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Story & Photos by Willa Warren

# Center for the Arts at Wesley Chapel

## BIG CITY THEATER IN OUR OWN BACK YARD

At 30651 Wells Road in Wesley Chapel, tucked between Weightman Middle School and Wesley Chapel High School, is the Center for the Arts at Wesley Chapel. It is a handsome, crisp white building with a striking blue logo emblazoned on the front that says "theater" with a Frank Lloyd Wright flair.

Patrick McDermott is the director of the Center for the Arts at Wesley Chapel and he is justifiably proud of the facility he oversees. With 15 years in the business world as an executive for Federated Department Stores out of New York, this former band teacher, with a Masters degree in music composition, Mr. McDermott has a solid foundation for directing this community resource.

Built by the Pasco County School system in 1999, the center is a professional quality theater facility. This means that when you step into this theater, designed to hold 927 people, you are immediately aware of the absolutely perfect acoustics. Further exploration will disclose nearly state-of-the-art stage amenities, equipment, sound system

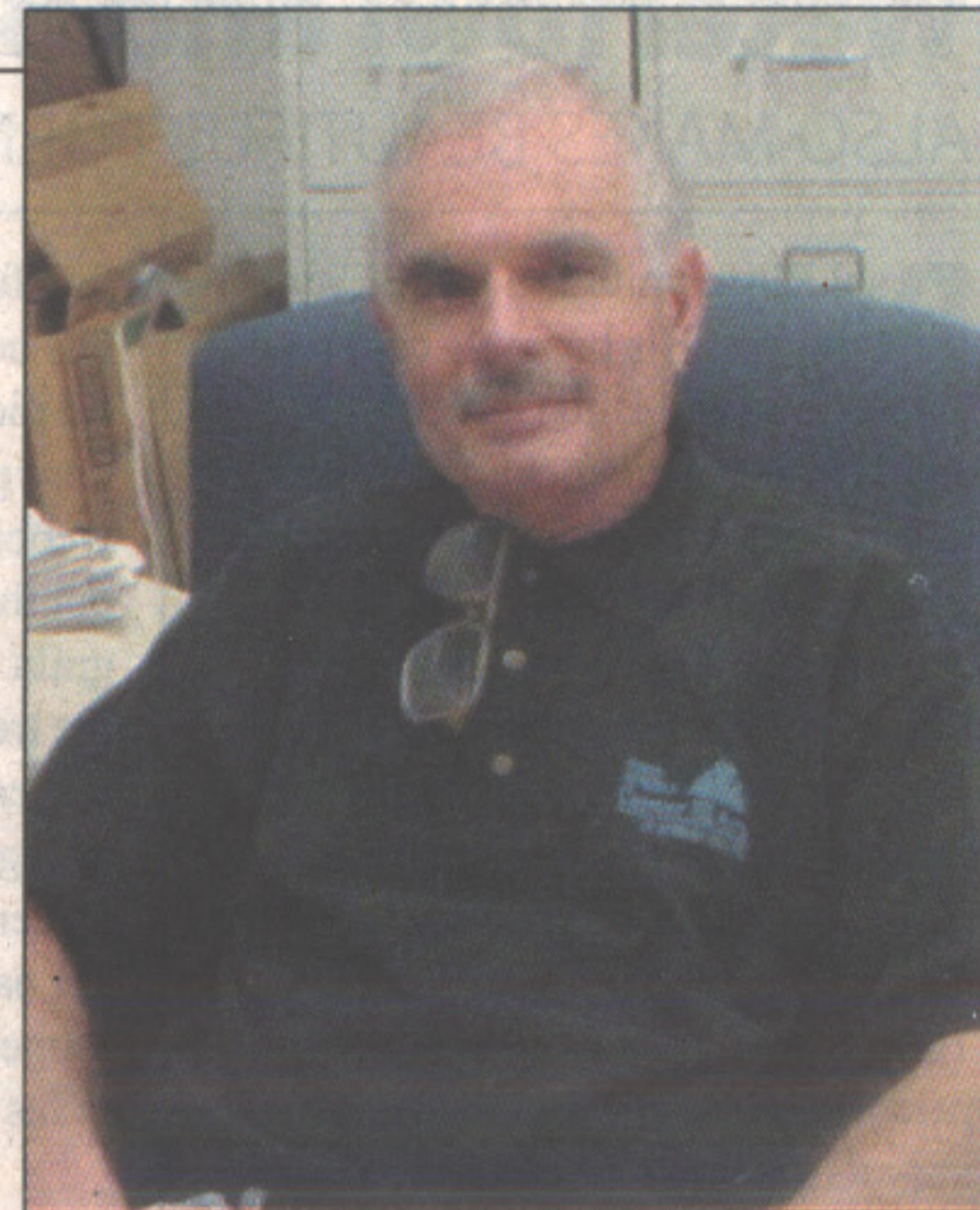
and lighting. It has dressing rooms backstage to accommodate dozens of performers. Large double stage doors to the outside allow very tall or bulky dramas sets and backdrops to be brought in and out to an area where tractor trailers will park to load and unload. This theater is every bit as professional in quality as the Tampa Bay Performing Arts in Tampa. And here it is right in our own back yard!

Mr. McDermott explained the three-fold objective of the Center. First, and most important, is to meet educational needs of Pasco County school children by exposing them to a multitude of dramatic and musical events. In a unique program, children are bussed in from all over the county to experience 12 – 15 professional shows a year. Productions from New York, around the country and even Canada are presented in day shows for the kids. This year they will even get to hear the Poet Laureate of the United States, Ted Koozer. These day shows are also open to the public on a seating available basis. The Center also provides a venue to the students for their own plays, musical and choral productions.

Secondly, it is having the facility available to the school system and county for meetings or training classes. For example, Kurt Browning, Supervisor of Elections, utilizes the center to train precinct workers how to operate voting machines and assist voters.

And thirdly; public shows. This is where we-the-public gets lucky! On dates where the center is not being used for purpose one or two, the Center for the Arts brings professional shows to Pasco County. We can enjoy big city type entertainment without the drive to Tampa! Coming up in April of 2006 the Duke Ellington Orchestra will be performing right here in our neighborhood.

Past performances include The Maynard Ferguson Orchestra, The Chamber Singers from the School of Music at USF, DIVA the all women Big Band out of New York City and a local band that has gotten national attention by being nominated for a Grammy award in 2003, The Dan



Patrick McDermott, Director of The Center for the Arts at Wesley Chapel.

McMillian Jazz Orchestra.

The public can also rent the Center for putting on plays by local theater groups or promoting theatrical, dance studio or musical events. We all want big city amenities here in Pasco County; well here is a fabulous one! Let's support it!

For more information, or to obtain a 2006 calendar of events, call the Center for the Arts At Wesley Chapel box office at 813-794-8772.