



# WALHALLA PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Becoming a world-class venue for  
Culture in the Upstate

*Words by Darlene Greene /Photos by Cheryl Key*

**T**he classic red brick building, constructed in 1903, was placed on the historical registry in 1992. Located one block off Main St., in Walhalla, SC, the building originally served as an elementary school for the city. After the school moved to a newer facility in town, the historic building was used as administrative office space for the Oconee school district. By 1993, despite being a historic property, plans were in the works to tear the building down. Two women, both of whom were former teachers at the elementary school, had the idea to turn the building into a community auditorium. A restoration committee of local citizens was formed and efforts to save and re-purpose the building began. The committee established a 501(c)3 and spent 10 years raising funds for restoration and repairs.

*In April of 2003, the “Walhalla Civic Auditorium” opened its doors for its first live performances by regional and local bands. As time went on, the events scheduled included plays and comedians as well as a few nationally known performers. By 2017, the auditorium’s growth potential was clear and entertainment promoter, Mark Thompson, was hired by the Auditorium’s Board as Executive Director. Thompson suggested the name be changed to “Walhalla Performing Arts Center” (WPAC) and expanded the performance season to include a wider variety of entertainment options. By 2019, WPAC was offering more live performances than ever before, and the building was being visited by enthusiastic patrons from all over the Upstate and beyond.*

“The upkeep on a historic building as old as this one, is constant,” said Thompson. “As we increased our performance offerings, we continued to work on building improvements. In early 2022, I had the idea of creating additional usable space on the second floor of the building. After two and a half months of work creating a budget and renovation plan, I applied to the SC Park-Rec-Tourism Grant Fund for \$1 million. We were awarded the grant in December of 2023,” said Thompson proudly.

Thompson immediately lined up a skilled contractor to replace the derelict windows and to begin restoration and renovation of the 2nd floor rooms. “We had our work cut out for us; the second floor had essentially been ignored for years. We had to rewire, replumb and replaster. We had to remove the ancient carpet and install new flooring as well as new HVAC systems,” said Thompson. “We wanted meeting or conference space, and we wanted to convert the rest of the rooms into attractive Airbnb-type suites.”





As renovations progressed, it was determined that two rooms were better suited for rental as office space, two rooms could be converted into overnight accommodations, and the largest room was updated with a kitchenette and full bath so that it could be used for conferences or smaller events. “The great thing about this project is that we have improved and upgraded the building while creating new revenue opportunities to help support our on-going maintenance and improvements,” said Thompson. “We are a true non-profit organization. We want to be as self-sustaining as possible to ensure we can continue to meet our goal of bringing world-class entertainment this community and the surrounding areas.”

WPAC is located amid the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains; Lakes Hartwell, Keowee and Jocassee; hiking, biking and horseback trails; scenic rivers and waterfalls; and several highly rated state and county parks. For upcoming performances at WPAC, visit our website, [www.walhallapac.com](http://www.walhallapac.com). You can purchase tickets online. Some upcoming performances include Mother’s Finest Band, The SteelDrivers, Sara Evans, Black Jacket Symphony, White Collar Comedy Tour, Jason Crabb, Allman Betts Band, Mutts Gone Nuts, a Jimmy Buffet Tribute and much more. You can also follow WPAC on social media @walhallapac.

