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The historic Players Playhouse, located at 3321 E. Jefferson Ave. in Detroit, is home base for the Players, the Theatre Arts Club and the Fine Arts Society of Detroit.  
Photo provided by Lisa Lechniak

## Historic Players Playhouse story is center stage

By: Maria Allard (/reporterbio/maria-allard) | Grosse Pointe Times

(<https://www.candgnews.com/newspaper/grossepointetimes>) | Published November 16, 2018

DETROIT — In 1911, a group of men from the Detroit area with a love for amateur theater put their talents together to create the ideal atmosphere for their monthly performances.

They called themselves the Players, and while the men got along, the problem was they needed to find a new stage every month on which to perform their shows, according to the website [www.playersdetroit.org](http://www.playersdetroit.org).

Fourteen years later, in 1925, fellow Players member and architect William Kapp, of the then Smith, Hinchman and Grylls firm — now the Smith Group — designed a building in a Florentine Renaissance style that became the historic Players Playhouse. The building at 3321 E. Jefferson Ave. in Detroit opened circa 1926.

Since that time, the historic Players Playhouse has become the ideal home for the Players, and it also recruited two other groups: the Theatre Arts Club and the Fine Arts Society of Detroit. While the Players is only open to men, the Theatre Arts Club is an all-women's theater group, and the Fine Arts Society of Detroit is open to men and women. All groups have members of all ages from Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties.

The building — which includes a formal meeting room, a four-story stage, state-of-the-art digital lighting, a sound booth, a lobby bar and more — has become such a special place for many that it has made its way to the Detroit Historical Museum for an exhibit.

Artifacts from the historic Players Playhouse will be on display inside the Robert and Mary Ann Bury Community Gallery at the Detroit Historical Museum, located at 5401 Woodward Ave. in Detroit.

The exhibit opened Oct. 25 and will continue until either Jan. 6 or Jan. 13, 2019; an exact date for closing has not yet been determined.

Players member and Berkley resident Ed Priebe coordinated the exhibit, which features photographs, playbills, costumes, flags and banners, stage props, newsletters and a timeline of major events in the Playhouse history. Priebe went back through the inventory of the Players Playhouse to find the items to showcase at the Detroit Historical Museum.

One exhibit highlight is the collection of caricature drawings of the Players theater productions over the years. Priebe said there are anywhere from 500 to 600 caricatures to date, and digital copies were created to display many of them at the museum exhibit. Visitors also will get a chance to see a replica of the historic Players Playhouse's interior.

The Players members get together every month for a meeting, known as a frolic.

"At each frolic we do three one-act plays," Priebe said.

And the members — clad in black tie — enjoy dinner afterward. At the end of each theater season, the Players pick three of their best one-act plays to perform for the general public.

"We're part of the history of Detroit. It's a great honor for our club to be in the Detroit Historical Museum," said Tom Sloan, a Grosse Pointe Woods resident who is the current Players president. "(The Playhouse) is one of the best-kept secrets."

Sloan has been a member for 15 years.

"I had never been onstage before. I enjoy everything about it," he said. "It's the fellowship of the group. We're all friends."

Katherine Baetz is the Fine Arts Society of Detroit president. The Fine Arts Society of Detroit was founded in 1906 by leaders of the community who wanted to bring together professional and amateur lovers of the arts.



(<https://www.galeanasvandykedodge.net/>)



In the group's early days, members initially met in their homes. When the Players Playhouse opened in the mid-1920s, the Fine Arts Society of Detroit found a new home. The Fine Arts Society of Detroit performs three plays from November to May. Group members also meet for parties, social events and other outings.

Lisa Lechniak is the president of the Theatre Arts Club, and Kim Czasnojc is the vice president. The Theatre Arts Club presents two shows per year: one in the fall and one during the spring. The members act, direct and work backstage on each show. The Theatre Arts Club also holds fundraising events during the year.

For Lechniak, of Warren, the best part of being involved in the group is "the people."

"Once you start and become a member and help out in different aspects, everyone becomes your friend there," Lechniak said. "All the people have fun. It's a good outlet."

For more information on the Fine Arts Society of Detroit, visit [www.fineartsdetroit.org](http://www.fineartsdetroit.org)

For more information on the Theatre Arts Club, visit [www.theatreartsclub.com](http://www.theatreartsclub.com).

To reach the Detroit Historical Museum, call (313) 833-1805 or visit [detroithistorical.org](http://detroithistorical.org).

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