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President, Board of Directors

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Dear ACT Friends & Neighbors:

Greetings to all former and current Elkhorn City residents, Elkhorn City High School alumni, and all those hold nostalgia for the beautiful Elkhorn City, Kentucky! It is a beautiful thing to be an adult and look back on the memories of growing up and living in Elkhorn City. I am also appreciative for modern social media and the ability it grants us to reconnect, communicate, and keep up with friends and family, often times including people who now live very far away from us. This was not possible only a short time ago, as some of you will recall. For me, one of the best parts of utilizing this modern technology is being able to really see how many amazing people we actually grew up with. Through shared accomplishments and completed goals, my social media feed is constantly bursting with new events worthy of huge congratulations. It makes an Elkhorn City lady like myself very proud of the people our town has produced over the years.

As some of you may know, I moved back home after many wonderful years away working in the theatre business. I was actually on stage one night in Chicago when God (truly) called me up and told me it was time to go home to do some work. Who in the world would have considered moving back to Elkhorn City with a thriving theatre career? Well, two weeks later I was packed up and my brother was moving me home, for what reason I had no idea.

It wasn't long until God revealed His plan. Elkhorn City now has its very own award-winning community theatre company: **Artists Collaborative Theatre**. ACT, now closing in on its 16th birthday, is a non-profit 501c3 entity celebrating local talent through year-round high-quality theatre productions and a K-12 educational program within a positive, loving environment. ACT was incorporated in 2001 to umbrella my Master's Degree in Directing from Chicago School for Performing Arts/Roosevelt University. In 2004, we built a black box theatre in downtown Elkhorn City where the old blue lumber building was located. The performance space now stands as a 5,000 sq. ft, 120 seat theatre, complete with dressing rooms and scene and costume shops. The facility was paid largely through coal severance tax funding. The theatre has one paid position, Artistic Director, which is currently held by ACT Alumni and University of Kentucky graduate Samantha West. All other positions are volunteer—our amazing and dedicated members of our community work together to make magic happen at ACT almost every month of the year. I have personally been employed through the University of Kentucky as a Fine Arts Agent with the Pike County Extension Service since 2005.

Education for all ages is the backbone of ACT. ACT offers *free* afterschool educational programming throughout the school year, including producing two full stage productions with a cast consisting entirely of students from our ACT Kidz Company. Each production averages 50 student roles, with the youngest currently four years of age. As young as 11 years old, students are taught to run technical equipment and eventually grow into designing lighting and sound. We use theatre as the vehicle to teach life skills, also known as "soft skills," to our students ensuring success in their chosen life path. These skills include problem solving, teamwork, communication, empathy, community pride, confidence, thought processing,

naturally striving to meet high standards, and the desire to succeed. For our older generation volunteers, ACT gives them a place to create, think, commune, and to care and be cared for by others who celebrate their wisdom and experience.

ACT has placed over 19 students in post-secondary collegiate or technical training programs. Our students, both in high school and post-secondary schools, maintain a collective average GPA of 3.75. Additionally, ACT has awarded over \$5,000 in scholarships to qualifying seniors. After being involved in just one semester of ACT classes, every child experiences a positive increase in grades, behavior, and confidence. To see a complete roster of our ACT Alumni along with their success stories, visit www.act4.org/sponsorships and download the “ACT Alumni Success Stories” file.

Our annual budget is approximately \$85,000. To date, ACT has contributed well over \$50,000 into our local economy **each year for the last ten years**. ACT is also proud of our fiscal responsibility. ACT has met budget every year of our existence due to the amazing and responsible ACT Board of Directors and frugal awareness of our creative teams. We are very proud of the economic influx our theatre has been able to provide in a town where the population is now under 1,000.

Our ticket prices have remained at a low rate of \$10 for the entirety of the company and we feature a “First Fridays” pay-what-you-can night on the first Friday of each production to easily allow all people to access local, quality, live-performance theatre.

Beyond all of this, we are perhaps most proud of the fact that when you come to an ACT show, you will see people on stage that you know! People you grew up with, people you went to school with, or maybe even people you now work with. Maybe you’ll recognize Gloria Conley Ratliff in *Steel Magnolias*, *The Calendar Girls*, and *August: Osage County*. Or, maybe you’ll see Rodney Ruth and Larry Compton in *12 Angry Men* and *A Few Good Men* among others. Or what about Hannah and Katie, the daughters of Fredia and Darren Ratliff—and yes, Fredia has even graced the ACT stage herself! This list of our local performers is extensive and includes at least one name everyone will recognize. ACT knows we don’t have to rely on bringing in outside actors when there is already a wealth a talent right here at home.

What’s in our future? We now have a plan in place to keep serving our community in even bigger and better ways beyond our home ACT location. The Board of Directors recently purchased the old WECL movie theater and radio station building and are preparing to renovate the space with a vintage interior design nod to its former days of glory. It will mainly serve as a concert hall performance space for local musicians, and sometimes a secondary production space for stage shows that require a larger audience space.

Currently, however, there are now nationwide financial stressors that could make keeping the doors open for **any** theatre even more challenging than in recent eras, and even more so in eastern Kentucky’s failing economy. Admittedly, we at ACT are usually so consumed with the work we are doing that we do not stop to ask for donations often enough.

ACT’s financial challenges include:

- Royalty fees now average \$2500 per production
- Increasing costs for set materials, costumes, props, etc.
- Running an award-winning, free K-12 educational program including after school transportation
- Keeping a salary for a very necessary and quality Artistic Director
- Paying bills, which is getting more and more challenging in our area as prices increase and options decrease
- Insurance for a performing theatre
- Renovation costs of the WECL location
- And, no... there are very few (none) grants available. We’ve looked.

So, here's the big ask:

For the Love of T.O.'s, the Frosty Freeze, the IGA, The Main Place, Corner Pizza, the White Star Café, our ball teams throughout the years, "the Wall," Apple Blossom Festival and parades, school bands, speech and drama teams, and the feeling you get when you come home for a reunion and stand in front of the trophy case—we need your support. Any amount of money you can donate will be greatly appreciated and will directly help move Elkhorn City forward. And if you personally are not able to donate, but you know someone else who might be able to, please let them know about the awesome work ACT is doing in Elkhorn City! If nothing else, put us on your to-do list and make sure when you come home to visit you plan to "take in a show" at your hometown theatre. Every dollar will make a difference in someone's life, and not just anyone, but someone you actually know. It is emotionally rewarding to help others and to join the ranks of those who are already investing time and energy into this eastern Kentucky treasure.

For more information on Artists Collaborative Theatre and additional information such as donor benefits, ACT alumni success stories, and more, visit us online at www.ACT4.org/sponsorships. We also invite you to "be our friend" and keep up with us on our very active Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ACTTheatre1 (Artists Collaborative Theatre, Inc.). We post photos and videos often, as well as special local promos and more.

I thank you endlessly for your time and support and look forward to seeing you soon around Elkhorn City!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephanie Richards". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Stephanie Richards,
ACT Executive Director