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Mayor's message: Ocean State Theatre Co. plan to open new 420-seat theatre

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The Ocean State Theatre Company (OSTC), a non-profit entity which five years ago brought new life to the state's historic Theatre By The Sea, has announced its plan to open a new 420-seat theatre in Warwick.

The facility, at 1245 Jefferson Blvd., is a former telecommunications company headquarters that will be converted into a modern performance venue and headquarters for OSTC staff. The company will continue to stage performances at Theatre By The Sea, but the building's seasonal nature meant it could not meet the OSTC's goal of offering year-round productions to its patrons. Having the "sister spaces" will allow them to keep the favorite summertime destination operational while expanding cultural offerings in Rhode Island year-round.

Construction is slated to begin this month, with principal construction completed by October and plans for a holiday production in December and a truncated 2013 season.

The company took its first steps toward expansion last summer with the launch of Camp OSTC, a two-week theatre camp for elementary and middle school students as well as an expanded performance schedule.

At the announcement, OSTC officials and I were joined by representatives of the Central Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, whose president and CEO, Lauren Slocum, called OSTC's move to Warwick a fantastic addition to our arts and cultural community. The Chamber, she said, is thrilled with the positive impact the development will have on local businesses such as restaurants, hotels and surrounding retailers and in drawing a new audience to our community. (Of note: according to 2010 survey by the Theatre Communications Group, non-profit theatres such as OSTC contributed \$1.9 billion to the national economy.)

The move, in fact, is also expected to have a direct job-growth benefit, with 17 seasonal jobs turned into full-time positions and three new, full-time positions created within its first year.

Further, the project also in keeping with the vision of the Warwick Station Development District Master Plan, which guides redevelopment of the 95 acres surrounding T.F. Green Airport into a mixed-use, live/work, pedestrian-friendly area.

Amiee Turner, OSTC's producing artistic director, called the timing "ideal" and noted the exceptional support the project has received from the city and the business community. "We feel very welcome already," she said.

We know that the OSTC will be a great asset to our community. Our Department of Tourism, Culture and Development will continue to work closely with OSTC to build upon the good working relationship we have developed and to help ensure their future growth and continued success.

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick.