

Baton Rouge Performing Arts Theater to get \$18.1M makeover

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The city-parish is moving forward with the planned \$18.1 million makeover of the Raising Cane's River Center Theatre for the Performing Arts in what's being billed as the first major renovation of the roughly 2,000-seat theater since it was built in 1977.

The refurbishments will return the theater to a "shining home for arts in the Capital Region," says Mayor Sharon Weston Broome in a statement issued this morning.

"The theater will be a beautiful and exciting venue for patrons of all ages to enjoy a wide variety of live entertainment," Broome says. "This adds to our growing, dynamic arts portfolio here in Baton Rouge."

The design work should be completed in the first quarter of 2018, and bids for a general contractor will be accepted next spring. Construction is expected to begin in the middle of next year, with the theater reopening in late 2019 or very early 2020, says SMG, which manages the theater.

The work includes expanding the lobby and guest services, as well as VIP boxes with larger seats and additional amenities. There also will be VIP lounges, improved ADA access and seating, new aisles, expanded bathrooms and concessions.

The theater's capacity will be slightly reduced, but the city-parish, which owns the building, has not said by how much.

"The new design of the theater focuses on improving the patron experiences while maintaining the warm sound qualities that the theater is famous for," says architect Skipper Post, whose Baton Rouge-based firm, Post Architects, teamed up with HMS Architects of New Orleans to redesign the theater.

The theater hosts concerts and performances by the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, the Baton Rouge Ballet and the Baton Rouge Broadway Series, among others. A makeover has been years in the making.

The city-parish issued a request for proposals for the theater's redesign in December 2015 and awarded the architectural contract to Post Architects last year. Broome agreed to the current design scope for the theater, which hosts about 175 event days each year, after a series of meetings with stakeholders.

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