

Venues encourage patrons to call state leaders

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"Quite honestly, if we just had a target date; if they could tell us that we'd be opening Jan. 1 or Feb. 1 or March 1, and here's your capacity; that would be wonderful because then we could start putting together a business plan and we can have shows booked and put tickets on sale. There would be patron confidence that it's going to happen and (the public) would say 'We'll support the arts again.' But the fact that there's just no plan in place is the really frustrating part here."

While the Riviera has some capabilities to show films, Fillenwarth says such a plan wouldn't be feasible. Beyond acquiring film rights, theaters can only have a maximum of 50 patrons, something that isn't much of a problem for a multi-screen cinema, but is not conducive to the Riviera's limited stage space.

In the absence of a state provided plan, Fillenwarth says the theater worked with Niagara County to develop its own plan, which they have sent to state officials for approval. The Riviera's plan – which calls for 50% capacity, required masks, temperature checks and social-distance seating measures – mirrors other state-approved guidelines for comparable businesses.

"We've done everything that they've asked. We've gotten the MIRV 13 air filters; we've waited for them to flatten the curve. We've been patient. We've done our due diligence and gotten everything approved by the Niagara County Health Department. The



most frustrating thing is we lay that all out there and try to get an answer from them and they don't even respond to us."

The Riviera isn't the only local theater in the dark. A recorded message for the Ghostlight Theatre has a pointed message explaining a similar situation. It states: "Here is what happened – we had gotten some guidance from the New York COVID-19 hotline regarding low-risk indoor arts and entertainment and protocols for operating a haunted house. We

had talked to several people – who couldn't have been nicer – and we were under the impression that if we used masks, had less than 50 people, followed social distancing and had plenty of hand sanitizer on hand, that we could proceed. It was indeed unsettling to find out that that was not the case. It is a confusing time for everyone and the North Tonawanda and county people have been very helpful and sympathetic to our dilemma. When we get a definite go-ahead, it is our intention to present our season."

Local theaters aren't the only ones fed up with the state's inaction. Recently, city and county officials were joined by New York State Sen. Robert Ort for a highly publicized press conference outside the Riviera, calling on Albany to act. Since then, Niagara County Legislator Jesse Gooch created lawn signs urging residents to reach out to Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul. The Lawn signs are available for a cash donation of \$20 and can be purchased at the Riviera box office on Wednesdays and Thursdays between noon and 3 p.m.

Now, North Tonawanda city officials are imploring residents to step up their efforts. On Tuesday, the Common Council passed a resolution spearheaded by Alderman-at-Large Robert Pecoraro urging residents to call and write to Albany.

"We implore all North Tonawanda residents to consider calling Gov. Cuomo, or Lt. Gov. Hochul, at 1-518-474-8390, or write them at: The Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo, governor of New York state, NYS State Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224.

"Additionally, you can also complete an online form at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/goveor-contact-form>," the resolution states.

"I want a call to action and I need everybody's help with that. They'll not only be helping the Riviera, but it helps the Ghostlight and other local theaters around like the North Park Theater (Buffalo) and the Aurora Theater (East Aurora) and the

Rapids Theater (Niagara Falls) etc. that need the guidance of what they can do to open," Pecoraro says.

Residents are also encouraged to donate to the Riviera directly via its website www.rivieratheatre.org. However, Fillenwarth says the best donation right now is the time it takes to contact state officials.

"Of course we always welcome donations, but more than that we really want people to voice their frustration and support us by delivering the message to Albany: Please acknowledge that independent theaters need to reopen. I mean, from a mental health aspect alone, people need an escape. They need two hours to free their minds, and live entertainment and concerts are so beneficial to that state of mind. We need people to stand up and help us be heard as we really need," Fillenwarth says.

He was quick to note that what's at stake isn't just a few jobs and a nice building. Rather, Fillenwarth says it's the area's culture, historical identity and connection to the arts that are truly on the line.

"This thing is such a treasure here," Fillenwarth says of the theater. "The building has been here for 94 years and it's so important that future generations enjoy the arts. I mean, the people who work here; we're just keyholders right now. The industry itself is going to really fall apart unless we try to save some of this going forward. It's so important to really keep the arts alive, and that's really what we're fighting for."

Kevin Nephew named president & CEO at Seneca Gaming Corporation

The Seneca Gaming Corp. board of directors announced Kevin Nephew, an executive with decades of financial leadership experience, was named the corporation's president and CEO. His appointment, which followed an extensive search, was officially approved by the board earlier in the day.

As president and CEO, Nephew will oversee the operation and performance of Seneca Gaming Corp.'s three casino properties – Seneca Niagara Resort & Casino in Niagara Falls, Seneca Allegany Resort & Casino in Salamanca, and Seneca Buffalo Creek Casino in downtown Buffalo. The facilities collectively employ more than 2,700 workers and attract millions of visitors each year.

Nephew joined Seneca Gaming Corp. in 2014, most recently serving as vice president of organization improvement and development. In that role, he successfully developed and launched a company-wide continuous improvement program, focusing on process improvement and delivering improved customer service and profitability across the organization. To date, more than 1,000 Seneca Gaming Corp. employees have been trained on con-

tinuous improvement principles, which have provided savings and efficiencies to the corporation. He previously held the roles of executive director of continuous improvement and director of budget and financial analysis.

"We have seen Kevin's leadership and commitment firsthand over the past six years and we have every confidence in his vision for leading Seneca Gaming Corporation and our three world-class properties," said Dr. Lori V. Quigley, chairwoman of the Seneca Gaming Corp. board of directors. "As an executive and a colleague, Kevin has demonstrated an ability to inspire positive operational and philosophical change throughout the corporation for the benefit of our stakeholders, including our guests, our more than 2,700 team members, and the Seneca Nation. The board looks forward to working collaboratively with Kevin to fulfill our shared goals for Seneca Gaming Corporation."

Prior to joining Seneca Gaming Corp., Nephew spent 22 years working in a series of finance positions with New York state, including 15 years as director of financial administration for the New York

State Office of Technology, as well as roles with the New York State Department of Tax and Finance and the New York State Division of Budget.

An enrolled member of the Seneca Nation's Wolf Clan, Nephew becomes the first Seneca Nation member to lead the corporation in its 18-year history.

"I am incredibly humbled by the board's confidence in my ability to lead Seneca Gaming Corporation forward," Nephew said. "I know well the passion and dedication our team members bring to their jobs every day, and how that resonates in the service they provide to our guests. I also know the important role our properties play for our team members, for our community, and for the Seneca Nation. Those perspectives will help guide my leadership in continuing to strengthen our operations and make Seneca Gaming Corporation and our three properties leaders in our industry."

"The Seneca Nation is very proud to see one of our members earn this important opportunity," added Seneca Nation President Rickey Armstrong Sr. "When we opened the doors at Seneca Niag-

ara nearly two decades ago, it was a milestone moment in our history and a monumental turning point for the future of our people. Not only will Kevin have the opportunity to make a lasting, positive impact on our Seneca economy, he is also setting a positive example for our Nation's younger generations."

Nephew is a graduate of Bucknell University and earned an MBA from Columbia University. He holds Kaizen training certification in continuous improvement and is currently pursuing Lean Six Sigma management certification.

In addition, Nephew is an adjunct professor at Medaille College and is a member of the Seneca Nation investment board of directors.

David Sheridan, Seneca Gaming Corp.'s CFO, who has served as interim CEO since the spring, will resume his CFO duties.

"David did a remarkable job leading the company through the unimaginable circumstances brought on by the global pandemic," Quigley said. "The board is grateful to him, and we look forward to David continuing to be a key member of our management team."

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