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## FAQ's Created October 2006; Amended May 2008 CATS FAQ's: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How can I become a member of CATS?

The good news is that CATS does not have a "membership." There are no fees, dues or obligations for being involved with CATS, other than showing up, pitching in, and having a good time. CATS is, by definition within its bylaws, a volunteer organization. Anyone (and indeed everyone) is encouraged to get involved in whatever aspect of theater interests them! Here are the names and phone numbers of specific department heads whom you could contact to find out how to get involved in the future:

Executive Producer, Production Director, Vice Chair Board of Directors – Karen "Sarge" Rachels, 585-5505  
Producer & CEO Board of Directors – Russ Lowery, 866-4738  
Sets & Lighting & Construction Crew – Joanne McMaster, 585-8984  
Costumes – Priscilla Anderson, 866-6094  
Music – Brian Adams, 585-0315  
Audio, Sound, Asst. To The Producers – Donna Fisch, 585-1866  
Public Relations/ Donated Funds Management - Karen Bergmann, 866-4754  
Production Directors – Beth Gardner, 866-7091; Steve Cassling: Cell: 310-266-6737; Michael McConnell: 909-744-4556  
Stage Management – Carlin Harris 584-2910  
Budgets - Steve Combs, 611-433-6321; Legal- Jim Weyant, 909-800-2319  
Programs & Ad Sales - Gloria Meade, 816-7431; Joan Carlson , 585-0377; Fundraising Chairperson- Ellen Stohr- 585-9209  
Concessions - Millicent Cook, 866-7605; Lobby Sales- Jan Nissan, 878-4911; Ushers - Jim Lyon, 866-6531

### Are any of the cast or crew members paid for their services?

No. All of CATS volunteers share their gifts, talents and services as a donation to our non-profit group and its mission to provide quality, affordable theater to our Valley!

### I've heard that all the roles in CATS shows are pre-cast. How can I "break in" to the shows if this is true?

It is true that, for many of our productions, some of the leading roles are often "pre-cast," or offered to performers who have had previous experience in CATS productions. Why is this? Several reasons:

Location Location Location , Quality and Cost: In the past, we have advertised in down-the-hill newspapers for open auditions for leading roles in our productions. However, we have discovered that due to our "location", most performers do not want to commute up to Big Bear for the intensive rehearsals and show schedules that we have. Therefore, in order to ensure the quality and professionalism of our productions, we pick shows based on the availability of our known-local performers for some leads. Our productions cost between \$35,000 and \$50,000 each, and CATS cannot risk that investment of donated funds on unknown factors. Thankfully for all of us, Big Bear is a destination for artistic talents of all categories, and, therefore, CATS has become more than a "community theater" in some respects. We have created a "resident company" of seasoned, qualified performers from which to choose for leading parts. Also, in contrast to many traditional "community theaters", CATS has no fees for auditioning or for participation in any of our productions, and choruses for musicals, and workshops for straight-plays are open to *everyone*, with no audition necessary. Small parts are cast from these groups of men, women and children. Prior stage experience is not necessary to participate, only the willingness to commit to the project, come to the rehearsals and have a good time. If you love performing and have not yet joined us, we recommend you check our web site or watch local press for announcements of upcoming auditions and/or open calls for chorus members. The best way to be cast in a lead role with CATS in the future is to let us get to know your talent and reliability through participation in the chorus or a supporting role.

### Do you have to have a special talent to participate?

Whether your interest is in being on stage, backstage, or in helping to sew, paint, build, organize, market or sell concessions, there is a place for you in CATS! For some roles on stage, prior experience and/or a needed character type are helpful, but we have cast a number of "first timers" in roles and they've done a terrific job and had a great time in the process! If you do have a specific talent to offer, whether as a performer or in any one of the production areas (sets, lighting, costumes, marketing, concessions), please do let us know by contacting the appropriate department head (listed previously).

### Does another CATS volunteer have to invite newcomers to participate?

Anyone can volunteer at any time! It is possible, however, that you might contact a department head or "show up" at a work site when all tasks have been assigned. We ask you to please not be discouraged if you aren't "put to work" immediately. There will always be future needs at future times, and there are plenty of ways in which you can be involved!

### **How does CATS decide which shows to produce each year?**

Although this process varies, it generally starts with The Board of Directors deciding on the anchor or “blockbuster” show for a given year. (Because CATS relies entirely upon ticket sales and donations to fund its productions, we must produce at least one show per year that is predictably a strong draw for audiences.) After the production director’s choice is approved, and once the anchor show is determined, other production directors propose projects that they would like to direct that would be complimentary to the anchor show, thereby helping to create an interesting and diverse “season” for audience members as well as CATS volunteers. (CATS typically produces three shows per year and is restricted to that number by the City of Big Bear Lake’s PAC Rental Policy. It is our hope to have a facility of our own whereby we can produce many more productions and workshop presentations per year.) Directors and producers frequently receive and consider recommendations for programming, and everyone is encouraged to share their favorites with the producers, directors or any Board member. Production Directors wishing to propose a project and present a show, bring their ideas to a CATS Board of Directors meeting, where Board Members’ input, concerns and questions are answered. After consideration of all factors involved, a vote for the season’s production schedule is taken, which releases the Organization funds for each production.

### **Are sets and costumes rented?**

Sets are custom designed and constructed by CATS’ volunteers, under the direction of Joanne McMaster. Because our storage space is limited, sets are almost always completely dismantled at the close of each show, and built from scratch for the next. Some specialty pieces may be rented, but this is unusual. Most are built by our wonderful construction team headed by Dennis Brown. Costumes are designed by Priscilla Anderson, who procures costume pieces in a variety of ways depending on the needs of the show. They may be rented, borrowed, made or reconstructed from CATS’ ample warehouse of costume pieces. We invite all volunteers to contribute their expertise and time to our set construction and scenic paint crew and our wardrobe team.

### **There are some rumors floating around that CATS is a “clique.” Is this true and to what would you attribute these rumors?**

Many newcomers to CATS have expressed their surprise and delight at the warm and friendly demeanor of our organization! We are always pleased and excited to welcome new faces into the CATS family. We understand that over our decade-plus history there have been individuals who have not enjoyed their experience with CATS, perhaps because of personality or creative differences. We respect the decision of individuals who part ways with CATS, some after one show and others after a few years, and always wish them well. However, the majority of CATS volunteers become “hooked” and participate with us regularly as their schedules permit, and for them we are all very grateful!

### **Are CATS performers professionals?**

The definition of a professional is literally one who is paid for their service. CATS is an all-volunteer organization and no one, including performers, is paid for their service to CATS. Fortunately, for the high quality of our productions, a number of CATS performers have worked professionally in entertainment in the past, and may continue to do so in other venues, but when they perform for CATS they are not paid to do so. (Note: Performers who are currently active in entertainment trade unions such as Actor’s Equity, SAG, AFTRA, and AGVA, are most likely ineligible to perform with CATS due to union restrictions. Active card holders wishing to perform with CATS are responsible for obtaining any and all necessary waivers, permits or other documentation required by the terms of their union membership in order to perform without compensation. Copies of such documentation must be provided to CATS prior to first rehearsal in order for active union members to participate.)

### **My children have expressed interest in performing. Does CATS provide lessons?**

CATS believes that one of the best learning experiences for young performers is to participate in a production. Occasionally, we have offered workshops for both children and adults, and will continue to do so as time allows. However, our primary focus, which takes substantial time and dedication on behalf of our directors, is the production of three shows per year. Children can learn a lot about theater through their involvement in a production. Unlike many community theater groups, we do not charge any fee for participation for children or adults. However, we do require that adults sponsoring the participation of children in the show contribute to the production in some capacity, i.e. as a “dressing room child wrangler” (supervising and assisting backstage), or with costumes, sets or concessions. When CATS has its own theater, and are not subjected to the City PAC rental restrictions, it is our goal to offer instruction and workshops in theater for children and adults, as well as expanded theatrical opportunities in smaller productions.

### **Are the singing voices dubbed or pre recorded?**

No! Our performers sing for you live during each performance and their voices are not ever pre-recorded as has become common practice in other theaters today. We enhance the volume of these live voices with small “lavalier” microphones monitored by our excellent volunteer team of audio engineers.

### **Is there a minimum or maximum age limit for participation?**

We in CATS are particularly proud of the fact that it is truly a family-oriented organization and our participants have ranged in age, literally, from 2 to 82 and beyond! (Founding Board Member Jean Schiesser, 88 years young, appeared as a nun on stage in ‘The Sound of Music’ in 2005). Very young children (ages 0 – 5) might find the schedule, excitement and structure too difficult or stressful. We ask that parents consider the temperament and needs of each young child carefully, and make the best decision for their child.

about participating at a very young age. However, we've had a number of very young "scene stealers" who have delighted audiences and had a great time being in "show biz".

### **Does CATS make a profit on its shows?**

No. CATS is, by definition within its by-laws, 501c3 non-profit organization. In the event that revenue from ticket sales and donations exceeds the cost of a given production, the excess funds are carried over and used as "seed money" to fund the start up expenses of the next production. Carry over funds are absolutely necessary for CATS to continue producing shows, as there are a number of up front costs and investments that must be paid, in full, weeks and often months before a show will open and begin to generate revenue.

### **Why does CATS need so much time in the theater? Why can't rehearsals be held elsewhere?**

CATS does indeed rehearse in alternative spaces for each and every one of its shows, and we pay rental for each rehearsal. Nonetheless, because of needs outlined below, CATS has required a minimum of three guaranteed weeks rehearsal time in its current performing venue, the Big Bear Lake Performing Arts Center. (Denied, by the terms of the revised PAC Rental Guide). This time is necessary due to the sheer size and scope of CATS' artistic and participatory goals and commitments, as well as for the safety of our crews and casts, many of whom are children. Our casts and crews all have "other lives" and schooling needs, and cannot be scheduled for daily rehearsals like trade unions. There is also a philosophical disagreement between our organization and the City as to the useage of the theater, as outlined in the original gift of Milt Hofert and Wilma Schaefer, as a community-based facility.

Also: The stage at our beautiful PAC is a very large revolving stage. Because the theater is not equipped with fly space (which enables sets and drops to be "flown" up and down to effect scene changes), our scenes (except for small "one-set" shows), must change by revolving the stage. In order for our all volunteer casts and crews to learn how to navigate safely on the revolving stage (frequently in very dark and crowded situations), we must very carefully "choreograph" each step of scene shifts and revolves, and practice these steps very thoroughly. By practicing for safety, we also ensure production quality as scene shifts become smooth and seamless on our revolving stage. It is not possible to recreate the process of revolving scene shifts in any other location; it simply must be done on the stage!

Sets are an integral part of the art form of theater, and the size and complexity of sets are dictated by the needs of a production and the directorial vision for that production. CATS does not always construct massive sets (such as in its productions of 'The Laramie Project' or 'The Fantasticks'), but when the show calls for a large set (such as 'The Sound of Music'), it would be a disappointment or, at the very least, an unwanted compromise to the art form, to build anything less than a magnificent set! This requires the use of the "revolve". We DO build as much of our sets off site as possible, and then bring them to the theater on our load-in date. However, because of the construction restrictions imposed by the theater, such as not allowing set pieces to be attached to the stage, it still takes quite a bit of time for our all volunteer, mostly retired labor force to put together the sets safely and securely on the revolving stage.

CATS needs to rent the PAC for a minimum of 10 performances for each of our three shows. Our break-even point comes somewhere around show #9. And, as previously mentioned, any "profit" revenue for additional performances is used as seed money for the next production. CATS is run like a business by an excellent Board of Directors and an Advisory Board. We are proud of the fact that we have stayed in business this long, and pay our bills on time.

Every member of CATS Board of Directors has a passionate dedication to excellence in theater, which means we strive to provide the very best quality possible in all aspects of theater arts, including sets, costumes and lighting as well as music, dance and acting. We have a commitment to artistic excellence, teaching and training, and community involvement. This formidable commitment distinguishes us substantially from other theater groups and dictates our rehearsal time requirements. To accomplish our goal of ever-improving artistic merit and expression while providing participatory experiences and opportunities to anyone interested, we simply must have adequate time in the theater. None of our time in the theater is ever wasted! All time in the PAC is paid for in rental fees by CATS. We do not use the PAC for free. Those interested in attending a rehearsal in the theater may request permission to do so by contacting any of the individuals listed previously.

### **What is all the flap between CATS and The City?**

First of all, the CATS Board of Directors would like to make it known that we greatly appreciate being able to rent our beautiful Performing Arts Center, and thank everyone who contributes to its maintenance and availability to the community. We wish to work cooperatively with the City government to make the most use of this beautiful, public facility and have, over the past decade-plus years of our consecutive programming, done just that. However, at the end of 2004, the City Council voted to restrict our use of the theater to a maximum of three multiple run shows per year, and to limit the number of days we could rent the theater for each of those three shows. Because of our rehearsal needs (see other question & response regarding rehearsal space) we pleaded to the City Council for additional rehearsal time. As a compromise and to free up time in the theater, we offered to cancel our 10-year traditional Picnic At The PAC. There was no compromise (see Grizzly Editorial, Nov. 17, 2004), and we were simply told "no". So, after 11 years of service to the City and community, the City Council voted to revise its rental policy to restrict our access to the theater. Forced to choose between risking quality and safety with shorter rehearsals in the theater or lower revenues due to a shorter performance time, we opted to cut our performance runs from three weeks to two, whenever possible, which will start with *The Lion In Winter*, in our 2006 sea-

son. Other productions will have a very limited rehearsal time in the theater, (making it extremely hard on our volunteers), but will have the three week performance schedule instead.

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We tried to fight City Hall and unfortunately the old adage turned out to be true. Now, we are very concerned about our future because our patrons are accustomed to a three-week performance run for all shows. The third week has historically been the week of our highest attendance, and the one in which our ticket sales surpass the “break even” mark and produce enough revenue to create start up funds for the next show. Since we depend entirely upon ticket sales and Angel donations to fund our operations, we could be forced out of business if we lose ticket sales due to a shorter performance run. Moreover, the City has now established its own 501-C3 non-profit Performing Arts Foundation, and we have no information with regard to the mission or plans for that Foundation or whether or not its requirements will impose more restrictions on our theater access in the future. The City Council holds the keys to the theater, and now they have created their own “non-profit” tenant, funded by taxpayers funds, for their own use. Our future, therefore, is uncertain.

We hope we can count on community support in 2006 and beyond. Please tell everyone you know about our shortened schedule and the need to plan accordingly for attending our shows. We hope, also, that there will not be any future restrictions imposed upon us by the City, but the fact is we simply don’t have any guarantees. We believe that our contributions to the community in terms of economic impact, cultural value and community involvement more than justify the time we request in the theater to produce three shows (or more) per year. If you agree, please encourage the City Council to reconsider its decision in light of the public good CATS brings to the community. Please write to the Big Bear Lake City Council and ask them to restore CATS customary rental time in the theater in honor of its long history in the Big Bear Valley and to ensure its future. Contact:

City of Big Bear Lake, P.O.Box 10000, Big Bear Lake, Ca. 92315 (909) 866-5831 Fax: (909) 866-6766  
email: [citymanager@citybigbearlake.com](mailto:citymanager@citybigbearlake.com).

#### **What plans does CATS have, then, for the future?**

What distinguishes CATS from most other community based “community theaters” is the fact that CATS does not have a home of its own! Most City-owned theaters down-the-hill have more cooperative agreements with their local theater groups, assuring their continued contributions to their communities. Alas, not here. So, CATS needs a home. We have established a Building Fund and are currently in negotiations for property where we intend to build a small theater and set construction shop/ warehouse of our own! We will still look forward to doing our larger productions at the PAC, but having a home of our own will open up unlimited possibilities for our future goals.

**Amendment: May 2008:** As of this date, CATS is well on its way to building the CATS Warehouse Theater to solve many of the issues raised in this document in 2006. We anticipate beginning construction this year. CATS is still prevented, by City contract, in renting the PAC for more than three multiple run performances a year. However, we have been able to secure rental time for single day events, bringing back our traditional Picnic With CATS and the Los Angeles Police Band, and adding, what we hope will be another tradition, The Silent Movie Matinee with Bob Salisbury at the Theatre Organ.

**This issue was not addressed above. What is your policy on Understudies?** Understudies for our lead roles are very important. In case of emergency, we owe it to our paying patrons to be prepared to “go on with the show”. We view being cast as an understudy an honor. Yes, it’s lots of work, but many times it is the best way for the actor to learn and improve their “chops” (a term for expertise in skills as a musician or actor). Part of CATS mission statement is to extend opportunity for learning and growth, *at no charge* to our volunteers, whether they are children or adults. Many of our lead “resident actors” have learned their skills and improved their “chops” by being understudies in various productions. (Please see paragraph on “pre-casting” P. 1) Because of the nature of our semi-professional community theater group, should a lead or star performer be permanently unavailable, it is possible that we would not be able to cast the understudy as the permanent replacement. In our community theater situation, (i.e., v.s. a professionally cast theater production with a plethora of talented / paid understudies), sometimes understudies are not capable for one reason or another to step into a starring role for the “run”. Perhaps there’s an age difference that would make a permanent replacement by a young understudy inappropriate. An audience will forgive a one night stint, and will cheer the understudy’s fine accomplishment. Sometimes we do have very capable and appropriate understudies who could fit the starring role or important lead roles and be an excellent permanent replacement. When that happens, that’s a great day for CATS! The decision as to whether an “understudy” will replace a lead on a permanent basis is made by the Director, in agreement with the Executive Producer.

**We encourage your participation as a volunteer or as a donor. If you have any further questions, please contact us! Thank you.**

The following are excerpts from the Big Bear Lake Events Office Report created August 15, 2005:

#### **Event Economic Impact Survey Analysis, CATS “The Sound of Music” – July 2005**

The Events Office conducted surveys at the opening night of the CATS production of *The Sound of Music* on July 9th, 2005. Thirty one surveys were conducted, representing 7.8% of the attendees at this performance. The economic impact report represents both that of residents and non-residents of Big Bear Valley. Bottom line economic impact: Out of 11 responses from the non-residents, \$4,750 was brought to the Big Bear Valley for the opening night of the CATS production of *The Sound of Music*. The average spent was \$432.00 per person. If you multiply that by the 22 nonresident respondents it equals \$9,499.99, or **\$9,500.00**, if rounded, that was spent in Big Bear by those that answered the Economic Impact Survey

#### **Event Economic Impact Survey Analysis CATS “Oliver!” - April, 2004**

The Events Office conducted surveys at the last three performances of the CATS production of *Oliver!* in April, 2004. 75 total surveys were conducted, representing 8.8% of the attendees at these three performances\* and 3.5% of all attendees at all 10 performances\*\*. (NOTE: The total number of percentages is not always exactly 100% and the total number of responses is not always 75 because not every respondent answered every single question and due to rounding.) The economic impact reported represents only that from non-resident attendees, i.e., those who *brought* their money to Big Bear just to see the show.

**Bottom line economic impact of CATS:** Of the 2138 total attendees at *Oliver!* in April of 2004, 45% (or 962) were non-Big Bear Valley residents. The average expenditure of \$99.53 per person times those 962 equals **\$95,748**. Add the expenditures of Big Bear Valley residents who see our shows, and multiply these figures by the number of attendees for CATS shows each year, and you will understand that CATS is an economic benefit to the Big Bear Valley, as well as a cultural and social benefactor as well.