



Hildebrand Family Donates Major Gift *St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre to be Renamed in Honour*

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ST. JACOBS – Alex Mustakas, Artistic Director of Drayton Entertainment, has announced the St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre will be renamed the **Hildebrand Schoolhouse Theatre St. Jacobs** in recognition of the sustained support of community philanthropists **Henry and Grace Hildebrand**.

As the previous owner and operator of St. Jacobs Place, a luxury independent / assisted living facility in the community, the Hildebrand family has been attending productions at the Schoolhouse Theatre for more than two decades.

The new name will take effect for the 2024 Season. The Burlington couple has generously donated **\$1 million** to help with a planned renovation to the layout and functionality of the 1867 Schoolhouse Theatre, located at 11 Albert St. W. in the village of St. Jacobs.

“We salute the vision of Henry and Grace Hildebrand, and their incredible approach to philanthropy,” says Mustakas. “Their gift will help ensure the stability and longevity of the St. Jacobs Schoolhouse Theatre – and our theatre operations as a whole – so that they may be enjoyed by future generations.”

Theatre renovations are scheduled to commence in January, and will largely focus on accessibility improvements. This includes a significant expansion of the lobby to accommodate newly redesigned and expanded washroom facilities to better serve seniors, persons with disabilities, families with young children, and non-binary gender identifying individuals.

Other upgraded amenities will include new auditorium seating, technologically advanced hearing assist system, life safety infrastructure to protect audiences, energy-efficient windows, and LED stage lighting to reduce the theatre’s carbon footprint.

A stairwell will also be added to connect the lower level dressing rooms directly to the stage, positively affecting the range of productions capable of being produced at this venue in the future.

As a multi-purpose and multi-flex space, the renovated Schoolhouse Theatre will become an additional space from which Drayton Entertainment runs classes, workshops, and community

showcases through its burgeoning Youth Academy, which serves as an arts and cultural incubator to provide community building and arts-based learning for local youth.

“The support of the Hildebrand family is significant because it has inspired us to reimagine how the Schoolhouse Theatre may serve the broader community in the future. In addition to our live theatre productions, these renovations will better position us to reach and engage young people in a range of performing and technical arts training programs,” says David Connolly, Associate Artistic Director and Director of Education for the Drayton Entertainment Youth Academy.

The revamped Schoolhouse Theatre will also become an ideal venue to pilot the organization’s future projects, such as Theatre for Young Audiences. With its roots in education and content revolving around traditional child-friendly topics, this programming will be geared towards young people, their families, teachers and peers in a space of joy, wonder, surprise, and connection.

In addition to Drayton Entertainment’s theatre productions and arts programs, the Schoolhouse Theatre will also serve the community as a venue equipped to host school assemblies, dance exhibitions, music recitals, concerts, film festivals and cultural exhibits, charitable fundraisers, corporate meetings, and weddings.

The historic schoolhouse is St. Jacobs’ living link to Canada’s Confederation, and its rich history proudly represents part of our country’s history. In the 1840s, settlers started fleshing out a village they called Jakobstettel (Jacob’s Village) after Jacob C. Snider, one of the founders. Over the next 20 years, it continued to develop with the addition of Benjamin D. Snyder’s flour mill, alongside a tannery, harness shop, wagon manufacturer, woolen mill, and general stores.

The two-room schoolhouse was added in 1867 to educate the village’s 75 pupils. The building was eventually renovated into a small theatre space by the Milo Shantz family, as part of a push to develop tourism in the area.

Drayton Entertainment arrived in St. Jacobs in 1997, in what would become the first of multiple expansions following the unprecedented success of its first venue, the Drayton Festival Theatre. In 2019, Mersynergy Charitable Foundation, which was founded by the Milo Shantz and Ross Shantz families, donated the Schoolhouse Theatre to Drayton Entertainment, thereby allowing the cultural landmark to change from one charitable organization to another.

“We are so pleased to support Drayton Entertainment in their ongoing effort to produce topnotch entertainment for residents and visitors to this community, and expand the range of opportunities that will be available in the future,” says Henry Hildebrand.

“This is a tremendous gift, which significantly enhances the economic, cultural, and social fabric of the Township of Woolwich and the Region of Waterloo,” says Willy Heffner, Chair of Drayton Entertainment’s volunteer Board of Directors. “The Hildebrands are true community champions.”