

## ***For Immediate Release***

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# **FLORIDA THEATRE AND THEATREWORKS WILL MERGE**

## **TWO OF JACKSONVILLE'S ICONIC NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS WILL STRATEGICALLY ALIGN TO MORE EFFICIENTLY SERVE THE CHILDREN OF THE FIRST COAST**

*Jacksonville, Fla.* - Two of Jacksonville's oldest and most important arts organizations, the Florida Theatre and Theatreworks, are merging.

Founded in 1979, Theatreworks, the arts-education organization will become a program of the Florida Theatre. For more than a year, discussions regarding the merger have been ongoing. In October, the Theatreworks' board approved the merger. The Florida Theatre board approved the merger in November. Following approval from the Secretary of State, the effective date of the merger was December 11, 2019.

For 40 years, Theatreworks has been filling a need for children's theatre in the First Coast region by bringing the best national and international professional touring children's theatre to Jacksonville, to perform for school-age children. Annually, close to 30,000 school-age children attend Theatreworks performances on school trips. The majority of the organization's school time presentations take place at the Florida Theatre, where Theatreworks has been a theatre renter for decades.

"Arts organizations only talk about merging when times are tough, and one of them is in trouble," said Numa Saisselin, President of the Florida Theatre. "In this case, two strong organizations are joining forces to better serve our community. It makes strategic sense for both organizations. Theatreworks presents the majority of their programs at the Florida Theatre, the theatre has always avoided competing with them. Our programs are complementary, and our donor base has no overlap."

After the merger, the Theatreworks' programs will continue unabated at the Florida Theatre, but as a program of the Theatre. "The Florida Theatre has been the de facto home of Theatreworks for decades; the only change will be the address of correspondence between schools and our staff," said Jamie Kent, Theatreworks' Executive Director. "Many schools mistakenly send thank you notes to the Florida Theatre and show up to our business address for the shows because, in the mind of the teachers, we are the same entity with two addresses. We are just formalizing what is already perceived to be the case. What was 'Theatreworks at the Florida Theatre, is now 'Theatreworks, A Florida Theatre Production.'

"It was important to the Theatre that the Theatreworks' name was perpetuated," said Saisselin. "It has an excellent professional reputation in our community and strong brand recognition."

Theatreworks' employees will become Florida Theatre employees. They will move from Theatreworks' Riverside offices to the Florida Theatre's administrative offices.

Jamie Kent says that he looks forward to it. "Although Theatreworks serves more than 30,000 students a year, it has always been a very small organization. Becoming part of the larger Florida Theatre operation relieves me of dozens of administrative tasks that go with any company, and puts my focus on the core mission. That will be a blessing, and should result in a stronger program for the community too."

Theatreworks will no longer pay rent to the Theatre, allowing a larger portion of income to flow to the bottom line, and be reinvested in more programming.

"The Theatreworks' mission is to enrich the lives of all First Coast children by exposing them to quality and culturally relevant performing arts," said Kent. "Children are the audience of the First Coast's future, and the Florida Theatre is, of course, one of the First Coast's primary performing arts venues."

"Every year, the Florida Theatre tries to construct a schedule that touches all corners of the region, and with Theatreworks as part of the programming, we're now addressing audiences from kindergarten to beyond retirement," said Saisselin.

The Florida Theatre is sponsored by Community First Credit Union. For a complete list of upcoming season events, visit [floridatheatre.com](http://floridatheatre.com).

[Florida Theatre](#): From ballet and opera to contemporary pop, jazz, rock, country and blues the nonprofit Florida Theatre offers 200 cultural and entertainment events annually for every taste and age. More than just an entertainment center, The Florida Theatre is also home to graduations, awards ceremonies, lectures, business meetings and charity events that support the community's schools, churches, hospitals and civic groups. As an anchor to downtown development along the beautiful St. Johns River, The Florida Theatre draws 250,000 people to Jacksonville's center each year. The magnificently restored Florida Theatre is recognized as one of the finest concert venues in the Southeast. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Florida Theatre holds special memories for four generations. From the Vaudeville acts and silent films of its earliest days to today's blend of performances of all kinds, The Florida Theatre has served as Jacksonville's premier entertainment center since 1927.

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