ralph Remington, now the Theater and Musical Theater Director for the National Endowment for the Arts, and then a notable Twin Cities actor and teaching artist working with Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center, launched the Pillsbury House Theatre—a professional arts organization with a mission to “provide a platform for marginalized people to have their muted voices heard.” In 2000, the Theatre's mission was revised to “create challenging theatre to inspire choice, change and connection,” a charge consistent with the broader mission of Pillsbury United Communities to “create choice, change and

Pillsbury House Theatre evolved out of the gradual expansion of arts programming held at Pillsbury House. Over 26,000 residents of Minneapolis, the great majority from the Central-Powderhorn neighborhoods, look to Pillsbury House for bedrock services such as childcare, after-school programming, emergency assistance, and health and wellness programming including an alternative health center, support to homeless youth and other services.

Any person or organization that has worked for long on the serious issues that typically plague impoverished core-city neighborhoods knows that there is a maddening gestalt to the experience. Whether the context of the work at hand is economic and community development, education, public health, or human services, the same giant tangle of issues, a proverbial Gordian Knot, appears: poverty, low-educational attainment, joblessness, homelessness, language barriers, racism and discrimination, family instability and violence, gang activity, street violence, social isolation, poor health, and mental health issues—including emotional or psychiatric disorders coupled with alcohol and/or drug abuse.

The combinations of issues and challenges trace back, but never fully lead back, to the particular experience of unique individuals who create the community around them—whether for good or for ill. The persistent trauma of poverty—the contracted opportunities, isolation, discrimination, violence and crime typically experienced by the impoverished members of low-income communities—wears away not only at the individual’s hope and aspirations, but also the will to act on them, robbing individuals of a sense of self-efficacy and agency as well as the collective efficacy necessary to build positive social networks and community.

For those working on the ground in the core-city, and who accept the practical challenge of helping nurture healthy individuals and build healthy communities out of the rubble of poverty, people are best understood as *whole individuals* with their own particular and unique personal stories and experiences, and best approached and *worked with* through long-term relationship building—one person at a time.

Pillsbury United Communities has always operated and developed programming from a “whole-person” perspective. When the agency was founded in 1879, taking a “whole person” perspective meant focusing efforts on low-income women and children, and offering services that included a day nursery that enabled mothers to go to work, a health clinic, industrial training, sewing classes, and arts programming that included a regular Friday night vaudeville show with admission fee of 5-to-10 cents, dance classes, a brass band, a children’s chorus, and various singing societies. Pillsbury House settlement workers laboring at the turn of the 19th century knew intuitively what contemporary research on the arts increasingly bears out: cultural development is essential for healthy community building—as essential to the human experience as food and shelter—and that the relegation of art to a “nice-but-not-necessary” category, especially for the urban poor, impedes both individual growth and community advancement.

In fact, art and art making provide the perfect vehicles for the development of both individuals and communities. Life is inherently creative. Our very bodies are inherently creative at systemic and cellular levels. The ability to use the same set of materials to generate matter and to sustainably weave together complex processes is imprinted in our very genes. Art making brings these processes to a conscious level, awakening a sense of possibility and an appreciation for complexity and interrelationships within any given community or social network. The arts, the performing arts, especially theatre arts, provide excellent vehicles for the process of nurturing individuals and empowering communities, accomplishing a number of key objectives necessary to the development of individuals and the process of community building:

- *They encourage self-awareness and self-understanding.* A sense of self, of one’s feelings, boundaries, desires, and intentions as well as the ability to self-reflect and self-assess are prerequisite to developing the self-control necessary for true efficacy and agency. Furthermore, as an art form, drama focuses on *action*, it causes and consequences, reinforcing the idea that personal choice and behavior not only create our own narratives, but also influence our communal destiny.

- *They encourage a sense of complexity and interdependence.* As a collaborative art form that demands interaction and relationship-building among collaborators, theatre encourages participants to see themselves in the context of their complex and interdependent relationships with others.
- *They develop essential skills.* It is commonly known that theatre training aids in the development of literacy; however, its benefits extend far beyond basic skills. Theatre arts involve the entire body in learning, enabling individuals to integrate emotional, intellectual, and somatic experience as well as gain presentational skills, providing a foundation for emotional intelligence and leadership development.
- *They engage creative faculties.* Theatre encourages creative thinking, visioning and problem-solving in the context of the creation of new work—through writing, ensemble collaboration, staging and stagecraft. To see a blank stage, a blank canvass, or a blank page is to be presented with *opportunities and possibilities* as well as being confronted with personal choices and responsibility for making the most of them.
- *They demand team building and collaboration.* As a fusal art form that includes dramatic literature, acting, dancing and choreography, stagecraft, and art and music, theatre demands the marshalling and organizing of many and diverse specialists and resources in order to mount productions.
- *They require storytelling.* The act of storytelling provides cathartic benefits, helping individuals explore and transcend challenging personal experiences.
- *They create civic space and opportunities for dialog, ritualizing communal experience.* In a secular, pluralistic society, safe space must be created where individuals of diverse beliefs can gather, in a meaningful and memorable way, to consider complex issues of life, morality and ethics.

These characteristics of art and theatre-making now serve as the foundation for the integration of Pillsbury House Theatre and Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center, the creation of our "cultural community hub," and the basis for a new, emerging model for arts-based community development.

Both adults and kids can use the arts to access their inner beauty, to realize their basic human dignity and value, and to access the most important tool they carry with them--their imaginations. While this philosophical belief in the value of art was always part of the Settlement House ethos, in the early days of founding Pillsbury House Theatre, this concept was controversial. Internally, I had to sell the arts as a social service to my peers in order to justify using precious resources to create arts programming, while externally trying to distance the theatre from the idea of social services in order to gain credibility as an arts organization.

~ Ralph Remington

The founding of Pillsbury House Theatre, its success and growth, and the reintegration of Pillsbury House and the Theatre into a single entity dedicated to community building and creative placemaking have never been foregone conclusions. This history has required volition, a constant evolution in thinking and a willingness to take significant risks. It has required programmatic choices and investments made by leaders of Pillsbury United Communities and Pillsbury House. Nevertheless, the story of Pillsbury House Theatre follows an unassailable logic that makes the organization inherently sensible, effective, sustainable, and most importantly, compelling to those community members who look to Pillsbury House for support and act as its co-creators and collaborators.

Act I. Activist Roots and Redefining “Community Theatre.”

The Politics of Funding

The founding of Pillsbury House Theatre was itself a feat of activism and advocacy. The Theatre’s launch was made possible, in part, through funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB). The grant represented a significant victory for the Powderhorn-Central neighborhood. Initially, Pillsbury House was precluded from receiving funding from the MSAB, determined merely by the fact that the Theatre was an operating unit of Pillsbury United Communities and did not have its own 501c3 status. Ralph Remington challenged the MSAB policy, saying that it effectively excluded low-income communities of color from receiving arts funding by virtue of the “non-professional” status of most of their cultural activities. Remington’s challenge proved to be a watershed moment for diverse, low-income communities as well as the arts funding landscape in Minnesota, generally. In the

end, the MSAB recognized the validity of Remington's position, opening up opportunities not only for Pillsbury House Theatre, but also for other arts organizations across the state operating in non-traditional contexts. The change in policy has been crucial to expanding arts access throughout Minnesota.

The lesson for arts advocates could not be clearer and mirrors some of the most important lessons we try to inculcate in our own community. Communities and institutions rarely change of their own accord and advocacy is not for the faint of heart. Among other things, leadership and advocacy require standing—often uncomfortably—in opposition to the status quo, as well as learning how to identify and capitalize on strategies, political levers, and opportunities to compel change. Fortunately, the arts themselves teach us how to do this. Reading contextual clues, interpreting the subtext underlying the nature of things and the ways of the world, and then portraying stories of how culture, ideas, relationships, and situations affect individuals is our stock in trade. It has always been a goal of Pillsbury House Theatre to use these tools to effect change in the community. A few years after Ralph Remington left Pillsbury House Theatre, he ran for Minneapolis City Council and won a seat as the 10th Ward Council Member. He says of this transition that he "felt moved to take his political advocacy to the next level and try to effect change directly through policy making." His current role at the NEA represents an ideal blend of the passions he forged as founder of Pillsbury House Theatre.

Art Making in Collaboration with Community

In 1992, when Ralph Remington came to Pillsbury House to coordinate community rentals of the Center's theatre space and teach classes for kids and adults in the neighborhood, he immediately saw more possibilities in the performing space and began programming the space himself, producing the kind of provocative, edgy work for which the Theatre is now known. Within three years Remington was running what was initially known as, "The Center for Cultural Arts and Heritage," the programming for which included a mainstage season held in the main producing space, the afterschool youth program, a "mini-school" program for adolescents at high risk for truancy and failure in school, and a day program for adults with developmental disabilities.

In 1995, Noël Raymond, an accomplished actress and recent MFA graduate from the University of Minnesota, who now serves as both the Co-Artistic Managing Director of Pillsbury House Theatre and the Co-Director of Pillsbury House, was hired through a grant to use theatre techniques to support low-income women in obtaining and maintaining employment. In 1996, three additional theatre artists were hired, and the name was officially changed from "The Center for Cultural Arts and Heritage," to Pillsbury House Theatre.

At this time, the Theatre started one key community program and resurrected another. Pillsbury House launched the Chicago Avenue Project, a theatre mentoring program that brings youth together with adult volunteer professional artists to create original theatre. Modeled after the 52nd Street Project in New York, the Chicago Avenue Project includes acting classes at inner-city community centers, an intensive playwriting class, a countryside writing retreat, two fully-staged productions each year, and ongoing arts outings. The Chicago Avenue Project was eventually installed as an ongoing program of the Theatre and in 2005 received the Coming Up Taller Award given by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. The Theatre also resumed one of its initial programs—Breaking Ice—a multi-racial, socio-political improvisational theatre program that develops performances and workshops for schools, corporations and community groups around social issues such as racism, homophobia, sexism, and domestic violence. Breaking Ice, an on-going program as of this writing, received the 2007 Leading Lights Diversity Award for significant achievements in promoting diversity and inclusion to affect social change through the performing arts from the National Multicultural Institute.

From 1996-1998, the Theatre explored separating from Pillsbury United Communities and moving out of Pillsbury House, primarily due to perceptual concerns. The Theatre's professional mainstage performances were hampered by the view that Pillsbury House was a "community theatre" rather than a professional theatre staging productions "for the community." Furthermore, the perception of the neighborhood as dangerous discouraged the general theatre-going audience from attending Pillsbury House Theatre productions. While partnership with the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center continued, the Theatre focused on developing a separate identity in order to establish its professional credibility and reputation for high-quality work.

As the Theatre's reputation began to solidify, it convened an advisory committee in 1998 to improve organizational capacity and define strategies that would enable it to grow audiences and funding, expand programming, heighten visibility, and take a significant step toward long-term sustainability. Shortly thereafter Ralph Remington left to pursue his individual artistic goals and fulfill his political aspirations. Faye M. Price, a local actress and Dramaturg at the Guthrie was hired as a replacement, and a Co-Artistic Director structure was adopted, with Price and Raymond leading the theatre. Price brought to Pillsbury House strong connections with young, emerging, and diverse playwrights, advancing the Theatre's interest in developing new work.

Geol Weirs, at that time the arts program officer at the Dayton's Foundation, joined the Pillsbury House Theatre advisory group in 1999. At one point, Weirs made an observation that has had an impact on the Theatre's direction ever since. To Weirs, the identity of Pillsbury House Theatre was based on its position within Pillsbury United Communities; its settlement house history a huge asset and unique competency on which the Theatre needed to capitalize. This observation seems obvious in hindsight, especially in the context of this case study, but at the time, after many years of fighting for legitimacy in artistic and funding circles, Weirs' comment provided the Theatre's leadership with a significant "aha!" moment. Energies that had previously been spent in an effort to distance the Theatre from its relationship to the human services and community building mission of Pillsbury House were redirected into embracing the relationship.

This philosophical sea-change led to a strategic planning process in 2000 which, in turn, led to a new mission statement consistent with the newly revised mission of the larger organization, *i.e.*, "To create challenging theatre to inspire choice, change and connection." The process also refocused PHT's programs on the settlement house tradition of working in partnership with the community. Committed to using the dynamic tension between its professional artistic and community aspirations and to reframing its identity as providing excellent professional theatre with and for the community, the Theatre provided Pillsbury House a unique opportunity to fulfill the Pillsbury United Communities mission and settlement house objectives.

The lessons to be learned here are the importance of intentionality and the ability to accommodate the tension between apparently disparate missions. Many organizations, especially organizations that encourage an entrepreneurial culture, find that programming has a way of growing organically, almost of its own accord to the point of unintentionally reengineering an organization. To a degree, the Theatre emerged from just such a process. Remington saw potential in the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center facility and began to develop programming accordingly. After a period of growth and success, however, the organization was faced with making intentional choices about the Theatre's future.

There were at least two reasonable alternative paths that Pillsbury House Theatre considered taking: spin-off as a separate arts organization dedicated solely to professional theatrical production or take on a role as a "community theatre," providing artistic opportunities for amateur performers. Instead, leaders of Pillsbury House Theatre made the conscious decision to accept the challenge of working in a unique, hybrid form and to accept that doing so put them in a world where existing models for success did not transfer simply or easily. Nevertheless, this decision proved to be the reason for the Theatre's unique, current success.

Act Two: Expansion

In 2000, Pillsbury House Theatre entered a period of seven years of incremental growth, reputation building, and reconnecting with the community. The Theatre's community engagement strategy has always been a function of focusing on the programming itself, as opposed to targeted marketing strategies and techniques that are proven to "put butts in seats" in most conventional performing arts contexts. Instead, the Theatre chooses work by artists who reflect the diversity of the neighborhood and are telling stories that feel in some way germane or related to the experience of the people in the community.

Here are just a few examples that reflect the kind of repertoire that Pillsbury House Theatre stages every year: *Hot Comb: Brandin' One Mark of Oppression*, written and performed by Kimberly Joy Morgan about Black

Women and their hair; *Broke-ology* by Nathan Louis Jackson about a low-income family struggling to deal with the compounding effect of illness and an aging parent; *No Child* by Nilaja Sun about the impact of NCLB legislation on low-income youth of color; *Angels in America: Parts One and Two*; and *Far Away* by Caryl Churchill exploring the psychosocial effects of war and large scale social issues on individuals and societies. For every mainstage show produced at Pillsbury House Theatre we partner with a community organization that has a mission connected to the themes explored in the show. This community partner then helps to connect the production to its constituents and co-facilitates post-performance dialogues. In return, Pillsbury House Theatre spotlights its organizational partners and their work to its audiences and the people who visit the Neighborhood Center.

There are, however, two particular “marketing and outreach” strategies that the Theatre has always embraced. The first is to offer “positive gateway experiences” in order to attract audiences that are otherwise disinclined to participate in the arts. The second is to create a “street presence” much in the same way that organizers raise awareness and mobilize a community around a given issue or cause.

Gateway Experience

There are two aspects of the “gateway” strategy that are particularly important. First, “gateway experience” is fundamental to the process of dispelling common, negative associations with ‘high art’ in the minds and hearts of community members (*i.e.*, that art is expensive, that it is just for the wealthy, that it is not reflective of diverse perspectives and experiences). Secondly, “gateway experience” is crucial to the process of helping people overcome internal obstacles to participation, especially their own lack of “familiarity” with the rituals of arts participation. For individuals new to a country, a community, a language, or a culture, acts such as making reservations, or being escorted to a seat by an usher can create anxiety and discomfort and a feeling of not belonging.

Pillsbury House Theatre has found that its community engagement programs such as the Chicago Avenue Project, Breaking Ice, and the Late Nite series (which invites the community to participate through a shared meal prior to each performance) provide excellent vehicles to introduce its constituents to the rituals that surround the participation in live performing arts, creating familiarity and encouraging confidence in the uninitiated that they can navigate the terrain of arts participation successfully and without embarrassment. Very often, especially with the Chicago Avenue Project, youth and child participants become the “gateway” through which an entire family becomes involved in the arts. Our recent pilot project that animates human services programming with the arts (explained under The Pillsbury House Cultural Community Hub—A New Level of Integration) is a logical extension of this strategy to introduce individuals to arts participation in a way that is naturally integrated into their broader lives.

Presuming that a given program or production is well executed, an opportunity is created for repeat experience; however, content and quality are key. If the program or production is lacking in terms of either substance or execution, doors to deeper relationship building and repeat participation close quickly. No one should confuse new or non-traditional audiences with unthinking or unsophisticated consumers of art and performance. If anything, we have found that while new, “non-traditional” audiences may be at first unfamiliar with the rituals of theatre-going and the critical nomenclature of the theatre, they are naturally well-attuned to the subtleties of symbol, metaphor, language, and poetry as well as the psychological subtext and political context underpinning theatre works and performance.

Street Presence and Community Organizing

The Theatre often uses a community organizing approach, building relationships by finding groups and individuals with interests and affinities that intersect with thematic issues in a given production. Through a given play, the Theatre is able to start a relationship with a person, a family, an informal group, or an organization.

One example of this strategy in action was the 2007 Pillsbury House presentation of the one-woman play *LOW* by Rha Goddess. Rha Goddess created *LOW* specifically to revolutionize how society in general, and especially the African American community, deals with mental illness. While we saw the play as a compelling piece of theatre in its own right, we also recognized in it the potential to have a deep and significant social impact in our community by: 1) educating and raising awareness about issues of mental illness, especially in the context of communities of color; 2) opening up a suppressed subject and then creating a safe space for productive problem solving and making connections to resources through dialogues and forums; 3) inspiring individuals and groups to take positive action such as reaching out for personal aid and advocating for policies that address cultural inequities in the identification and treatment of mental illness, and 4) using the show as a catalyst to build a network of relationships with organizations, public institutions, and community members.

In order to catalyze this process, we created a slate of community engagement events in partnership with numerous Twin Cities organizations and individuals. These events included special performances for high school students; speaking engagements by Rha Goddess at the Northpoint Health and Wellness Center serving low-income people of color; post-performance dialogues co-facilitated with the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Minnesota; workshops taught by Rha Goddess for The YWCA Women's Wellness program and the Minnesota Spoken Word Association; and numerous connections with women's shelters, university departments and mental health associations to promote the show and encourage community dialogue. The *LOW* community engagement process was so successful that it has served as our model since that time. We know that it had a significant impact on the individuals who attended the production through direct audience feedback we gathered.

The production also generated a great deal of discussion in the local community about mental health and mental health policy. In fact, the Theatre was contacted by Congresswoman Michelle Bachman's office with regard to a reference to pending mental health legislation made during a post-show discussion that prompted calls to her office. The legislation, championed by MN senator Paul Wellstone, eventually passed in 2008 and was renamed the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

The Theatre's community engagement strategies worked very well through 2007. The audience grew steadily. Years of effort resulted in 80 percent audience capacity for mainstage performances over the 2006-2007 season. In addition, our gateway and outreach strategies helped us build and maintain significant increases in attendance by young people, people of color, and neighborhood residents. In 2004 and 2005, approximately 36 percent of the mainstage audience was comprised of people under 35 years of age. In 2006 this figure grew to nearly 40 percent. In 2004, 14 percent of the total mainstage audience identified themselves as people of color, compared to 46 percent in 2005 and 53 percent for 2006. In 2004 we worked specifically to increase attendance among people who live in the low-income neighborhoods surrounding the theatre. In that year we were able to increase attendance from an average of 8 percent to 25 percent, and through continued focus, we maintained a 20 percent level in 2005 and 16 percent overall for 2006. (The total number of individuals attending from the neighborhood continues to rise, but as the total audience grows, the percentage of neighborhood patrons is shrinking slightly.)

During this period, the reach and success of our community engagement programs also expanded considerably. For example, contract revenues from *Breaking Ice* grew over 300 percent, from roughly \$60,000 per year for *Breaking Ice* performances to \$200,000 in 2006. The Chicago Avenue Project also grew. The program doubled the number of classes, added performances to each showcase production and necessitated the creation of a director's position for the program.

Act III: Crisis and Opportunity

In 2008, the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center entered a critical juncture in its organizational development. Pillsbury United Communities and Pillsbury House had long been viewed as leaders in the delivery of human services programming. Pillsbury House Theatre's artistic work had already achieved tremendous success locally, regionally, and nationally. Furthermore, the Theatre had grown steadily over the 17 years that it had

been in operation. In 2008, in great part due to the effects of the economic crisis, Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center reached an institutional plateau resulting from diminishing program fees for human services, a reduction in United Way support, and lowered ticket revenues from Theatre performances. Neighborhood Center leaders scrambled to respond to a quickly changing funding landscape and new operating realities.

Leadership for both the Neighborhood Center and the Theatre were consolidated under the Theatre's Co-Artistic Directors, Noel Raymond and Faye Price, who had many years of experience as senior managers within the organizational structure and culture of Pillsbury United Communities. It would have been possible for Raymond and Price to respond in a conventional manner to the economic crisis merely by reducing costs through downsizing staff and programs and decreasing services to the community, but again, as organizational leaders, they chose a different path. Raymond and Price became inspired by the work of Susan Seifert and Mark Stern at the Social Impact of the Arts Project, and especially their presentation of a new model for a 'Neighborhood Based Creative Economy.'

The University of Pennsylvania researchers had posited that community cultural organizations created social networks, which in turn enhanced diversity and community capacity. Research further suggested that "cultural clusters" or "geographic concentrations of inter-connected companies and their associated suppliers in a given field," facilitated social engagement and the cross-pollination of ideas that lead to innovation. Most importantly, this approach had been shown to stimulate community building and economic development without the negative consequences common to other forms of culture-based revitalization, such as social dislocation and the acceleration of economic inequality.

Raymond and Price immediately recognized that Pillsbury House and Pillsbury House Theatre were in an ideal position to serve as a "cultural community hub," anchoring a 'cultural creative cluster' for a number of reasons:

- The breadth of programming and the diversity of program participants had already started to produce new programming ideas and new investment into the organization.
- The Theatre had already started to develop a network of "internally anchored" partnerships, such as its relationships with Upstream Arts, an arts organization that serves youth with disabilities, and the Pillsbury House Integrated Health Clinic. These partnerships were starting to establish the Center as a place for collaboration.
- Partnerships and associations that Pillsbury House Theatre had been involved in were bringing local artists together to collaborate and share resources. For example, Pillsbury House Theatre was a founding member of South Minneapolis Arts Business Association (SMARTS), the first arts business association in the city of Minneapolis.
- Human and social services offered at Pillsbury House had created crossover to multiple organizations, connections that would not have existed for stand-alone arts organizations. The potential to infuse arts into traditional human and health services and to use arts as the catalyst for transformation was tremendous, as was the potential for helping community members discover the artists in themselves.
- The Center was in an ideal position to facilitate multiple mergers and partnerships and to create new ways to share resources—this was the Neighborhood Center's history and the way that it already operated.

The Pillsbury House Cultural Community Hub—A New Level of Integration

In 2009, through its Regional Arts Development Program, the Bush Foundation granted Pillsbury House Theatre a 5-year grant of \$500,000 to support an organizational planning process and transition to a Cultural Community Hub—with the goal of serving as a catalyst for arts-based community development in the Central-Powderhorn neighborhoods of South Minneapolis. Price and Raymond immediately enlisted the help of William Cleveland, Director of the Center for the Study of Art and Community, and a thought-leader in the area of arts-based community development. With Cleveland's support and ongoing consultation, Price and Raymond

set about reengineering the Theatre and the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center into a “cultural community hub.”

While the basic pieces for serving as a 'cultural community hub' were in place, the organization's goals as well as programming and operating model needed to be established. For its first 17 years, Pillsbury House and Pillsbury House Theatre operated side-by-side, benefiting from resource sharing and a degree of shared community outreach. Nevertheless, their organizational goals, program planning, and implementation had remained fundamentally separate. The new organization was more than the sum of two separate parts. It required genuine integration and a sensible alignment of goals and functions.

Furthermore, Pillsbury House had to be realistic about its expertise, credibility, and the best focus for its efforts. Pillsbury House most certainly had never operated as an economic development organization, nor does it today. Its goals are to stimulate community building and the “creative economy” of South Minneapolis. But it has never assessed its success by virtue of business starts, job creation or the effectiveness of job training programs. Instead, looking at its particular and unique expertise, Pillsbury House leadership understood that the particular value of its service and that of Pillsbury House Theatre rested in the relationship between the arts and “individual agency,” “social cohesion,” and “community building.” The new organizational model animates all human and health services programming through the arts. The arts are now the defining characteristic of our human and health services, informing their delivery and enhancing their effectiveness—regardless of whether the goals of a given program are school readiness, educational performance, parenting skills, leadership development, public health outreach, goal setting, or interpersonal skills.

Healthy communities are not necessarily perfect communities, or even communities that have “arrived” at a particular destination in terms of income level or educational attainment. The challenges facing South Minneapolis may never be “solved” in some final sense. It is very likely that the neighborhoods we serve will always lag behind other neighborhoods relative to income, and standard indicators of community health and wellness. What Pillsbury House could aspire to, however, was perhaps even more important. It could, with speed and immediacy, create an environment, a context in which individuals within the community could be supported to make the best possible choices for themselves regardless of the often-overwhelming challenges and obstacles they faced. Pillsbury House could help create an environment that encouraged individuals to develop agency regardless of their external circumstances. It could provide the community with a safe space within which members could develop their minds and bodies. It could, regardless of circumstance, help community members build meaningful lives marked by intelligence, grace, realistic optimism, empathy, compassion, and a desire to serve—all qualities that participation in the arts helps develop. Finally, it could encourage individuals to tap into their own creativity in order to generate opportunities for themselves as well as solutions to community challenges.

The kernel and building block of Pillsbury House’s identity and the logic of its programming thus became the integration of the arts with human services for the purpose of the psychosocial development of individuals. Starting at the point of the individual, the Pillsbury House Cultural Community Hub then works outward, serving as a nexus for community building—sometimes taking a central role in whatever neighborhood project may be on the table for consideration, sometimes simply providing a point of connection or introduction to potential community partners.

In the new model there is not simply a reciprocal relationship between theatre programs and human services and health programs, but an integrated relationship. Within the new model, human services and health programs are a primary gateway through which individuals access the theatre. The theatre serves not only as an end in itself, an exemplar of artistic excellence, and a programming center, but also as a catalyst that creates opportunities for personal advancement and the social cohesion necessary for community change.

Pillsbury House + Theatre also works to overcome barriers to arts participation among individuals who have not traditionally participated in the arts. Through their involvement in human services programs, such as childcare,

out-of-school programs, parenting programs and others, community members are introduced to the arts in a way that does not separate the “arts experience” from the other services the individual requires, so barriers to arts participation—such as perception about the likely value or relevance of the arts to their lives, self-consciousness about whether or not they are capable of participating, or economic choices about whether or not they can afford to participate—are removed. Experience has shown us that once introduced to the arts, participants develop positive associations and greater self-confidence, as well as assign greater value and priority to the arts, paving the way for repeated, intentional experience and increasing the individual’s frequency of participation. Increasing participation is crucial to achieving significant long-term benefits.

The new Cultural Community Hub represents a markedly different kind of organization—a hybrid organization with a unique approach toward community building. To our knowledge, the systematic effort to integrate arts into the design and delivery of human and health services has never before been attempted in the United States. While there is a long tradition in the Americas, Europe, and globally in the use of the arts in educational, healthcare, and psychotherapeutic contexts, framing, defining, and developing health and human services programming (especially in the context of community revitalization goals) and using the arts as the core methodological driver of such programming is new. By way of example, the distinction lies in the difference between an afterschool program that may include painting and music as part of its scheduled activities and an afterschool program in which the design, goals, staffing, primary activities, and evaluation are built around the arts as a core element of an interdisciplinary approach to program delivery.

For this reason, the Pillsbury House Cultural Community Hub is being looked upon as a potentially powerful new model for arts-based community development and has started to gain the attention of city officials, local and state funders such as the Bush, McKnight and Kresge Foundations, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Theatre Communications Group, and national thought leaders including Bill Cleveland, and Erik Takeshita, Senior Program Officer at the Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

As of 2011, we have had an opportunity to pilot our arts integration process with more than half of our social service programs. The next five-year period will serve as a laboratory for testing our new integrated and interdisciplinary approach. The challenges are numerous and include:

- **Programming Replication:** The arts are embedded in all programs as foundational strategies. This approach requires dedicated interdisciplinary teams of artists and social services staff who work in constant partnership. It also requires the creation and organization-wide adoption of a critical nomenclature that enables the organization to create, implement and evaluate programming in a nimble, consistent, and meaningful way. For example, at this writing, we are working to create a parallel educational track for parents whose children participate in arts programming at Pillsbury House. The goals are to give parents tools to reinforce their children's learning process as well as to develop their own creativity and enhance their relationships with their children.
- **Programming Expansion and Community Outreach:** To date, our pilot has focused on core programming that happens on-site at the Neighborhood Center; however, if the concept of the ‘cultural community hub’ is to achieve its potential, the goal is to encourage arts creation in informal contexts well beyond our organizational control. For example, we are now working on street outreach programs with youth, home visiting, and integrating the arts into our health clinic programming. Strategies now under development include street-corner poetry slams, arts activities that are packaged for parents to do with their children in their homes, and play readings during clinic hours for patients waiting for services.
- **Evaluation and Organizational Management:** We realized during the planning of the ‘cultural community hub’ that experimentation, evaluation, and the ability to adapt programming and organizational strategy in light of evaluation data would be critical to organizational success moving forward. We invest significant money, time, and resources in developing evaluation systems and methods for collecting and analyzing the data in real-time. We are working with professional evaluator Mary Ellen Murphy developing metrics and establishing baseline data by which we can measure progress. The challenge in this process remains the inherent problem of defining and measuring personal

and community transformation. In essence, the challenge is in determining what change looks like and how long it should take.

- **Staff Development and Training:** The work we undertake requires interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration. It also requires staff to be nimble and flexible, able to adapt on the fly to emerging community needs and new programming opportunities. These requirements place significant demands on both artists and human services staff who do not necessarily or easily speak each other's languages. Identifying a set of core competencies and ensuring that staff are trained and encouraged to develop their skills is essential to our long-term sustainability. In the fall of 2010, during the course of the 'cultural community hub' pilot project, Pillsbury House created a Cultural Community Hub Institute (CCHI) in which teams of resident teaching artists and human services staff along with Pillsbury House Co-Directors Price and Raymond; Program Evaluator Mary Ellen Murphy; and Consultant Cleveland and his colleagues Erik Takeshita and Harry Waters, Jr. gathered regularly to plan, implement and evaluate programming. The CCHI now serves not only as a primary managerial instrument but also as the place in which core competencies and organizational training needs are identified and delivered.
- **Infrastructure:** The Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center building is over 30-years old and does not project the image of creative vigor that we have for either the 'cultural community hub' or the neighborhood. Absent a sufficient base of philanthropic support to mount a significant capital campaign for a new facility, we are working in partnership with Natasha Pestich a professor at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, to implement a community process to redesign and transform the space.
- **The New Normal:** Assaults on funding and the tendency of funders to support only one aspect of an issue—be it early childhood education, truancy, youth development, or health care—carves up what we know to be an interdependent human services system. This creation of funding silos in turn leads to lack of coordination of services among peer organizations and sometimes supplants cooperation with competition.
- **Urgency:** We feel tremendous urgency around our change process; but innovation requires time, the "luxury" of experimentation and freedom from the tyranny of the "immediately doable." Our goal is to reach a threshold where some percentage of employee time can be devoted to projects outside the scope of their regular responsibilities, providing them the freedom to explore and experiment.

Key Lessons

As a hybrid organization with a unique mission, the lessons learned at Pillsbury House + Theatre could be useful in any number of contexts— from arts organizations to human services organizations that run arts programming, to economic and community development, organizing and advocacy organizations searching for ways to capitalize on the arts for greater organizational effectiveness and visibility.

Summarizing nearly two decades of experience in organization and community building, key lessons that we take from our past and into the future are:

Improvisation. There are times when organizations grow organically by seizing opportunities that arise in the moment. The founding of Pillsbury House Theatre was just such a process, its organizational sustainability built upon incremental programming successes and growth over time. It did not require immediate and grand plans or huge stores of philanthropic capital. Even today, our fundamental operating goal is to behave as an organization that can improvise constantly — capitalizing on opportunities as they come, rather than forcing the creation of programming that either does not fit our community or our capacity for investment. We have, however, grown increasingly sophisticated in our approach to improvisation. Now, more than ever, our programming efforts and experiments are informed by evaluation, a fundamental part of keeping the organization engaged and vibrant.

Intentionality. While improvisation keeps leadership "present-centered," organizations also require intentionality at key decision points. These watershed moments often appear either as a conflict, an intransigent obstacle, or even a crisis. Our history has been no different. In these moments, we were able to chart new

ground as an organization with no clear model by undertaking the hard and brave work of organizational assessment, identifying fundamental organizational conflicts of identity and mission, and resolving them in creative, yet sensible ways.

Quality. While, increasingly, we hear about the need for arts participation independent of any considerations of quality, our experience tells us that the quality of the art created and the overall experience is key to organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, working with underserved communities makes the emphasis on quality even more important.

Advocacy. As an arts organization that is engaged in community building, we are advocates—for our community and for the arts. At different points in time, playing the role of advocate has not necessarily been a comfortable experience; however, it is essential to our mission in the community. We do not shy away from difficult positions or difficult work. As our own expertise as advocates has grown, we have become better able to pass on these skills to our constituents, helping cultivate new community leaders.

Investment. All organizations must invest in themselves if they are to flourish, but the question of what to invest in is ever present. At Pillsbury House + Theatre, we place an emphasis on investing in continuing education and professional development, organizational evaluation, and intellectual and creative capital. For example, our emergence as a ‘cultural community hub’ has succeeded in attracting significant new interest from major foundations. This interest on the part of donors has followed from intensive efforts on our part to understand major advances in the field of arts-based community development and to take the necessary steps to model ourselves with the latest thinking and best practices in mind. Furthermore, now that we have truly adopted a new operating model, we are making continual investments in the development of personnel so that they are able to function within our new normal. As we build the organization and institute a stronger development program, it is our goal to make commensurate investments in physical infrastructure. Nevertheless, investment in intangible assets will remain our priority.

Integration. Programming at Pillsbury House + Theatre does not sit in independent silos. Rather, all programming, whether sitting (ostensibly) in the area of health and human services or the arts, integrates strategies and goals of all of these fields. Creating theatre is part of a larger mission to integrate individuals into the community and build social capital. This focus echoes back to our roots as part of the settlement house tradition. With the integration of Pillsbury House and Pillsbury House Theatre, there is a recommitment to this idea. Our theory of community change is that participation in and experience of art encourages and stimulates creativity in and among individuals, which then ripples out to the larger community.

Audience Development. Developing audiences, both in terms of audience demographics and size, has been a natural result of our community engagement strategies rather than a focus of traditional marketing efforts. Our audience building success owes more to strategies gleaned from the fields of community organizing and human services than arts marketing. Building an audience to attend the theatre is not really the goal. Rather, we encourage people to participate in theatre in order to stimulate community building. Figuring out how to eliminate barriers and increase participation in arts programming is a basic function of all segments of the organization because all segments of the organization are engaged in arts programming.

Noel Raymond is the Co-Director of Pillsbury House + Theatre where she has helped lead, develop, and implement arts programming to promote community vitality since 1995. Raymond has served on the Boards of Directors for the Multicultural Development Center; the Burning House Group Theatre Company, which she co-founded in 1995; and the South Minneapolis Arts Business Association (SMARTS). As an actor, Raymond has performed locally and nationally with many theatres including Pillsbury House Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, Penumbra Theatre in Minneapolis, and the Hangar Theatre in New York. Raymond's directing credits

include *No Child...*, *An Almost Holy Picture*, *Far Away*, *Angels in America: Parts I and II*, and *[sic]* at Pillsbury House Theatre; *From Shadows to Light* at Theatre Mu; and *The BI Show* with MaMa mOsAiC. Noel is a core company member of Carlyle Brown and Company and has directed the premiere productions of Carlyle Brown's *Are You Now...* and *Therapy and Resistance*. She has served on numerous panels including National Theatre Criticism/Affiliated Writers Program, Minnesota State Arts Board's Artist's Initiative Program, the Playwright's Center Many Voices and Affiliate Membership Programs, United Arts General Fund, and 'The Art of Social Justice' breakout at the Neighborhood Funder's Group/MN Neighborhood Institute conference.

Denise Kulawik, Principal of ONEIROS, LLC., serves as Development Consultant to Pillsbury House Theatre, bringing 20 years of fundraising, communications, non-profit management, and governmental experience to her role. Her industry experience ranges from the arts, economic, and sustainable development sectors to healthcare, health policy, and education policy. Most recently, Kulawik served as the Associate Director of Institutional Giving at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She began her career as a staff writer, then Director, Research & Communications and finally as Vice President for Marketing for J. Donovan Associates, Consultants in Philanthropy, an AAFRC consulting firm with clients throughout North America. She has served as a Program Coordinator and Consultant to the Massachusetts Commonwealth Department of Medical Security, and as Associate Director of Development and later, Acting Director, Planning & Operations, for Health Care For All, one of the nation's leading policy and advocacy organizations working on behalf of underserved health care consumers. Kulawik has served numerous start-up entrepreneurial social ventures including the Center for Women & Enterprise, the ALS Therapy Development Foundation, the Rainbow Health Initiative of Minnesota as well as artists and arts and cultural organizations including Pillsbury House Theatre, Carlyle Brown and Co., and Mad King Thomas. Kulawik has presented on fundraising topics for The Boston Foundation, the Center for Women & Enterprise Community Entrepreneurs Program, and the Women Waging Peace Colloquium presented by the Hunt Alternatives at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Ms. Kulawik received her undergraduate degree in dramaturgy from the University Professors Program at Boston University. Kulawik is also a working artist. Her original screenplay, *D(a)emons*, is now in development by New Globe Films.