



When Neil Lange purchased the 1926 Historic Riviera Theatre in 1989, it was a dark, dirty, dingy movie house. Plaster was falling from the organ chambers and auditorium and lobby ceilings. Many seats were broken and threadbare, and the Mighty Wurlitzer needed work.

Category: Stewardship
Riviera Theatre
North Tonawanda, New York

By year's end, volunteers from the community, responding to a massive appeal—for what's a theatre without seats?—completely stripped, repainted, and reupholstered two rows at a time until all 1,152 seats were restored, often donating the materials needed.

The following year, volunteers also repaired the falling plaster, painted the lobby, replaced missing floor tiles, and repaired and repainted the marquee, on which more significant work remains to be performed by professionals.

In 1992, the work of painting the auditorium walls began with paint donated by the Roe-Bisonite Company of North Tonawanda and labor donated by four volunteers who

worked in their free time over a period of four years. Only the ceiling was painted by professionals. Volunteers also rewired and computerized the Wurlitzer theatre organ, which has since been restored to 1926 specifications.

With constant repair and rehabilitation essential to maintain this movie palace, the Riviera operates as a rental theatre, offering live shows and movies attracting a wide demographic audience.

Preservation Buffalo Niagara is pleased to honor the Riviera Theatre—its owner and the volunteers who over the years restored it to use—for the dedicated stewardship that has enabled it to celebrate a 20th anniversary renewed and continuing to significantly impact the community.