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North Country crowdfunding at the Colonial a success

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BETHLEHEM—The Colonial Theater recently completed a \$53,000 online fundraiser that speaks to its strong support in the North Country and beyond.

The modern Colonial opened its doors in 2001, and in the 16 years since, has rapidly expanded. Executive Director Steven Dignazio said that the theater has come of age, and is currently pushing toward its last major investment goal.

The majority of donations came from the

north country region, but donors from as far off as Scotland and Japan chipped in from across the sea. The online platform Kickstarter has allowed the theater to look beyond Bethlehem.

This is the Colonial's second Kickstarter—the first raised \$17,000 (with a \$12,000 goal). The extra thousands were used to hire architects to plan the Next Century project.

Dignazio said that he chose Kickstarter, rather than competing crowdfunding services, because at the time it

was by far the most successful and well known. Other sites, like Indiegogo, take a smaller percentage but are thought to have less broadcasting power.

"They do a great job of promoting your project," Dignazio said of Kickstarter, which charges a fee of 8 percent of all money raised.

Previous fundraising campaigns have relied on e-mailing lists—for which the Colonial maintains a record of some 3,500 individuals.

The Kickstarter campaign
COLONIAL, PAGE A15



COURTESY

On Oct. 8, ten different religious groups along with locals joined together on the lawn of the Littleton Community Center to remember the lives of those lost in the Las Vegas massacre on Oct. 1.

COLONIAL

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1)

campaign ran for 60 days (the typical limit that the site imposes), and gathered a total of 185 backers both large and small. More than half of the project's contributors donated \$150 or more.

The most popular amounts and awards were a pair of free tickets (\$50 or more) and a commemorative plaque (\$150 or more). A dozen backers pledged \$500 or more, and four backers made the \$1500 commitment to earn a private party during the 2018 season.

A gold season pass, good for two tickets to every event in the 2018 season, was not enough to induce anyone to make the necessary \$5,000 maximum donation.

In general, the rewards for donating had a ticket price about 20 percent of the minimum amount (for example, a \$250 donation got you a \$45 membership). In other words, the rewards definitely sweeten the deal, but most of the donation goes to the project.

Dignazio explained

that digital fundraising is a way to expand the theater's base of support. While the generosity of regular subscription members is a key revenue stream, it skews local and older. The other part of the Colonial's friends, who tend to be seasonal (if loyal) visitors and somewhat younger on average, tend also to be more digitally-connected. Online platforms like Kickstarter, Facebook, and Instagram have allowed the theater to expand its fundraising and media outreach to that group.

The Next Century Capital Campaign has totaled about \$650,000, with another \$50,000 still to go. The expansion will include additional bathrooms and a year-round office.

Dignazio said that the money was raised "one thank-you note at a time," and attributed its success to seventeen years of building social capital in the community.

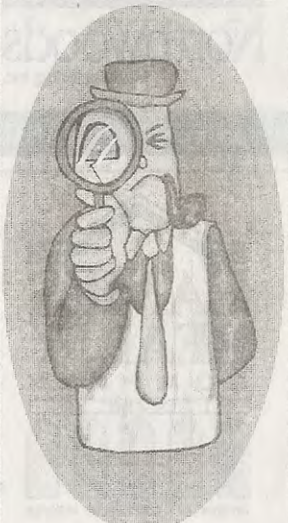
He also explained that about 80 percent of the project needs would be raised before going to the public for additional

funds. He said having a well-designed plan, and being persistent through social media and email, were keys to success.

"Bugging people daily is tedious, but necessary," he explained.

He also pointed out that an online campaign can gain steam quickly, and achieve exposure well beyond the geographic range of a traditional fundraiser. Once the word gets out online, support comes rushing in from ear and far—so long as the organizers stay focused and keep the ball rolling.

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