

YE OLDE GLOBE THEATER

SAN DIEGO'S CIVIC TREASURE

article by **Jeanne Ferris**

The Old Globe Theatre is steeped as strongly in San Diego's cultural fabric as the impact of imported black tea was on Europe's elite. According to the Old Globe website, the current economic impact on the city is at \$28 million, \$8.6 million of which is generated by cultural tourists visiting San Diego for the Summer Shakespeare Festival. More than 250,000 attendees generated \$10 million in ticket income for the Globe. Over 650 staff and artists are employed annually, making it the largest arts employer in San Diego.

Not bad for 580 seats originally built for \$20,000 in 32 days. Modeled after the famous Old Globe in London, it was built as an attraction of the Cal-Pacific Int'l Exposition at the historic Balboa Park in 1935. However, it has far exceeded these expectations.

The Old Globe has gone through various closings, renovations, war-time dark periods and

arson fires in its 75-year history. The first play to open in the remodeled Old Globe Theatre was a production of John Van Druten's, *The Distaff Side*. Craig Noel, a young cast member, became a beacon of guiding light for the Old Globe as an actor, director and artistic leader since 1937, earning him the highest honor for artistic excellence in 2007: the National Medal of Arts.

In 1969, the Falstaff Tavern was remodeled to become the 225 Cassius Carter Centre Stage, an intimate space devoted to the production of new and experimental theater. Ten years in, an arson fire destroyed the playhouse. According to Dave Henson, Director of Mktg. and Comm., "Cassius Carter Centre is now the Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre which has a state of the art arena stage with five rows surrounding the stage, full lighting grid and trap room (orchestra pit and wings), and new public restrooms." Inauguration is planned for the

251 seats by purchasing an 8-play subscription thus insuring priority-seating privileges.

By 1982, the Old Globe Theatre filled its new 580 seats with Shakespearean lovers for a production of *As You Like It*. Alongside Noel (Artistic Director Emeritus), Jack O'Brien, a 3x Tony® award winner, served as Artistic Director. Tom Hall served as managing director. This dynamic trio has contributed to the awe-inspiring success the theatre has subsequently experienced, both financially and creatively.

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, visited the Old Globe in 1983 and participated in the unveiling of a bronze sculpture of the great bard, William Shakespeare. Roy Paul Madsen's sculpture is a permanent installation in the theatre lobby.

An impressive number of successful Old Globe stage productions have been exported to the Great White Way (a journalistic sobriquet for a part of Broadway in the Midtown section Manhattan). After the 1980's, it could be said: you've come a long way, San Diego.

Aside from this recognition and newly-found fame, the Old Globe continued to increase San Diego's commerce, cultural landscape, and also contributed philanthropically to the community. Today, the Globe's Outreach Programs serve more than 50,000 San Diegans every year. "Core programs include MFA in Dramatic Arts, The Grinch Children's Initiative and The Shakespeare Initiatives, just to name a few," said Jeffrey Weiser, Public Relations Director. In 1999, the Globe was recognized by the California Alliance for Arts Education and also received the Professional Artist Award from (CETA) for outstanding contributions to theatre education.

National artists, designers, directors and playwrights have made the Old Globe their home. The results are Tony® Awards and nominations beginning with *The Full Monty* (11 nominations) in 2000 and the more recent *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (11 Tony® Awards) in 2005. With this type of world attention, we are very fortunate to have a thriving civic treasure like the Old Globe. With a year-round season of 15 productions on three stages, it just might earn San Diego the nickname of "Broadway West" . . . Bravo, Ye Olde Globe Theatre!

