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Governor McAuliffe Announces New Virginia Tourism Growth Fund Project at the Historic Masonic Theatre

~The celebrated Clifton Forge performance hall will receive \$150,000 towards enhancements and restorations~

RICHMOND - Governor Terry McAuliffe announced today that the second recipient of the Virginia Tourism Growth Fund (VTGF) will be the Historic Masonic Theatre in Clifton Forge. Opened as an opera house and Mason Hall in 1905, the Theatre has hosted legendary acts such as Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Burl Ives, the Drifters, and the world-famous Count Basie Orchestra. The celebrated performance hall will receive \$150,000 in state funds toward a comprehensive historic renovation and enhancement. Total costs for the proposed project are estimated to be \$6.45 million. VTGF is a Virginia Tourism Corporation program established to grow tourism development projects across the Commonwealth.

Speaking about today's announcement, **Governor McAuliffe said**, "Growing our tourism industry is an essential strategy for diversifying and building a new Virginia economy. In 2014, visitors to Virginia spent \$22.4 billion, which supported 217,000 jobs and contributed \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes. It is critical that our destinations have the infrastructure in place to welcome travelers from around the nation and the world. The redevelopment of this performance hall is key to the revitalization of this historic community that boasts so many unique tourism assets. This project will help the region continue to attract businesses and visitors by serving as a catalyst for long-term employment opportunities and ongoing economic revitalization."

The Historic Masonic Theatre is the oldest operating theater in Virginia. The Theatre still retains most of its original 1905 design elements, and it is being upgraded with many performance and audience comfort improvements that will bring this historic performance space into the 21st century. In addition, this comprehensive renovation includes the refurbishment of the former third floor Masonic Lodge room into an elegant Community Room and the transformation of the industrial lower level into a more casual performance and event space with a view of "underground Clifton Forge." Both of these spaces will provide the community with much-needed event venues and will be available for social, civic, and business use.

This project will fill a significant void in area entertainment and attractions by providing a multi-use facility that will present a variety of live performances and select films targeted to draw both day and overnight visitors to the Alleghany Highlands, as well as offering meeting and event venues for business and social functions. The project is also expected to create jobs in the area, including one full-time job and three part-time jobs in the first year. Additionally, construction jobs created from the proposed project are expected to total four full-time hires and 90 crew members. The project is expected to enhance local tax revenue through meals and lodging collections.

“The Historic Masonic Theatre’s comprehensive renovation will help attract more visitors to Clifton Forge, bringing good-paying jobs and important local tax revenue,” **said Maurice Jones, Secretary of Commerce and Trade.** “Projects like this are essential for growing the economy, and make our downtowns and Main Street communities more attractive to residents, businesses, and visitors.”

“The enhancements to the Historic Masonic Theatre will not only benefit visitors to Clifton Forge, but also afford substantial advantages to regional businesses and partners,” **said Delegate Terry Austin.** “This multi-use facility will help drive business to local restaurants, retail establishments and lodging. But it will also benefit our schools, arts organizations, Main Street and numerous other partners in our community. Reviving the Theatre to its former glory is an extraordinary gain for Clifton Forge, Alleghany County and the Virginia Mountains region as a whole.”

“The restoration of the 1905 Historic Masonic Theatre has not just saved Virginia’s oldest, longest operating theater from slipping into irretrievable ruin, as this project is so much more than just a historic renovation project. It is about our community rising to the challenge to redevelop an existing asset into what will be the cornerstone of an already progressing arts, culture and tourism-based redevelopment effort in the Alleghany Highlands,” **said Meade Snyder, President of the Masonic Theatre Preservation Foundation.** “In short, we feel that this project will yield a much broader return on investment to the Alleghany Highlands community than just at the box office, and we are so very pleased to have the support of the Virginia Tourism Corporation as a strategic partner in this important community endeavor.”

“We are very appreciative of this grant award and the impact it will have on the completion of the Masonic Theatre’s renovations,” **said Teresa Hammond, Executive Director of the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce.** “In addition to bringing arts-related performances to the community, a renovated Masonic Theatre will generate a significant economic impact by drawing visitors to the area that will shop in our retail stores, eat in our restaurants, stay in our lodging establishments and visit the nearby attractions while in the area. A first-class performance venue will allow the Theatre to recruit premier talent, thereby expanding the base from which we draw visitors. It will also serve as a venue for meetings, conferences and group travel, and those visitors will be able to enjoy the many amenities that the Alleghany Highlands has to offer.”

The grand re-opening of the Theatre is scheduled for the weekend of July 2, 2016, which will coincide with the 111th anniversary of the laying of the Theatre’s cornerstone.

The VTGF helps grow tourism development projects, including new or expanded facilities, as well as venues for lodging, recreation, entertainment, and epicurean, cultural, or destination retail products and services designed to attract travelers to the Commonwealth. Both nonprofit and for-profit

private-sector businesses are eligible to apply. VTGF grant awards cannot exceed 15 percent of project cost, and there is a minimum 1:1 locality match of the VTGF grant award. The project must create net new jobs, and public financing cannot exceed 30 percent of project cost.

For more information on the Virginia Tourism Growth Fund, [click here](#).

- See more at:

<https://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/newsarticle?articleId=14558#sthash.kHS0sOIR.dpuf>