The Sheldon Theatre entertains, educates, and enlightens the community and its visitors through the transformative power of the performing arts.

Overview of the Sheldon Staff:
The Sheldon, at full strength, consists of 5 full-time staff members, along with 12 casual employees who, during normal programming, work in Front of House (box office, lobby management) and backstage. Core staff includes Interim Executive & Artistic Director Jeff Larson, Associate Director- Marketing & Communications Brenda Stewart, Director of Production Russell Johnson, and Audience Services Manager Leah Adams. Development Director Jennifer Staley departed the Sheldon to become the Executive Director of Spark Place for Play in late December. That position’s tasks have been divided among remaining staff until the theater reopens post-pandemic.

Accomplishments in 2020:
Rapid and Responsible COVID-19 Adjustment
When the Sheldon was required to close in March, we immediately instituted policies for clear communication with artists and patrons, speedy and hassle-free refunds for ticketholders, and priority rebooking for acts scheduled during the closure. Maintaining a balance of optimism and prudence, we kept the Sheldon ready to open at short notice, while continuously adjusting our calendar and working with Public Works and risk management to develop procedures and building upgrades to keep our patrons and artists safe.

Careful Financial Management
2020 was guaranteed to end the Sheldon’s 5-year streak of sustained financial growth, but with careful stewardship and constant adjustment to realities during the pandemic, we were able to reduce costs and reach two outcomes we’re intensely proud of: 1. The Sheldon will end 2020 with a small budget surplus, even with the loss of 9 months of ticket revenue. 2. We kept our core staff fully employed and hard at work during the shutdown. This will allow us to reopen at full strength without a search for new arts professionals that can be difficult to find in small communities, and with months of strategic planning and venue maintenance and improvements behind us.
Making the Sheldon a Better Citizen
With our own position secure, the Sheldon staff and board looked outward during the pandemic and asked “how can we help?” The theater is a large open space ideal for public use with social distancing. We worked with officials on plans for the Sheldon as a backup council and commission meeting space, and hosted 3 blood drives with the Red Cross on our stage. As we look beyond COVID, we’re reaching out to other nonprofits in Red Wing to diversify our programming and spread the word about orgs that enrich life in our community. Aware of our unique place as a city-owned venue, we spent the COVID hiatus developing strategies to make sure the Sheldon is a space where everyone in Red Wing feels welcome.

Free Community Education and Outreach, in New Forms
In partnership with the Red Wing School District, Sheldon staff created a new weekly arts program for K-6 students, consisting of interactive video arts lessons and interviews with artists for students to view at home or in the classroom. This program will continue throughout the 2020-21 season, and generous support from RWSD and donors in Red Wing have allowed us to pay over two dozen artists for their participation, maintaining the Sheldon’s place as a leader and economic driver in the Minnesota arts community.

The Sheldon Was the Star of its Own Story
While the Sheldon was closed for conventional onstage performances, staff explored ways for the theater to continue to be a vibrant arts center and draw the community to downtown Red Wing. In October 2020 we commissioned the outdoor projection mapping project “Burning Down The House”, which used the façade of the Sheldon as a canvas to tell the rich history of the theater, and created the indoor history exhibit “Rise from the Ashes”, a collection of artifacts and images of the Sheldon’s past and various iterations as a vaudeville house, movie theater, and live arts venue.

Staffing Transitions
In late 2019, the organization completed a comprehensive staffing study with support of a consultant, aimed at reorganizing duties to meet the larger operating reality we are now in. This resulted in recommendation for addition of 1.6 FTEs in 2020, and a new organizational chart. These positions have been added, and excellent candidates were hired and fully onboarded despite remote work requirements due to the pandemic. The Sheldon also began a search for a new Executive Director after Bonnie Schock’s departure in early 2020. That search is paused, with Interim Executive Director Jeff Larson contracted to remain until the search can reopen and a permanent ED hired.

SUMMARY
Today, the Sheldon is in a financial and artistic position that is the envy of performing arts venues across North America, ready to reopen and able to look ahead to future growth in audience size, community impact, and artistic ambition. This is due, in part, to the unique and vibrant public-private partnership which leverages support and enthusiasm from diverse stakeholders. The result is a Sheldon that is moving confidently into bolder, still more impactful
programming that sets it and Red Wing apart as a leader in small-town, Midwest performance presenting.