

Penumbra Theatre Company Successfully Completes New Era Campaign and Fifth Consecutive Year in the Black

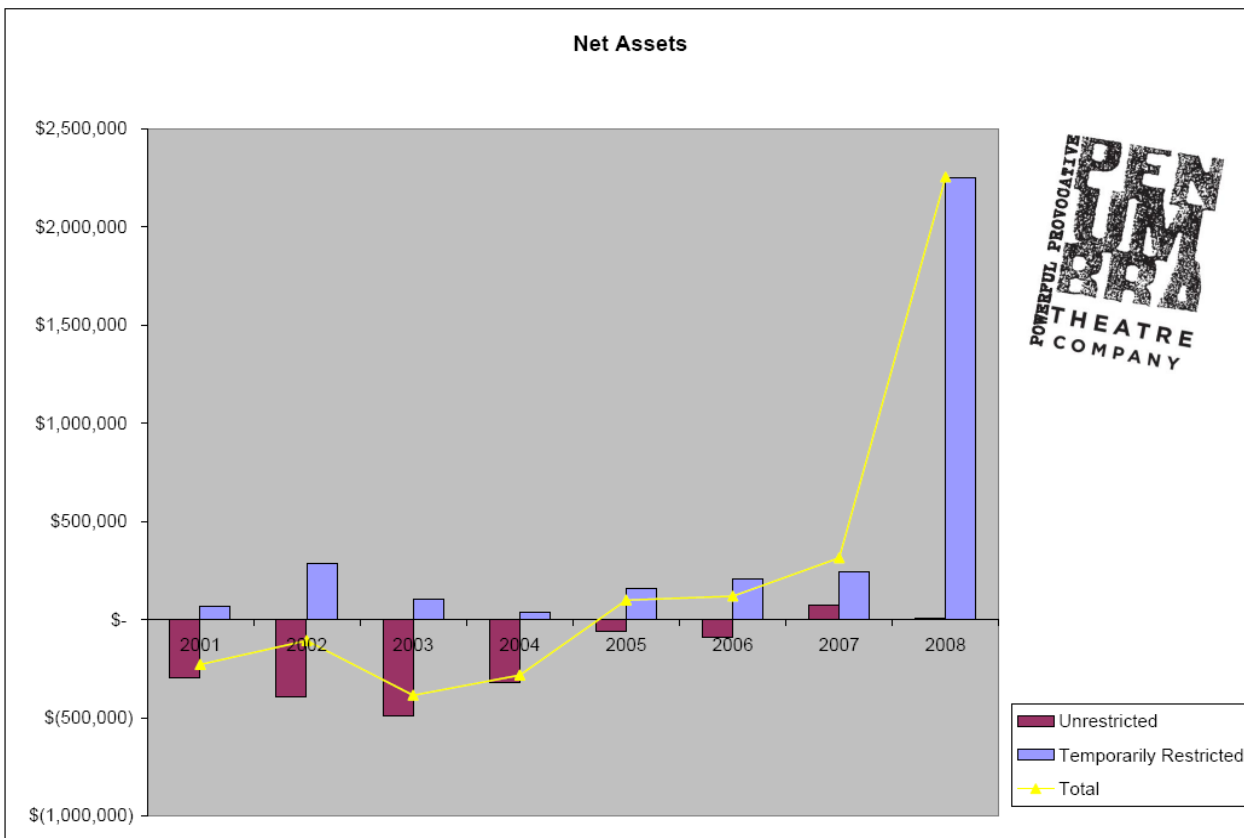
December 29, 2008 – Saint Paul, MN – Penumbra Theatre Company, one of the nation’s preeminent African American theaters, announced its fifth consecutive fiscal year in the black, and the successful completion of its first major campaign, which raised more than \$3 million of extraordinary general operating support.

“On the heels of Penumbra’s four-year restructuring that eliminated \$600,000 of debt, this infusion of funding will allow Penumbra to continue its current five-year transition plan from a lean model to a robust and sustainable organization,” said Phyllis Goff, Penumbra Board Chair and New Era Committee Co-Chair. “Recognizing the uncertainty we all face given the economy, we appreciate the strides we continue to make on our arduous journey, and are, now more than ever, confident that Penumbra will be good stewards of the community’s investment.”

FIFTH YEAR IN THE BLACK

Fiscal accomplishments in 2008 were dramatic due to pledges from the New Era Campaign as reflected in the increase of temporarily restricted funds:

- Total contributions increased from \$1,294,023 to \$3,274,842;
- Total revenue increased from \$823,011 to \$860,889; and
- Total net asset balance increased from \$773,576 to \$2,632,169.



NEW ERA CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

The New Era plan was designed to ensure a successful transition from a debt elimination model to a sustainable organization. In order to accomplish this goal within five years, the plan required an infusion of \$2.9 million of extraordinary operational support. The New Era Campaign was launched in January 2007 to raise these special funds and exceeded the goal by June 30, 2008. It was Penumbra's first successful major campaign.

"Penumbra's campaign is truly a testament to the community's support and desire for Penumbra to thrive and exist for many years to come," said Pat Donovan, New Era Committee Co-Chair and President of Bremer Financial. "In just 18 months, the committee and I worked hard to raise funding to support the priorities over the transition and are proud to have been a part of such an ambitious venture." (*See list of New Era Committee members following the release.*)

The campaign funded the following goals of the New Era plan:

- Establishment of a working capital fund to provide internal bridge financing and to be responsive to marketplace opportunities: \$600,000
- Expansion and retention of its donor base to ensure sustained funding: \$620,000
- Implementation of an artistic succession plan that ensures continued representation of an authentic African American experience: \$180,000
- Development of a formal education and outreach program to promote racial understanding: \$300,000
- Production of the entire *20th Century Cycle* by August Wilson: \$500,000
- Acquisition of more working room to accommodate new staff and patron services: \$700,000

"It was a busy first year. In addition to raising the campaign money, Penumbra hired additional artistic and administrative staff including Dominic Taylor as Associate Artistic Director; seeded a working capital fund with \$250,000, and negotiated a lease for additional space in the Hallie Q. Brown Center with renovations to be completed by June 2009," said Chris Widdess, Managing Director, Penumbra Theatre Company.

REFINED AND EXPANDED ARTISTIC PROGRAMS

During restructuring, Penumbra eliminated its new play development program and reduced its education programs to one component, Summer Institute. The infusion of New Era funds enabled Penumbra to fully articulate its mission of art for social change. "Now more than ever, we are increasing and focusing the impact of the main stage through education programs that provide rich context for adults and students, and at the same time, we are developing talented new playwrights that will seed great American art for years to come," said Lou Bellamy, Founder and Artistic Director.

Main Stage & Beyond

On its main stage for the 2007-2008 season, Penumbra co-produced and premiered *REDSHIRTS* by Dana Yeaton with Round House Theatre of Bethesda, Maryland where it was also presented. Penumbra launched its commitment to produce two plays from August Wilson's *20th Century Cycle* each year with *The Piano Lesson* and *Gem of the Ocean* (which was presented at the Guthrie Theater.) And the re-conceived *Black Nativity – Twenty Years of Holiday Cheer!* maintained its reputation as a holiday tradition.

Over the last three years, demand for Penumbra's commitment to authentic African American representation reached new levels, creating numerous opportunities around the country. Bellamy directed Wilson's *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theater in New York City in December 2006, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* at Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. in March 2007, and *Radio Golf* at Kansas City Repertory in September 2008. Penumbra has co-produced *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansbury with the Cleveland Play House and Arizona Theatre Company in honor of its 50th anniversary of opening on Broadway. This will be presented at the Guthrie Theater in March 2009.

Education & Outreach

Under the direction of Sarah Bellamy, Education Director, Penumbra has rebuilt its education and outreach programs to better articulate the mission and extend the impact of the main stage – to activate and translate the art into social change. In 2007, the newly restructured Summer Institute attracted the attention of the Surdna Foundation which identifies

programs with the potential to become national models. Surdna awarded a three-year \$150,000 grant to continue its efforts for more quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

Penumbra launched its RACE Workshops in 2007 to support the *RACE: Are We So Different?* exhibit at the Science Museum of Minnesota. The workshops were so successful that the Science Museum tapped Penumbra to support the *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* exhibit in 2008. Demand for the workshops was immediate. Macalester and St. Thomas brought the workshops on campus in 2007; Central College in Des Moines, Iowa raised funds to bring the workshops down for a week-long series in October 2008; and the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS) featured the workshops at its national conference in Saint Paul in November 2008 for its 230 schools from 13 states.

New Play Development

Dominic Taylor, Associate Artistic Director, launched an original new play development program in May 2008 thanks to the support of the Jerome Foundation. The OKRA African Diaspora Theater Development Process is committed to developing new plays through an approach that uses the traditional ideals of artistic reinvention and discovery specific to the cultures of African peoples. Emerging playwrights work with actors, directors and designers who can apply the dramatic tools necessary to the development of new work without focusing on commercial constraints. The new play development process consists of four programs:

- Play submissions
- *That's Cold* is a monthly closed reading series
- *Word(s) PLAY!* takes fully-texted plays through a week of development with visual and musical artists and culminates with a performed reading.
- *The GYM* is both a testing ground and a collaborative space, where an idea can be developed.

Two plays from the first *Word(s)Play!* were selected for further development by other theaters after its development at Penumbra: Zakiyyah Alexander's *Etymology of Bird* was produced at Providence Black Rep; and Keli Garrett's *Space* was given a staged reading at the New York Theatre Workshop. Marcus Gardley's *Road Weeps, The Well Runs Dry* is under consideration at American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco.

SEASON PRESENTORS

The 2008-2009 season is proudly presented by the Star Tribune, Minnesota Monthly.

###

The New Era Campaign committee comprised of past and current Penumbra board members, and senior executives, including:

- *David Abrams, Vice President, North Memorial Health Care*
- *Mary Brainerd, Chief Executive Officer, HealthPartners, Inc.*
- *Dick Cisek, Richard M. Cisek Associates*
- *Patrick Donovan, President, Bremer Financial*
- *Roxanne Givens, Principal Designer, ethnicHome*
- *Phyllis Rawls Goff, community volunteer*
- *Terry Devitt, community volunteer*
- *Beckwith Horton, retired Chief Executive Officer, Microtron, Inc.*
- *Reatha Clark King, retired President, General Mills Foundation*
- *Barbara Lupient, retired Chief Executive Officer, Lupient Enterprises*
- *Mike Monahan, Vice President, Ecolab, Inc.*
- *Frank Sims, Corporate Vice President, Cargill*
- *Stew Widdess, President, The Widdess Group*