

# A 96-Year-Old Gem

An Interview with Michael E. Moran, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer, Stamford Center for the Arts

**EDITORS' NOTE** Mike Moran is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Stamford Center for the Arts which features the iconic The Palace Theatre ([palacestamford.org](http://palacestamford.org)) in Stamford, Connecticut. He joined the Center in October 2000 after having served as the Director of Operations for Crown Theaters for five years. Moran attended the University of Maine.



Michael E. Moran, Jr.

and welcome some 85,000 patrons from all over Connecticut and Westchester County, New York. In the next couple of months, you can see humorist David Sedaris, the king of late-night Greg Gutfeld, great family selections Blippi or iLuminate, holiday classics Rudolph the Musical and The Nutcracker, comedian Dane Cook, and rising country star Alana Springsteen who *PEOPLE* applauds as “the future of country music.”

**How do you define the mission of The Palace Theatre?**

The Mission of Stamford Center

for the Arts' Palace Theatre is to entertain, educate, and enrich the diverse population of the greater Stamford community. We are a 501(c) (3) and invite charitable contributions in order to carry out this mission. The arts really need to be accessible to all, including those who are under-resourced and people with disabilities.

**What have been the keys to the strength and leadership of The Palace Theatre?**

Collaboration and relationships. I have had the good fortune of working in downtown Stamford for over 35 years. Over that time, I have met

**Will you highlight the history of The Palace Theatre?**

The Palace Theatre is a 1608-seat Thomas Lamb designed venue that was acclaimed as “Connecticut's Most Magnificent” when it opened in 1927. It was restored in 1983 for live theatre, opera, dance, comedy and concerts. Multiple improvements have seen all new seating, state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment, and an expanded lobby space with accessibility to the entire building. We have presented Diana Ross, Tony Bennett, Jerry Seinfeld, Trevor Noah, and Kidz Bop to sold out audiences. We host over 100 performances annually in multiple genres



A close-up view of the chandelier in The Palace Theatre (above); the iconic entrance to The Palace Theatre (top right)

several enthusiastic people that understand the importance of arts and culture in our community. Providing world-class entertainment and a state-of-the-art venue allows us to be “the” center for the arts. I have listened, learned, and surrounded myself with passionate and talented professionals.

**Will you highlight The Palace Theatre's commitment to arts education?**

As arts education seems to be continually underfunded, we hope to inspire, challenge, and engage through our arts education programs. We envision a vibrant and diverse community where every person is empowered through self-expression to embrace arts education and a lifelong appreciation of the performing arts. The Palace offers programs that energize by creating opportunities that build confidence, instill passion, and transform lives.

**What do you see as The Palace Theatre's responsibility to be engaged in the community it serves?**

It all relates back to the mission. The Palace is a valuable resource to the community. We don't get a lot of recognition for the enrichment portion of that mission, but it's truly important. The Palace



has hosted a broad variety of events and we offer the space without a rental fee for some functions. Last year, the Stamford Police Department had their pinning ceremony here to honor 11 officers who received promotions and Mayor Simmons was here to swear them in. For the past two years, we've hosted a "Super Soul" party on Super Bowl Sunday for people experiencing homelessness. This event features nourishing food, haircuts, clothing drives, resources for social and housing services, the big game, and most importantly, human connection. We host JM Wright Technical School's graduation, and just last week we hosted Blue Sky Ukraine for a Ukrainian Independence Day concert.

**How valuable has it been for The Palace Theatre to have such an engaged and committed board?**

Our dedicated volunteer board is amazing. They understand the importance of governance and fundraising. The board is committed to the mission and are very supportive of our role as a nonprofit. These ambassadors to the arts come from the most well-respected regional businesses. They share their experience and expertise, and provide a wealth of knowledge. They open a vast network of professionals for us when consultation is needed.

**How do you focus your efforts leading The Palace Theatre?**

I have learned the importance of communication and meeting people where they are. Not everyone has the same personality. Not everyone is motivated by the same things or at the same level every day. Ask questions, listen, and be genuinely interested. Allow everyone the opportunity to be creative and challenge them to be better. Give them the tools they need to succeed. I recently took the three youngest members of our staff to lunch because I wanted them to share what's important to them, how they perceive our company, and what their friends and family think about us. They truly appreciated that experience. Be opportunistic, be willing to try new things, set a good example, and say "thank you."

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?**

My path to the current role of President and CEO was entirely via promotion from within. Although stories say I started here as a janitor, that is just fiction. I started as the Box Office Manager and have worked alongside my colleagues for many years. In addition, I watched the path taken by five Executive and Artistic Directors before me. I think that afforded me a fantastic opportunity to gain valuable experience in both programming and in discovering leadership styles that worked and others that did not. The staff and board all have a seat at the table and therefore everyone can feel like part of the organization.

**What are your priorities for The Palace Theatre as you look to the future?**

Naturally, we'll continue to bring the best possible shows and events to our stages. We'll also look to invest in our facility. The Palace is a 96-year-old gem. I would like to see continued renovation in this building so that when we celebrate the 100th anniversary in 2027, it will be an example to theatre operators everywhere of the beauty of these amazing spaces. ●



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*A view from the stage of The Palace Theatre (above); a sold-out performance at The Palace Theatre (top)*