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2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT

GREAT PLAINS THEATRE COMMONS

FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of GPTC,

When I sat down to write this in the twilight of our 20th GPTC New Play Festival, I was feeling exhilarated, exhausted, and most importantly, filled with hope.

2025 has proven to be a difficult climate for many individuals and organizations, and GPTC is no exception. As you may already know, when our most recent NEA grant was awarded in late 2024, we were one of a handful of award recipients to be featured on the NEA website for our work, from among more than two thousand groups. It was a proud day, to say the least.

Just a few months later, our grant was stripped before it was funded, due to our programming "not aligning with that of the new administration." Our financial picture and our collective morale both suffered devastating blows.

However.

We became more resolute than ever. The board met quickly to reaffirm our commitment to telling diverse new stories. We agreed not to back down from our mission or the language we use to describe what we do. We got to work. Planning, making calls, trimming budgets, raising money, moving forward. Banding together under the certainty that art can change the climate, bring healing, and affirm our belief in the power of story and humanity.

If there is one thing that is certain in life, it's that there will always be uncertainty. That has never been more true for the arts, but what is also true is that we shall persevere.

We could not still be here today without the support, kindness and generosity of you, our GPTC family.

I ask today that you continue to keep us in your heart and mind as we navigate this new normal and work even harder to bring our programming to the community at a time when I believe it is needed more than ever. I ask that you continue to support GPTC however you can, financially, emotionally, and through your participation.

Thank you, on behalf of the Board of Directors, from the bottom of our hearts. We are still here for you, and because of you.

With gratitude and awe,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane Watson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small flourish at the end.

Diane Watson
GPTC Board President





FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Dear GPTC Friends,

What a milestone – we have closed the book on our 20th anniversary year.

For two decades, with your help, we have been proud to fulfill our mission: to strengthen community by supporting the creation and sharing of diverse new stories, in so many vibrant ways.

But this past season wasn't just a year of celebration. It was also a year of challenges that, with your help, we continue to meet.

GPTC, like many of our colleagues, sustained ideological attacks from the current administration, represented by the loss of federal support. It was the local generosity of our community that sustained us and helped us to keep our doors open. And it is from you that we continue to draw our strength as we prepare for ongoing challenges.

I know that many of us feel lost, overwhelmed, and paralyzed with sorrow and anger as we find ways to work together to preserve the pillars of our democratic society. The need for connection and kindness only becomes stronger.

It is just at moments like this when our mission takes on extra strength and our work becomes infused with new meaning. The compassionate sharing of stories has the power to transform isolation, fear, and ignorance, into empathetic understanding and enlightened action. We have seen this happen again and again over the past two decades, and we have exciting plans to share powerful new stories with all of you as we move into the new GPTC year.

This report shares the impact of our 20th year. You will see moments of joy, courage, and authenticity that were made possible by your support and your participation. We can't wait to welcome you back to a new GPTC season of adventure and imagination, kindness and compassion – and courage.

Thank you for being a part of the GPTC community.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

With warmth and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to be 'K. Lawler', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kevin Lawler



MISSION & VALUES

OUR PURPOSE: At GPTC, we believe that the stories we share as a community infuse and shape the social and cultural connections that bind us together. We create spaces and pathways to the sharing of diverse stories, authentically told by those who experience them. In this way, GPTC cultivates a more just and equitable community for all.

VISION: Compassionate, vibrant communities that are nurtured and strengthened through storytelling.

MISSION: The mission of the Great Plains Theatre Commons is to strengthen community by supporting the creation and sharing of diverse new stories.

VALUES:

- **Cultivation** – we support the development of new stories and new artists
- **Community** – we foster growth and strength by listening, creating, and sharing vital stories that represent all of us
- **Access & Inclusion** – we feature publicly presented works of art created with diverse audiences to our community at no charge
- **Creativity** – we enrich lives through artistic expression and imagination
- **Education** – we engage professional, community, and school-age storytellers in workshops designed to build confidence and storytelling skills

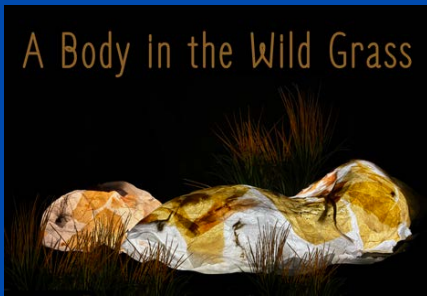
OUR CONSTITUENTS – GPTC serves theatre artists, community members, and partners who share our vision. We prioritize artistically underserved and otherwise marginalized sectors of our community.

OUR PHILOSOPHY – we explore the many ways that stories create community and community creates stories.



2024 - 2025 GPTC COMMONS SEASON RECAP

Three free-to-the-public productions of new work for Omaha audiences.



A BODY IN THE WILD GRASS by Kevin Lawler Directed by Mary Beth Easley

World premiere
Workshop presentation at Yates Illuminates
November 13-14, 2024

2 performances
101 in-person attendees
10 streaming attendees

In this beautiful script by GPTC Artistic Director Kevin Lawler, storytelling, poetry, and puppets combine to illuminate the joys, memories, longings, and dreams that arise during the liminal time at the end of one's life. Each performance included a post-show panel of palliative care professionals.



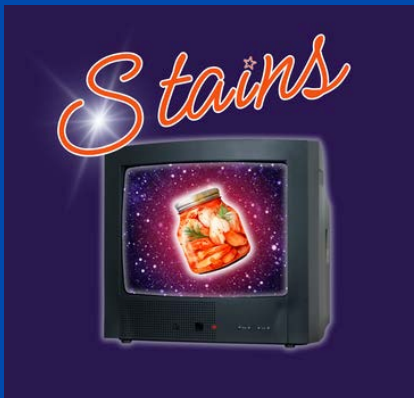
STUCK WITH LEMONS by Marie Schuett Directed by Amy Lane

World premiere
In partnership with Shelterbelt Theatre
February 13 – March 2, 2025

12 performances
364 in-person attendees
15 streaming attendees

Developed through the GPTC playwriting program, The Commoners

A wise, funny, and acerbic play about family ties and tribulations. When Emma and Cate announce to Emma's conservative Midwestern family that they are expecting their firstborn child, the Lemons must find a balance between honoring tradition and celebrating growth.



STAINS by Sarah Cho Directed by Rebecca Wear

Regional premiere
Workshop presentation at Yates Illuminates
May 28-31, 2025

3 performances
300 in-person attendees
28 streaming attendees

Developed as a PlayLab at the 2022 GPTC New Play Festival

A coming-of-age comedy about growing up poor, female, and Korean American in late-1990s Los Angeles, STAINS moves from grounded reality to flights of adolescent fancy while exploring a painfully awkward rite of passage.



by Kevin Lawler

A BODY IN THE WILD GRASS



by Marie Schuett

STUCK WITH LEMONS



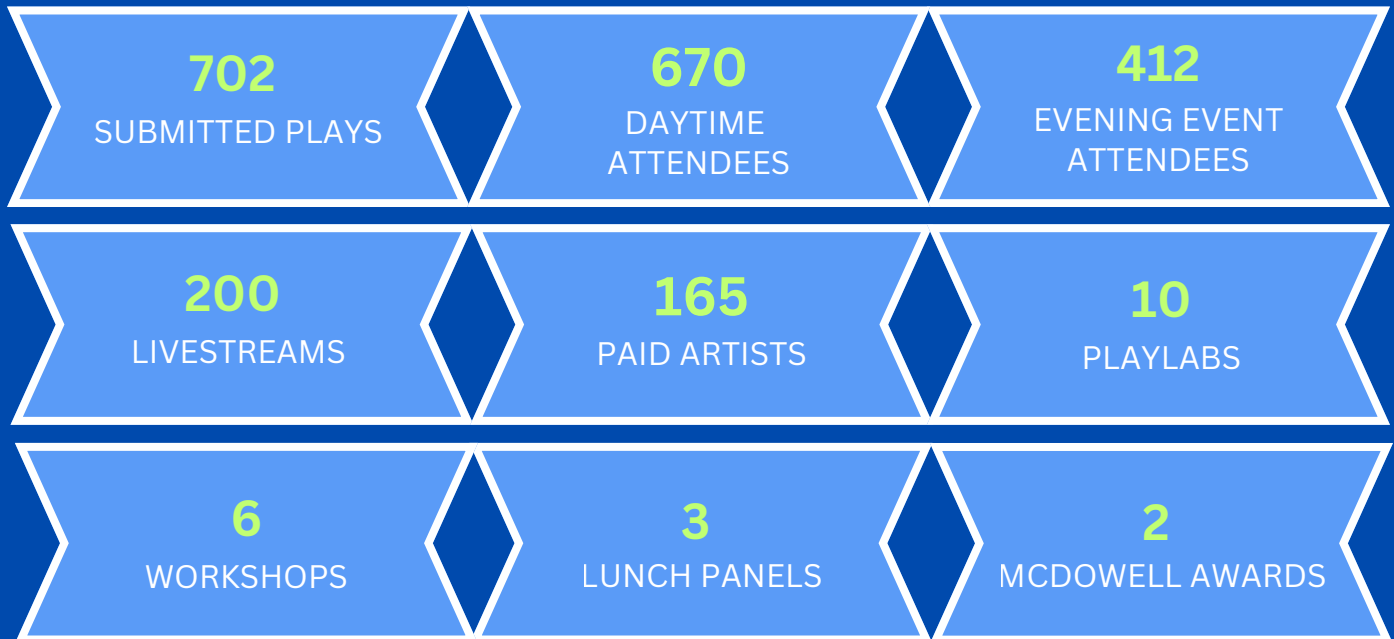
by Sarah Cho

STAINS

THE 20TH ANNUAL NEW PLAY FESTIVAL

In the last decade, the country has lost some of the premiere developmental programs for American playwrights, from the Sundance Theatre Lab to the Lark Play Development Center. But the Great Plains Theatre Commons has boldly soldiered on, offering writers an unparalleled chance to master their craft. Now more than ever, it is indispensable.

- Doug Wright (Pulitzer & Tony Award-winning playwright)



GPTC celebrated 20 years of new play development with an extraordinary week of staged readings and performances, story-sharing, workshops, panel discussions, and communal gatherings. The 20th annual New Play Festival was held May 25–31, 2025. Theatre artists and theatre lovers came from throughout the region and across the country to share in the uniquely powerful experience of developing new work, learning new aspects of their craft, and discovering new creative connections that will last a lifetime.



“Scribbling conversations in a notebook is a solitary, absurd obsession. GPTC creates a gorgeous space to connect with similarly afflicted playwrights, experience their singular work, and begin what I suspect will be long-lasting friendships. The GPTC team makes it look easy, but this only happens with grit, kindness, and close attention.”

-Chad Kaydo, 2025 PlayLab Playwright

Each spring, something incredible happens in the Heartland. For 20 years, theatre artists from all over the country have converged in Omaha, Nebraska, for the Great Plains Theatre Commons New Play Festival, which is dedicated to the development of 10 exciting new scripts, selected from hundreds of submissions from across the nation.

Local and national playwrights, actors, directors, dramaturgs, designers, and theatre-lovers share a week of stories, workshops, staged readings, performances, celebrations – and exceptionally good food. All Festival events are free, and all participating artists are compensated for their time and talent.

- The daily PlayLabs are staged readings of each selected script, offering playwrights valuable insights into their developing work. Each playwright works with a director, a dramaturg, and a cast of talented performers to bring the PlayLab before live and streaming audiences and hear their feedback afterwards.
- Theatre workshops and luncheon panels led by national, regional, and local theatre artists offer opportunities for professional growth and reflections on the current state of theatre and its role in our world.
- The Design Wing brings five emerging designers from across the country to immerse themselves in the play development process and share their vision from a visual perspective.

The artists we invite are distinguished, nationally known playwrights, directors, dramaturgs, actors, and designers. Many are recognized at the highest levels, including Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize, and Academy Award nominees and winners. These guest artists join GPTC in nurturing and mentoring new and emerging playwrights and guiding Festival attendees through the workshops, PlayLabs, and luncheon panels that make the week such an enriching experience. Over the course of 20 years, the Festival has helped launch the careers of Relentless, Pulitzer, Tony, and Academy Award nominees.

“For one week, the GPTC creates an enclave of the American theatre’s past and future. This is a week of discussion, questioning, reading, commiserating, yes — but really a week where we prove that theatre in this country lives, and lives, and lives.”

-Michael Quinn, 2025 Alternate PlayLab Playwright



2025 - 2026 GPTC COMMONS SEASON PREVIEW

A season of free contemporary theatre premieres for Omaha audiences.

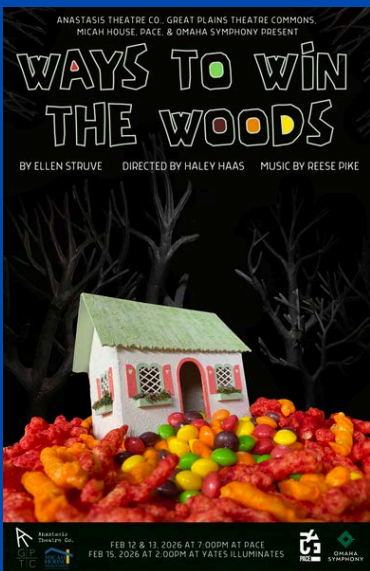


LOOKING-GLASS by Kevin Lawler

Directed by Kimberly Clark-Kaczmarek | Music by Jim Schroeder

World Premiere Co-Production with the Ollie Webb Center, Inc.
October 17 at 7:00pm & October 19 at 2:00pm
Scottish Rite Center, 202 S. 20th Street, Omaha, NE

GPTC Artistic Director Kevin Lawler spent 18 months with the Ollie Webb Center's Art of Imagination program, which empowers, develops, and encourages self-expression in adults with disabilities through professional opportunities in the arts. Using the beloved books, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There" by Lewis Carroll as a starting point, Lawler's script will be designed, produced, and performed by an ensemble of artists living with and without disabilities. When people of all abilities work together towards a shared goal, the result is a more just and compassionate community that appreciates the value of each individual. *GPTC is grateful to Cecilia Poon and Georg Getty and Michael and Nancy Getty for their generous sponsorship of this production.*



WAYS TO WIN THE WOODS by Ellen Struve

Directed by Haley Haas | Music by Reese Pike

World Premiere Co-Production with Anastasis Theatre Co., Omaha Symphony, PACE, and MICAH House
February 12 & 13, 2026 at 7:00pm at PACE, 1001 S. 6th Street, Council Bluffs, IA
February 15, 2026 at 2:00pm at Yates Illuminates, 3260 Davenport, Omaha, NE

This original script is a powerful collaboration between GPTC, Anastasis Theatre Co., the Omaha Symphony, PACE, and MICAH House, which provides a safe, supportive environment for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. Emerging from story-sharing workshops at MICAH House conducted by GPTC and Anastasis, **WAYS TO WIN IN THE WOODS** will reflect the lived experiences of women navigating homelessness through the lens of the familiar fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. Featuring an original score and musicians from the Omaha Symphony Forte initiative for selected performances, the play will provide a springboard for conversations between performers and audiences about what it means to be homeless and how we can effect meaningful change together.



BEING BLACK OUTSIDE by Vinecia Coleman

Directed by Denise Chapman

Rolling World Premiere Co-Production with the Union for Contemporary Arts
May 27-29, June 4 - 14, 2026
The Union for Contemporary Art's Shirley Tyree Theater, 2401 N. 24th Street, Omaha, NE

Sisters Vee and Niecy return to their childhood home after their mother dies -- just in time for the end of the world. As the Apocalypse begins, and the sisters remember the past and debate the future, they meet their mother's neighbor and are forced to contend with what it means to be Black...outside.

Developed as a PlayLab for the 2024 GPTC New Play Festival.



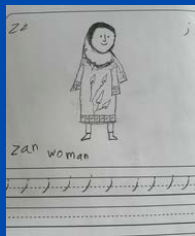
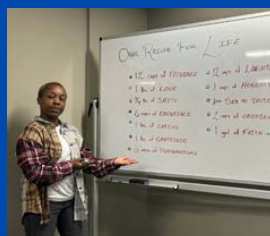
2025 GPTC COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

GPTC's Community Programs are how we inspire and support local emerging artists and community members to share their diverse stories.

GPTC has offered community arts programming from our home base at Yates Illuminates since 2022. We share this space with other community service organizations in the heart of the Gifford Park neighborhood that place an emphasis on serving immigrant and refugee populations. As the only arts organization in the space, we are uniquely positioned to create an artistic continuum where everyone in our community has an artistic home at any stop along their journey. We have developed programs with a specific curriculum that serve emerging and established artists, as well as community workshops and story circles that flexibly engage our audiences wherever they may meet us. More than 70% of the individuals served in 2025 were representative of the global majority.



COMMUNITY CREATIVITY & STORYTELLING



WORKSHOPS & STORY CIRCLES

In collaboration with community partners, GPTC encourages everyone (especially individuals who may not identify as artists) to share their stories. Workshops take many forms and explore all facets of theatre arts.

Bimonthly bilingual arts workshops with Familias en Acción include textile arts, acting, singing, 3D art, paper arts, painting and construction projects. In 2024 - 2025, these classes varied in size from 15 to 52 women and children, nearly all of whom identified as Hispanic. Artists supported included one lead community artist and several guest artists who offered their expertise and provided instruction in visual and theatrical arts. For example, calligraphy artist Jenn Waltemath worked with participants to create beautiful signs for their homes that celebrated families in their home languages.

We also worked to provide monthly workshops with Refugee Women Rising, where GPTC's Community Connector worked with Refugee Women Rising staff to identify artists from Omaha's refugee community to lead workshops. This year GPTC helped celebrate Narwhuz by providing drums for singing and dancing and eggs for decorating. Mezghan Halim partnered with Community Connector Ellen Struve to lead an ABC Book project with Refugee Women Rising. Women met to illustrate and create bilingual alphabet books as a way to engage women on a wide spectrum of literacy from those learning to read to those with master's degrees.

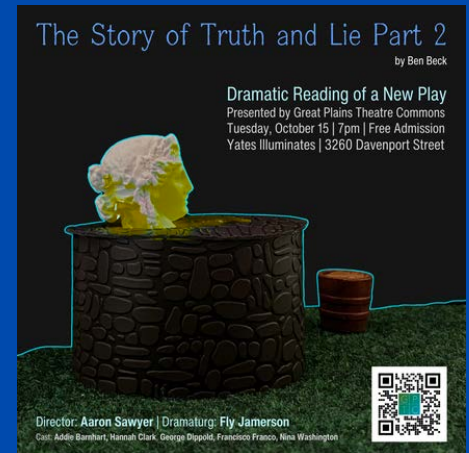
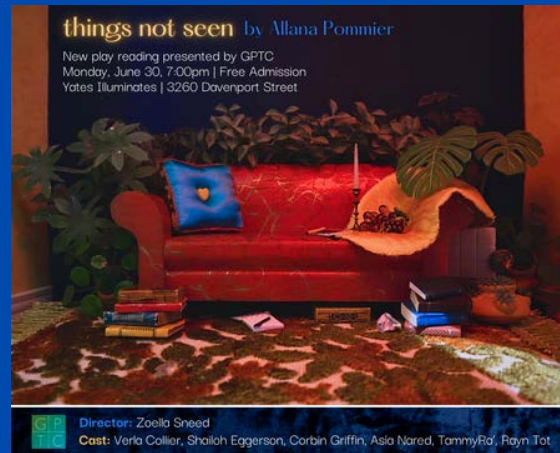
GPTC returned to MICA House with Anastasis Theatre to host story circles and arts workshops in preparation for its *WAYS TO WIN THE WOODS* production. Composer Reese Pike set participants' words to song and co-facilitator Doriette Jordan helped lead discussion.

STORIES OF O

We invite our community to gather in-person to share sustenance and great stories on the last Sunday evening of each month at Yates Illuminates. These regular, informal gatherings build community connections, create opportunities for dialogue, and promote shared understanding. This year, we added singer/songwriters to the evening, which expanded the ways in which stories are shared.



PLAYWRIGHT DEVELOPMENT & EARLY EXPLORATION PROGRAMS



GPTC is committed to an ecosystem for a thriving local artistic sector, thus enriching Omaha for all residents. To facilitate that, we offer powerful professional development opportunities for emerging and established playwrights that support the creation and eventual production of new work.

COMMONERS

This is a two-year residency for Omaha and Omaha-adjacent playwrights to grow the support, community, and connection they need to launch their stories into the world.

PLAY BY MAY

This program supports individuals who are committing to writing a full-length play for the first time. Writers commit to bi-weekly meetings over a three-month period.

SILENT WRITE

The second Tuesday of the month invites area writers to share space in a productive, creatively conducive environment.

YOUNG DRAMATISTS

Working to support and develop high school playwrights with mentoring, workshops, meetings with professionals, and guided access to the New Play Festival.

Great Plains Theatre Commons was able to host three separate new play readings by its Commoners Cohort (a writing group of produced area playwrights). These new scripts were introduced to Omaha audiences through public readings at Yates Illuminates. The cohort was also able to have a writers' retreat at the Willa Cather Foundation in Red Cloud, Ne and theatre artist Denise Chapman brought her expertise as a multi-hyphenate theatre artist to the group by joining as co-facilitator.



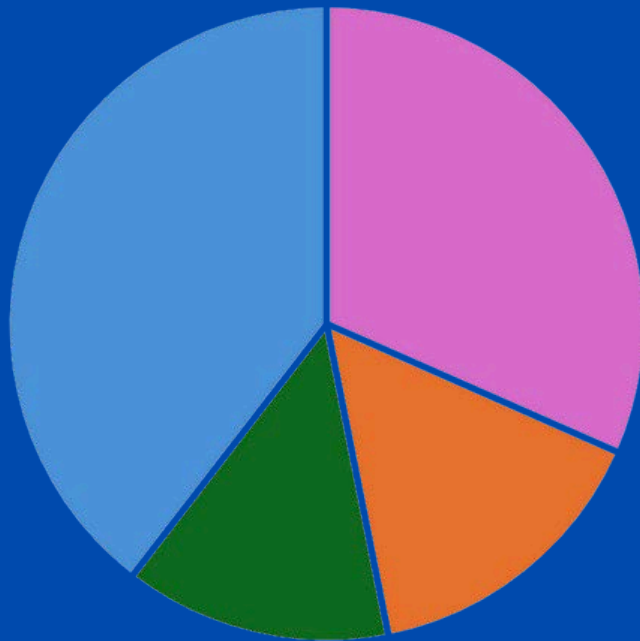
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SPECIAL EVENTS

GPTC hosted **professional development** opportunities, led by professional theatre artists and open to the public, in writing impossible plays, audition workshops, songwriting and getting a great headshot. Artists included CQ Quintana, Moira Mangiameli, Justin Payne and Thomas Grady.

GPTC's **Catrina Runway** event was led by Elizabeth Martinez and Juan Valdovinos. Elizabeth Martinez, a former leader of the Folklórico dance group Raíces de Mexico, created the fashion show/historical presentation delivered in Spanish and English and featuring 12 models in traditional costumes and wearing Catrina makeup. In conjunction with this event, makeup artist and drag performer Juan Valdovinos led a workshop open to the public on creating Catrina looks.



FINANCIALS



PROGRAM EXPENSES

- Season \$105,730
- Community \$93,857
- Festival \$273,656

ADMIN EXPENSES

- Admin \$218,762

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$692,005



REVENUE

- Foundations \$659,650
- Government \$82,043
- Sponsorships \$10,000
- Individuals \$90,603
- Earned Revenue \$16,880

TOTAL REVENUE: \$859,176

NOTE: FY25 revenue includes a multi-year pledge of restricted funds that will be released in FY26 and FY27.

GPTC BOARD & STAFF

COMMONS BOARD

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Assistant Professor of Theatre, School of the Arts University of
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Community Connector

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Attorney at McGrath North

Emiliano Lerda

Community Advisor.

Co-Founder and CEO of Elevator,
a co-warehousing company

Photos by Thomas Grady | Design by @qmetalc

The GPTC Board has over 50%
Global majority representation.



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS FOR THE 2024-2025 20TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR!

Below we recognize contributions from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025.

If you see any errors or omissions, please contact Rachel Hauben Combs at rhaubencombs@gptcplays.com.

We appreciate your generosity!

PRODUCER'S CIRCLE (50,000+)

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The Holland Foundation
Todd & Betiana Simon
Annette & Paul Smith
The Weitz Family Foundation

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IN-KIND SUPPORT

Benson Theatre
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Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
Metropolitan Community College
Omaha Community Playhouse
The Union for Contemporary Art
Yates Illuminates



The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, provides funding to GPTC through its matching grants program funded by the Nebraska Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Visit www.artscouncil.nebraska.gov for information on how the Nebraska Arts Council can assist your organization, or how you can support the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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* indicates a member of the GPTC Board of Directors

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