

Mayor Coleman and SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development Announce New Home in Historic 100-Year-Old Summit-University Building

New facility to offer classes and theatre programming for youth

(Saint Paul, MN) - Mayor Chris Coleman joined SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development today to unveil plans to renovate a 100-year-old pillar of the community in the Summit-University neighborhood of Saint Paul. Construction on the former Grace Community Church, located at Victoria Street next to William Mitchell College of Law, will begin this month. SteppingStone Theatre plans to move into its new home in late 2007.

The City of Saint Paul, through its Neighborhood and Cultural STAR programs, has committed \$725,000 to the new facility. "This project is a great addition to the soul of our City," said Mayor Coleman. "As we continue to work toward providing out-of-school-time learning opportunities for kids through the Second Shift, projects like this make a real difference and help us truly become the most livable City in America."

Joined by Councilmember Debbie Montgomery and Summit-University neighbors, Mayor Coleman and SteppingStone Theatre leaders unveiled architectural and programming plans. The company also announced a \$5.3 million capital campaign, "SteppingStone Theatre: A World of Possibilities." To date, the theatre has raised \$3.2 million toward the goal, in a campaign slated to finish in June 2008.

"We are thrilled with the potential this building holds as SteppingStone Theatre's new home," said Richard Hitchler, artistic director of the 19-year-old company. "We are quite literally-bursting at the seams due to significant growth over the past few years. This new facility will enable us to serve the needs of the youth in our community."

Last year, SteppingStone Theatre served nearly 70,000 youth and families through mainstage shows, classes, camps, and outreach programs. For the past 19 years, it has produced shows in the 230-seat Weyerhaeuser Auditorium in the Landmark Center and has rented space for classes and outreach programs wherever possible. The new facility's 430-seat auditorium and on-site classrooms will allow not only for more efficient and cost effective operations, but also for growth and opportunities for new youth-oriented theatre programming.

SteppingStone Theatre's renovation plans include improvement of the exterior; conversion of the sanctuary into a 430-seat theatre with a proscenium-style stage equipped with modern lighting and sound capabilities; installation of an elevator for accessibility to all areas of the building; and construction of classrooms, dressing rooms and administrative offices on the lower level. When complete, the facility will be home not only to SteppingStone Theatre's programs, but also available for use by other arts and community organizations as well.

Summit-University neighborhood member Mary Cardinal Peterson said, "Preserving this 100-year-old gem for a children's theater, as well as for other community uses, benefits our neighborhood in so many ways. We believe that SteppingStone Theatre will add an essential quality to the neighborhood and serve as a safe gathering place for young people."

SteppingStone Theatre purchased its future home in August 2005, The building, listed as a noteworthy example of architecture and style on the Historic Hill District's National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1908 to house a Methodist congregation. Later it was home to Saints Volodymyr and Olga Ukrainian Church. More recently, Grace Community Church members worshipped at the site before selling the building to a developer. After a neighborhood petition drive produced enough signatures to support preservation of the building, the City Council denied the developer's request to demolish the building. The facility has been vacant for several years.

SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development serves youth from diverse ethnic, social and economic backgrounds by teaching life skills through theatre. The mission of the theatre is to develop the whole child by using educational theatre programs and fully staged productions to build self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of community, while celebrating diversity in a supportive, noncompetitive atmosphere.

More information about SteppingStone Theatre is available by calling (651) 225-9265 or at www.steppingstonetheatre.org