

Great Lakes Theater

[Great Lakes Theater | Cleveland's Classic Theater Company at the Hanna Theatre](#)



Case for Support

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MISSION



The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its mainstage productions and education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Great Lakes Theater seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. Great Lakes Theater wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Great Lakes Theater is dedicated to the highest standards, to creative problem solving and to innovation in all areas of its

operation, including theater production, education, outreach, management and governance.

VALUES

GLT abides by a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement that details their commitment to creating an inclusive workplace that promotes and values equity and diversity in all aspects and across our Board, staff, and artistic company. They seek to reach a broad audience representative of the communities they serve and strive to support a culture with a deep sense of pride, passion, and belonging. GLT and their audiences are unified in their shared commitment to excellence, innovation, and social responsibility in all that they do.

They also support and abide by the CLEAn House Standards by being a safe and nurturing environment that fully allows them to challenge themselves, their audiences, and their communities: that supports creative risks of mind and body, and that establishes the freedom to create theater that represents the full range of human experience. They are committed to being a space free of harassment based on sex, sexual orientation or identity, gender, gender expression, race, color, religion, class, ethnicity, nationality, political belief, or ability.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- 1962 - The Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival was founded in Lakewood, Ohio between Lakewood School Board President Dorothy Teare and Arthur Lithgow, Artistic Director of a troupe of Shakespearean performers
- 1966 – Lawrence Carra named Artistic Director
- 1976 – Vincent Dowling named Artistic Director
- 1982 - Festival moved the Ohio Theater in Playhouse Square in downtown Cleveland and expanded its repertoire to include classics beyond Shakespeare
- 1985 – Name changed to Great Lakes Theater Festival; Gerald Freedman named Artistic Director
- 1989 – First production of *A Christmas Carol*
- 1991 – First 9-month calendar season
- 1997 – Victoria Bussert and John Ezell named interim Co-Artistic Directors
- 1998 – James Bundy named Artistic Director
- 2002 – Charles Fee named Producing Artistic Director; Great Lakes Theater Festival and Idaho Shakespeare Festival (Boise, Idaho) begin production alliance
- 2008 – Great Lakes Theater Festival moves to the re-imagined Hanna Theatre (except for *A Christmas Carol*)
- 2010 – Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival joins production alliance
- 2011 – Great Lakes Theater dropped the “Festival” from its name
- 2020 – GLT cancels *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Ain’t Misbehavin’* due to COVID pandemic
- 2023 – Executive Director Bob Taylor announced retirement



PROGRAM SUMMARY

Great Lakes Theater has been producing classical theater and offering education programs since its establishment in 1962. Each theatrical season comprises approximately five shows over eight months. All performances occur at the historic Hanna and Mimi Ohio Theaters in Playhouse Square. Their primary educational offerings include an in-school residency, student matinees, an annual writing contest, and youth summer camps.

THEATER PERFORMANCE

Each theatrical season includes plays written by William Shakespeare and other classical playwrights and an annual production of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. They also occasionally produce musicals as part of the Kulas Musical Theater Series. During the 2021-2022 season, they presented four plays that drew 22,532 total audience members to the theater. Student matinee performances of mainstage productions (more in the 'Theater Education' section) garnered an additional 2,457 students during that period. No plays were produced during the 2020-2021 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The four shows produced in the 2019-2020 season drew an audience of 46,915 from public performances and student matinees.

Great Lakes Theater offers special group ticket bundles and experiences, including Social & Family Groups, Student & Teacher Groups, Corporate and Business Groups, Tour & Travel Groups, and Fundraiser Groups. They also host a 'Director's Night' pre-show discussion with Charles Fee an hour before a select performance of each play in the Hanna Salon. A similar program titled 'Salon Thursdays' is only 30 minutes long and occurs multiple times per play. Additional pre-show programs include 'Playnotes Discussions' (one hour before Saturday matinees in which a guest scholar presents the content and history of a production) and 'Ice Cream Social Sundays,' where audiences can purchase discounted ice cream.

THEATER EDUCATION

Great Lakes Theater's acclaimed educational programming has positively impacted the lives of students since its founding in 1962. Their year-round programming connects over 50,000 students from 250+ schools in 21+ counties to classic theatrical works each season.

In-School Residency Program

Launched in 1981, Great Lakes Theater's in-school residency program is now one of the most successful artist-in-residence programs in the country. Each year, over 15,000 students in nearly 100 schools experience the pleasure, power, and relevance of classic literature brought to life right in their own classrooms. During the 2021-22 season, GLT visited 64 schools and engaged 10,378 students in nine Ohio counties.

The in-school residency program uses a hands-on, interactive approach to bring classic literature to students at all grade levels. Specially trained actor-teachers visit a school for five consecutive days, teaching five classes daily for an entire week and supplying scripts, props, and costumes. This program is designed to meet the common core education standards and involves three components: acting, discussion, and theater exercises. Additionally, all residencies are specially designed to engage students on the autism spectrum or with other developmental disabilities and are considered sensory-friendly.

The cost for a school to host a residency program typically runs \$2000 for one team of 2 actor-teachers, up to five classes per day for five consecutive days, averaging \$16 per student for an entire week of hands-on learning. Extra charges apply for mileage and additional classes. Educators can preview selected literature, resource guides, workshop offerings, and customizable lesson plans on their [website](#).

Residencies were transformed into digital engagement experiences during the 2020-2021 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in 166 total digital residencies delivered to 128 schools reaching 17,601 students. During the 2019-2020 season, actors visited approximately 10,251 students in 457 classrooms in 63 schools in 11 Ohio counties. Their educational outreach program, "Sherlock Holmes Meets the Bully of Baker Street," visited 49 sites in five counties with an estimated audience of 8,013 students. This season was shortened by 10 schools also due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Student Matinees

Ten (10) AM matinees at the Hanna Theater are open for discounted groups of 10+ students with complimentary seats for teachers and chaperones. Further, GLT creates and offers Teacher Preparation Guides for all plays to prepare students for their visit and provide educational activities for classroom use after the show. These specially curated guides include background information about the playwright, insight into our production, student-centered discussion questions, classroom activities, and writing prompts. Student matinee groups can also stay after a performance to chat with the cast and ask questions.

'A Christmas Carol' Writing Contest

Launched in 1989, Great Lakes Theater's annual *A Christmas Carol* Writing Contest is a literacy program open to all Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) students in grades six, seven, and eight. Every year, students participate by writing original stories, songs, and poems inspired by the timeless themes in Dickens' classic tale. Almost 2,000 students from over 50 CMSD schools submit entries to the contest each season. The 33rd annual writing contest in 2021 engaged 300 students from 11 CMSD schools amidst pandemic-disruption challenges. The 32nd annual writing contest in 2020 engaged 337 students from nine schools.

Each school may submit one winner per grade level to the GLT Education Department, and those essays are adjudicated by a panel of local educators, artists, and community members.

Six grand prize winners (two per grade level) are chosen and receive free tickets to *A Christmas Carol* and several additional special prizes. All participating students receive admission to a special student matinee performance of the play with tickets and transportation provided in part by the School District. After the matinee, winners are brought up on stage, awarded *A Christmas Carol* t-shirts, meet members of the acting company, and receive special recognition from their peers and teachers.

Great Lakes Theater Camp

GLT Camp is a summer drama camp with musical theater elements that immerses students in interactive and educational theater-based activities. Featuring classes in acting, Shakespeare, movement, improvisation, stage combat, mask making, and musical theater, camp is a unique opportunity for students to work with and learn from Great Lakes Theater's professional teaching artists in a fun, safe, and supportive environment.

Daily classes are held at Brook Park Elementary School, equipped with an auditorium and state-of-the-art classroom facilities in a two-week session from **Mondays through Thursdays**. The program is designed for students of all levels of experience and ability and does not require an audition. Classes are divided by students' respective ages: Groundlings (ages 6-8), Jesters and Fools (ages 9-11), Upstart Crows (ages 12-13), and Rude Mechanicals (ages 14-17).

'A Christmas Carol' Choir Program

Since 2005, GLT has incorporated a Pre-Show Choir and Ensemble Program into their annual production of *A Christmas Carol* at the Mimi Ohio Theatre. Over 200 choirs have participated in the past 18 years by welcoming and entertaining up to 1,000 guests as they enter. In 2022, eight community choirs and ensembles with a combined total of 234 singers and artists performed eight pre-show concerts.

This program invites local choirs and ensembles to perform approximately 20-25 minutes of holiday selections before performances of *A Christmas Carol* at the Mimi Ohio Theatre, Playhouse Square. Choirs and ensembles of all backgrounds, ages, and experience levels are welcome to participate – from school ensembles to church choirs, college and professional groups, and beyond. All participating performers and the program director each receive a complimentary ticket to enjoy the performance of *A Christmas Carol* after they perform.

AWARDS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS

- 1977 – Awarded membership in the League of Resident Theaters
- 1985 – Name changed to Great Lakes Theater Festival
- 2002 – Great Lakes Theater Festival and Idaho Shakespeare Festival (Boise, Idaho) began production alliance
- 2005 – Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award for Excellence in Theater
- 2006 – The Free Times Readers Choice Award for Best Performing Arts Group
- 2008 – Fundraising campaign of \$19.2 million allowed GLT to move to the historic Hanna Theater in Playhouse Square
- 2009 – \$14.7 million grant received from the Kresge Foundation in addition to donations from honorary campaign chair and past GLT intern Tom Hanks
- 2010 – Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival joined production alliance
- 2011 – Great Lakes Theater dropped the “Festival” from its name
- 2012 – 50th Season celebration (over 300 productions) and gala at the InterContinental Hotel & Conference Center

Great Lakes Theater has been mentioned in BroadwayWorld, TIME Magazine, Plain Dealer, FOX 8 News, News 5 Cleveland WEWS, Cleveland.com, and Cleveland Scene.

GOVERNANCE (AS OF 2022)

President: William Caster

Chair: Samuel Hartwell

Secretary: Elizabeth A. Grove

Treasurer: Kathleen Kennedy

Total Board Members: 44

GLT’s Executive Committee comprises the President, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and 15 other board members. They have 13 Life Trustees. The Board’s role in the organization has changed over time, beginning with artistic advisement and accounting and transitioning into hiring, board member recruitment, and financial contributions and oversight. In the early 1960s, the Board was tasked with looking for office space in Playhouse Square to prepare for their move to the Ohio Theater. This prepared them to shift from day-to-day operational tasks to big-picture responsibilities involving the organization’s development and sustainability. One of GLT’s Board’s strengths is stability and continuity during key staff transitions and budget emergencies. They are also generous financial contributors and community advocates for fundraising campaigns and upcoming productions. Founding trustees and new Board members all share a love for theater, and Board members participate in strategic planning and administrative initiatives.

LEADERSHIP



Producing Artistic Director: Charles Fee

Named Producing Artistic Director of Great Lakes Theater in 2002, Charles Fee has brought a dynamic and groundbreaking producing model for GLT and its Idaho and Nevada partners, in which more than 60 plays have been shared since 2002. A proud graduate of the University of the Pacific (Bachelor of Arts) and the University of California, San Diego (Master of Fine Arts), Charles serves as the Producing Artistic Director for GLT, the Idaho Shakespeare Festival in Boise, Idaho (since 1991) and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival in Incline Village, Nevada (since 2010). From 1988 to 1992, he held the position of artistic director at the Sierra Repertory Theatre in California. He has also worked with The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, the Milwaukee and Missouri repertory theaters, Actor's Theatre of Phoenix and the Los Angeles Shakespeare Festival. In 2009, Charles was honored to receive recognition for his leadership by the Cleveland Arts Prize as a recipient of the Martha Joseph Award. Other awards include The Mayor's and Governor's awards for Excellence in the Arts, Idaho.



Executive Director: Richard M. Parison, Jr.

Richard M. Parison, Jr., joins Great Lakes Theater as its new Executive Director with over 30 years of experience as an arts leader and theater producer in the non-profit regional theatre field. Prior to coming back to Great Lakes Theater, Richard was the Director of Arts and Culture for the City of Hampton, Virginia, for nearly ten years. There, he reinvigorated the cultural arts program for the Coastal Virginia city to include the creation of an award-winning education program and the genesis of a new municipally funded Public Art Program. Richard also oversaw renovating and opening a new 150-seat Cabaret & Jazz Studio Theatre in their historic American Theatre venue.

Richard has additionally held leadership positions at the historic Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, working alongside esteemed CEO/President Bernard Havard; Barrington Stage Company in the Berkshires as Producing Director; and CEO/Executive Director of Richmond Center Stage, now Dominion Arts Center, Central Virginia's premiere Performing Arts Center. Nationally and regionally, Richard has served as a panelist or board member for the Virginia Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Hampton Roads Regional Cooperation Consortium, the Philadelphia Theater Alliance, the National Alliance of Musical Theatre and Theatre Communication Group (TCG). A recipient of the Philadelphia PEW Fellowship for Emerging Leadership in the Arts, Richard earned his BFA in Theatre/Arts Administration from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He pursued concurrent MA coursework in Theatre History and Directing.

Associate Artistic Director: Sara Bruner

Managing Director: Todd Krispinsky

Interim Production Manager: Jaclyn Miller

Great Lakes Theater currently employs 26 staff members and 9 actor-teachers for their education programs.

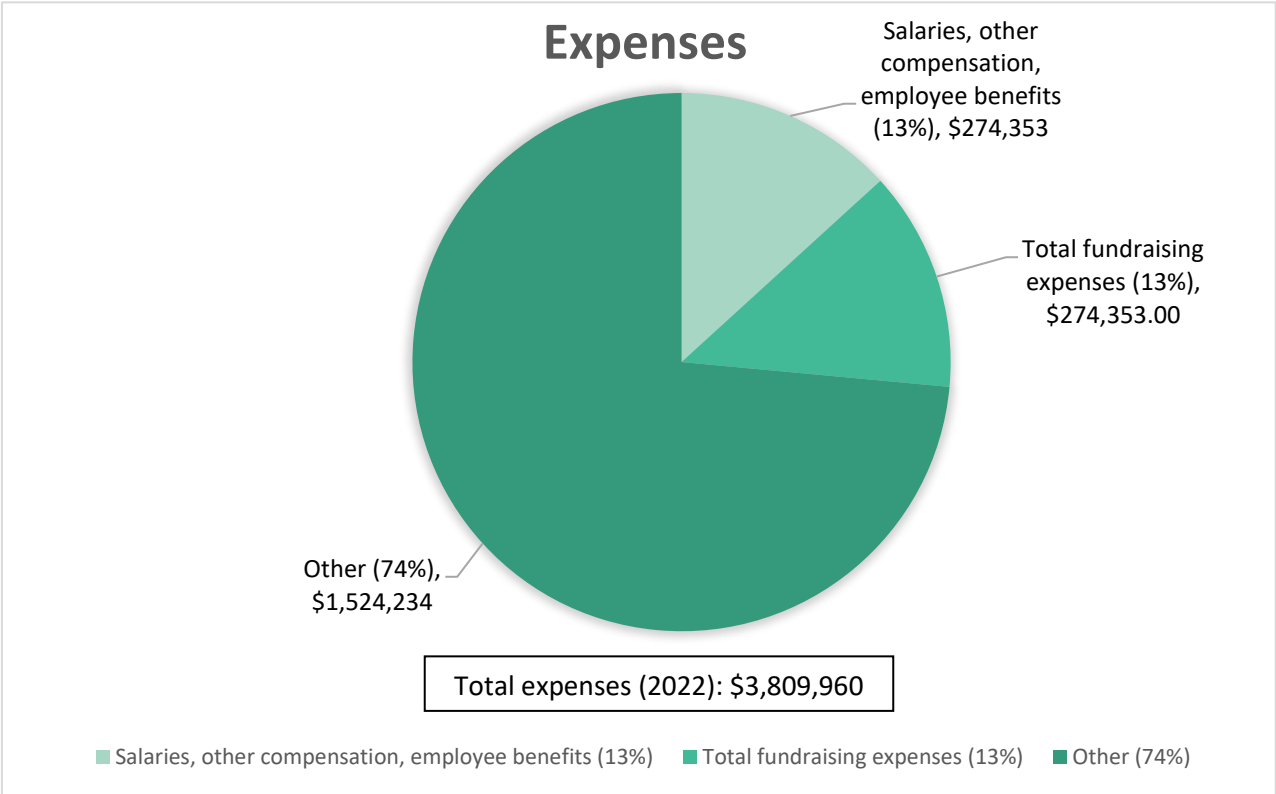
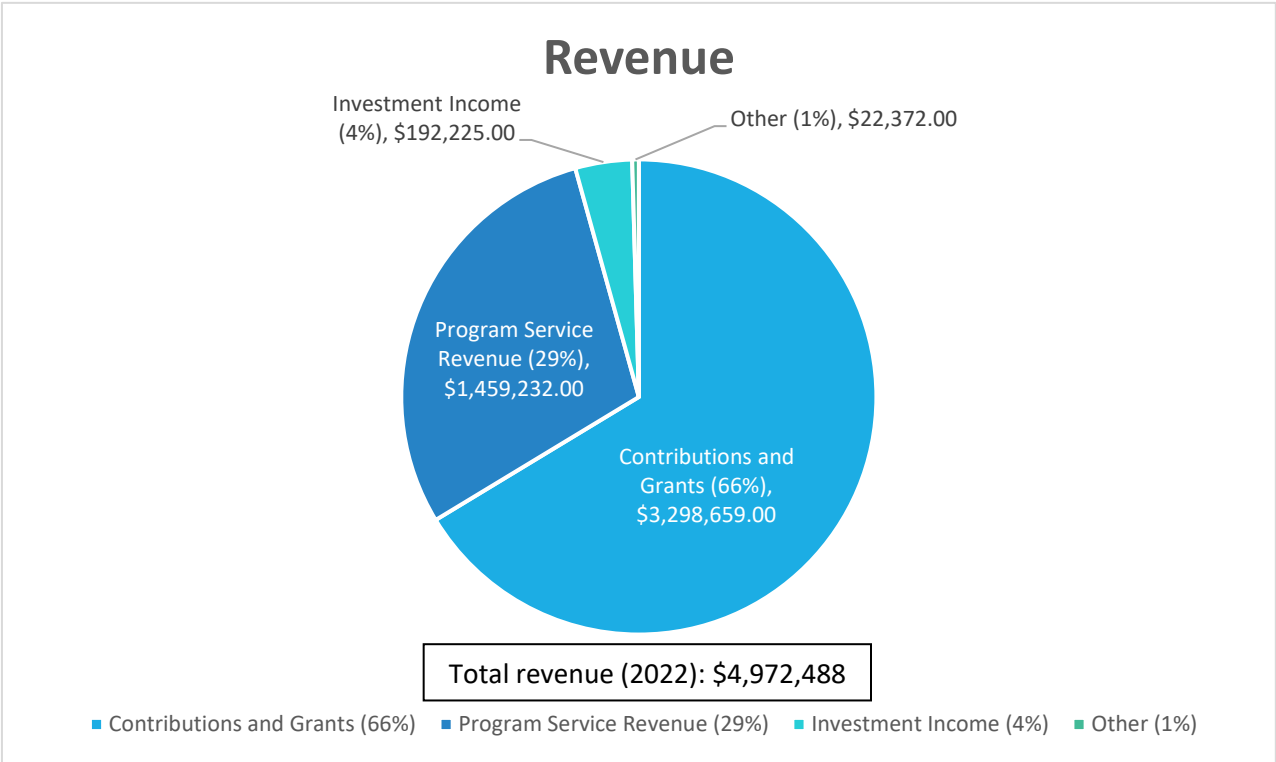
COLLABORATIONS

Great Lakes Theater has a unique and advantageous producing alliance with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival in Boise, Idaho, and Incline Village, Nevada, respectively. Since 2002, these collaborations have helped Great Lakes Theater maximize returns on organizational investments, increase production efficiencies, create long term work opportunities for artists, and share best practices in the performing arts. The three independent 501(c)(3) regional theaters have created multi-city employment opportunities for artistic company members for over a decade, resulting in notable growth for each company.

Another significant collaboration is GLT's frequent partnerships with the Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music's Music Theatre program. Spearheaded by GLT and BWMT program director Vicky Bussert, GLT regularly casts BW students and performing arts faculty to grant equity credit and present external performance opportunities. The theatre and students alike benefit from the strong ties between these thriving, talented organizations.

Other essential collaborators include Playhouse Square (utilization of the Mimi Ohio and Hanna Theatres), Brook Park Elementary School (classroom space for their annual summer youth theatre camp), and Cleveland Metropolitan School District (student matinees, residency programs, student and teacher discounts, and more; see [Program Summary](#)).

BUDGET



Revenue-Expenses(Net Profit)(2022) = \$1,162,528

KEY FUNDERS

Great Lakes Theater is proudly funded by:

- Cuyahoga Arts & Culture
- Ohio Arts Council
- George Gund Foundation
- David and Inez Myers Foundation, a supporting foundation of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland
- The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation
- Community Foundation of Lorain County
- Shakespeare in American Communities: National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest
- The Reinberger Foundation
- Cleveland Foundation
- Fifth Third Bank
- FirstEnergy Foundation
- Kulas Foundation
- John P. Murphy Foundation
- John & Barbara Shubert
- Arthur L. Thomas

Review Great Lakes Theater's 990s:

[2022](#)

[2021](#)

[2020](#)

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Competitor	Strength	Weaknesses
Playhouse Square (KeyBank Broadway Series)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting theatre with more well-known and current shows • More venues • Bigger audiences, sponsorships, and funding capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musicals only, no plays • Presenting, not producing • More expensive tickets
Cleveland Public Theater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producer of new works • Contemporary theatre • Internal, community-specific companies • Choose-What-You-Pay ticket pricing • Social justice based youth education programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose-What-You-Pay ticket pricing • Smaller annual operating budget
Beck Center for the Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More varied educational program offerings (including year-round youth theatre) • Less expensive tickets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located away from downtown Cleveland (Lakewood)

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Factor	Pro	Con
Financial/Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant and consistent recovery from COVID-19 deficit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nation-wide recovery of performing arts from COVID-19 and international political conflicts
Trending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive reviews for <i>Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of summer seasons and productions at partner organizations
Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impending local “Curfew Law” could increase participation in educational programming and outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Election and Presidential Election within the next 13 months
Local Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playhouse Square recently unveiled new marquees, including the Mimi Ohio and Hanna Theatres Recent HR concerns at Cleveland PlayHouse reduces their influence as a competitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in GLT’s organizational leadership



Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Former Executive Director Bob Taylor announced his retirement from GLT in October 2022, ending his service to the theaters in July 2023. Taylor served as Executive Director for the three independent theater companies for two decades, and he was succeeded by Richard M. Parison Jr. at the end of the summer. Richard's appointment in 2023 marks two joyous homecomings as he returns to his hometown in Northeast Ohio and the regional theater that launched his professional career. While Parison is not new to GLT and its partners, this change in leadership may present new challenges for the organizations. Read the official press releases [here](#).

CONCLUSION

Since its inception in 1962, Great Lakes Theater has brought professional programming to over 100,000 people in the Northeast Ohio region. Rooted in Shakespeare and classical theatrical works, the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire. GLT's success can be attributed to its strong and experienced staff and board and strategic producing alliance with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival. From the historic Hanna and Mimi Ohio Theatres in Playhouse Square and through community outreach, Great Lakes Theater seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives.

